

*Leave Of Absence**Friday, June 27, 2008***HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Friday, June 27, 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 following Members requesting leave of absence from today's sitting of the House: The hon. Austin Jack Warner, Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West, for the period June 27 to July 02; the hon. Chandresh Sharma, Member of Parliament for Fyzabad, from today's sitting of the House; the hon. Nizam Baksh, Member of Parliament for Naparima, from today's sitting of the House; the hon. Dr. Keith Rowley, Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West, for the period June 26 to July 17. The leave which these Members seek is granted.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that we have the answers to 10 oral questions today, plus three written, that is 13. I would tell you they are questions Nos. 74, 96, 115, 118, 125, 126, 136, 140, 141, 158. We would also be circulating as written, Nos. 93, 132 and 142. And I would ask for a deferral of two weeks of the other questions on the Order Paper.

The following questions stood on the Order Paper:

**Brian Lara Sporting Complex
(Cost and Completion of)**

48. With regard to the Brian Lara Sporting Complex in Tarouba, could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs state:
- a) the projected cost;
 - b) how much money has been expended on the project so far; and
 - c) the expected date of completion of the entire project? [*Dr. H. Rafeeq*]

**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*]

**Ex-Caroni (1975) Limited
(Leases for Residential Lands)**

- 75.** Could the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources state:
- (a) how many leases for residential lands have been given out to and executed by ex-Caroni (1975) Limited VSEP-availed workers as at February 29, 2008; and
 - (b) where the lands in (a) are located? [*Dr. H. Rafeeq*]

**Caroni (1975) Limited
(Criteria and Selection of)**

- 76.** Could the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources state:
- (a) how many residential lots from land previously owned by Caroni (1975) Limited will be made available by sale/lease/rental to members of the public;
 - (b) the price at which the lands in (a) will be sold; and
 - (c) when the land in (a) will become available; and the criteria for selection of purchasers for the above lots of lands? [*Dr. H. Rafeeq*]

Passports

- 77.** Could the hon. Minister of National Security state:
- (a) how many citizens of Trinidad and Tobago are in possession of the 'old' (non machine readable) passports;

- (b) the deadline for changing all these passports to the machine readable passports; and
- (c) how many passport applications are processed and new passports delivered at present on a weekly basis? [*Dr. H. Rafeeq*]

**Housing Development Corporation
(Allotment of Houses)**

- 87.** Could the hon. Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment state the process by which Housing Development Corporation (HDC) houses are allotted to applicants? [*Mr. H. Partap*]

**St. Marie Emmanuel Road
(Re-paving of)**

- 88.** Could the hon. Minister of Local Government state:
- (a) when would the St. Marie Emmanuel Road in Cumuto, Sangre Grande be rehabilitated and re-paved by the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation; and
 - (b) why was this road not previously paved? [*Mr. H. Partap*]

**Major Landslips
(Repair of)**

- 89.** Could the hon. Minister of Local Government state when would the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation repair the major landslips in Cumuto at:
- (a) Harkoo Trace; and
 - (b) Sookoo Trace? [*Mr. H. Partap*]

**University of Trinidad and Tobago
(Details of)**

- 101.** With regard to the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) campuses throughout Trinidad and Tobago, could the hon. Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education state:
- (a) the cost of construction of each; and
 - (b) the annual expenditure for 2006 and 2007 on (i) staff, (ii) scholarships to lecturers/professors and (iii) administration? [*Dr. T. Gopeesingh*]

**University of the West Indies
(Status of Internal Audit)**

- 103.** Could the hon. Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education state:
- (a) whether any internal audit has ever been done at the University of the West Indies since its inception;
 - (b) if the answer to (a) is in the negative, why not;
 - (c) if the answer to (a) is in the affirmative, for what years, and have they been reviewed by the Auditor General; and
 - (d) has the Auditor General ever conducted an audit of the University of Trinidad and Tobago? [*Dr. T. Gopeesingh*]

Official Overseas Travel

- 107.** Could the hon. Minister of Finance state:
- A. What was the actual annual Government expenditure on official overseas travel (airfares) from 2006—2007?
 - B. What is the projected expenditure on official travel for 2008?
 - C. How many aircraft travel hours are envisaged for 2008? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

Purchase of Blimp/Sky Ship

- 111.** Could the hon. Minister of National Security give the name(s) of the person(s) and/or organization(s) which negotiated the purchase and /or lease of each blimp/sky ship on behalf of the State?
- A. Could the Minister give the name(s) of the person(s) and/or organization(s) which negotiated the purchase and/or lease of each blimp/sky ship on behalf of the suppliers?
 - B. Were anti-corruption clauses inserted in the contracts for the purchase and/or lease of each blimp and/or sky ship? [*Mr. S. Panday*]

**Chaguanas Magistrates' Court
(Functioning of)**

- 119.** Could the hon. Attorney General advise when will the Chaguanas Magistrates' Court become functional in the premises rented by Government on Ramsaran Street, Chaguanas? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

**New Bridge
(Harripaul Village Intersection)**

- 128.** Could the hon. Minister of Works and Transport indicate:
- (a) when construction will begin on a new bridge to replace the old, dilapidated, wooden bridge currently at the Harripaul Village intersection with the M2 Ring Road, Debe;
 - (b) what is the estimated cost for construction of the new bridge;
 - (c) when is construction of the said bridge scheduled to be completed?
[*Dr. R. Moonilal*]

**National Commission for Self Help
(Mayaro/Rio Claro)**

- 134.** With respect to the National Commission for Self Help, could the hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs state:
- (a) the numbers and types of projects funded and undertaken, within the region of Mayaro/Rio Claro for the period January 2006—February 2008; and
 - (b) the cost of each project undertaken, the location and the status/outcome of these activities? [*Mr. W. Peters*]

**Mayaro/Rio Claro Region
(New Community Centres)**

- 135.** With respect to the Community Centres Programme, could the hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs state:
- (a) whether new community centres will be built within the Mayaro/Rio Claro region during the period 2008—2010;
 - (b) if the answer to (a) is in the affirmative, at what locations and what is the proposed cost of each;
 - (c) whether refurbishment/repairs will be undertaken to the existing community centres within the Mayaro/Rio Claro region; and
 - (d) if the answer to (c) is in the affirmative, which centres are earmarked for development, what is the budget for these works and what are the proposed dates for commencement? [*Mr. W. Peters*]

**Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago
(Projects Undertaken and Cost)**

- 137.** With respect to the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago (SPORTT), could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs state:
- (a) the total expenditure incurred to date by this special purpose company, all projects undertaken and completed for inspection from the inception of this entity to March 2008;
 - (b) the individual cost for each project identified and the names of the various contractors; and
 - (c) all ongoing projects, its estimated cost thus far, location and proposed completion dates? [*Mr. W. Peters*]

**Inauguration of the President
(Money Expended)**

- 143.** Could the hon. Minister of Finance state:
- (a) how much money was spent on the functions for the inauguration of His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in 2008; and
 - (b) give a breakdown of the expenses in (a) under the different items of expenditure? [*Dr. H. Rafeeq*]

**Swearing in Ceremony of Prime Minister and Ministers
(Breakdown of Expenses)**

- 144.** Could the hon. Minister of Finance state:
- (a) how much money was spent on the swearing in ceremony for the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago in 2007;
 - (b) how much money was spent on the swearing in ceremony for the Ministers of Government in 2007; and
 - (c) give a breakdown of the expenses in (a) and (b) under the different items of expenditure? [*Dr. H. Rafeeq*]

**Former Employees of Caroni (1975) Limited
(Government Intentions to Increase Pension)**

- 145.** Could the hon. Minister of Finance state:
- (a) whether the Government intends to increase the pension paid to former employees of Caroni (1975) Limited; and

- (b) if the answer to (a) is in the affirmative, when will the increase be effected and by how much? [*Dr. H. Rafeeq*]

**Debit Cards
(Details of)**

149. Could the hon. Minister of Social Development state:

- (a) how many persons by region/district have been given debit cards and how many persons are in possession of cards which are still valid and usable as at April 30, 2008; and
- (b) the criteria by which these cards are accessed and the process for accessing them? [*Dr. H. Rafeeq*]

**Poverty Line
(Persons Living Below)**

150. Could the hon. Minister of Social Development state:

- A. How many persons in Trinidad and Tobago by region/district are living below the poverty line?
- B. The criteria used to determine the “poverty line”?
- C. If the answer to (B) involves a “basket” of goods, could the Minister state the composition of the basket? [*Dr. H. Rafeeq*]

**Cuban Farmers
(Allocation of Farms)**

151. Could the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources state:

With regard to the demonstration farms:

- (a) how many farms will be allocated to the Cuban farmers for cultivating/management;
- (b) the size and location of each farm in (a);
- (c) the expected date of commencement and the expected date of completion of work by the Cuban farmers on these farms;
- (d) how many Cubans will be coming to Trinidad and Tobago to work in these farms and the amount of money that will be paid to them; and
- (e) whether there will be any subsidies or any other incentives given to the Cubans working on these farms? [*Dr. H. Rafeeq*]

**Programme for Upgrading Road Efficiency
(Details of Repairs)**

- 159.** Could the hon. Minister of Works and Transport state:
- (a) what roads have already been repaired or proposed to be repaired by the Programme for Upgrading Road Efficiency (PURE) in the constituency of Cumuto/Manzanilla;
 - (b) the length of the roads already repaired or proposed to be repaired; and
 - (c) the cost or estimated cost involved in each? [*Mr. H. Partap*]

Fishing Pond Turtle Patrol

- 160.** With regard to the Fishing Pond Turtle Patrol, could the hon. Minister of Public Utilities state:
- (a) why employees on the patrol gang have been forced to pay \$30 from their wages to meet the salary of the patrol supervisor; and
 - (b) what steps would be taken to stop this practice and refund money deducted to affected employees? [*Mr. H. Partap*]

Questions, by leave, deferred.

**Ex-Caroni (1975) Limited
(Leases for Agricultural Land)**

- 74.** **Dr. Hamza Rafeeq** (*Caroni Central*) asked the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources:

Could the Minister state:

- (a) how many leases for agricultural land have been given out to and executed by ex-Caroni (1975) Limited VSEP-availed workers as at February 29, 2008; and
- (b) where the lands in (a) are located?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, in the absence of the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources I will deliver the answer.

The number of leases for agricultural land which have been given out to and executed by ex-Caroni (1975) Limited VSEP availed workers, as at February 29,

2008 is 19. The number has since been increased to 88 with the distribution of 19 more leases to farmers at Orange Grove and 50 leases to farmers at La Gloria, at a ceremony held at the Forestry Visitors Centre, San Fernando Hill, on May 09, 2008.

The leases distributed to date are with respect to Orange Grove and La Gloria. Some of the impediments to the execution rate of leases are as follows:

- (i) Persons to whom plots have been allocated have not provided appropriate and sufficient documentation to allow Caroni (1975) Limited to forward their files to the Office of the Commissioner of State Lands. For example, in the case of the death of a recipient, no legal personal representative has yet been appointed.
- (ii) Some recipients have not responded positively to the letters they received and have protested payments indicating that the lands were allegedly promised to them at zero cost. This however, is contrary to documentation received at the Office of the Commissioner of State Lands from Caroni (1975) Limited, where recipients signed as agreeing to pay the State's charges.
- (iii) There are persons not responding to the request of the Office of the Chief State Solicitor to come in to execute their leases. Most of these persons who may have paid the processing fees have protested what they considered to be the high annual rental. However, the Government has significantly reduced the annual rents on small to medium sized parcels of state agricultural land as adopted by Cabinet in April 2008. In this regard, for standard agricultural leases, the annual rent on small to medium sized parcels of state agricultural land is to be applied as follows:
 - under one hectare, annual rent, \$200;
 - one hectare up to two hectares, \$400;
 - greater than two and up to five hectares, \$700;
 - greater than five and up to 10 hectares, \$1,000;

And as an aside, one hectare equals 2.5 acres.

- House spots on agricultural parcels 5,000 square feet or less are to be rent free;
- Value Added Tax on agricultural rents has been zero-rated; and

- the State is to bear the cost of the survey of State agricultural lands until further notice.

The Office of the Chief State Solicitor and the Commissioner of State Lands have continued to collaborate with a view to stepping up lease offer and execution exercises to ensure that the 5,722 eligible beneficiaries in block A are provided expeditiously with offers for the lease of two-acre size plots, as identified in the agreed schedule of delivery.

Further on May 15, 2008, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources advised that the lease issuance exercise was continuing, but its speed was dependant upon the receipt of regulatory approval and to that end:

- (i) 2,536 offers of agricultural leases have been made to beneficiaries on eight sites:
 - Orange Grove 102
 - La Gloria 305
 - Caroni 197
 - Waterloo 322
 - La Fortune 525
 - Jerningham 228
 - Cedar Hill 553
 - Felicity 304
- (ii) 966 beneficiaries have made complete payments; and
- (iii) 88 leases have been distributed.

Approximately 1,300 leases have been processed at the Office of the Chief State Solicitor. Of these, 194 leases have been executed and are being registered at the Registrar General's Department. In the meanwhile, 63 leases have been prepared and the farmers have been invited to execute these leases.

In addition, licences have been granted to 6,606 beneficiaries who can indeed occupy the land pending the official leases. Despite the improved logistical arrangements established for the lease execution exercise of Sevilla, Couva, the process for payment, preparation and execution of leases has been slow. It is envisaged that the recent approval of the revised terms and conditions for the grants of standard

agricultural leases could result in an improved flow of beneficiaries making payments and actively proceeding to the lease execution stage.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to reiterate for further clarity, that the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources has initiated the communications to the national community with respect to the changed and improved terms and conditions under which state agriculture leases will be granted going forward, including:

- a) Annual rents from small to medium sized parcels of state agricultural lands:
 - under one hectare or under 2½ acres, \$200;
 - one hectare to two hectares or 2½ to five acres, \$400;
 - greater than two and up to five hectares or five acres to 12.5 acres, \$700;
 - greater than five and up to 10 hectares or 12.5 to 25 acres, \$1,000;
- b) Annual rents for house spots on agricultural parcels of 5,000 square feet or less, rent free;
- c) Value added tax on agricultural rents, zero-rated;
- d) Cost of survey of State agricultural lands, to be borne by the State;
- e) All terms and conditions to be implemented immediately as at May 01, 2008, for existing leases and be applied at the time of the issue of the new leases.
- f) The rates in respect to existing leases of state land will therefore be adjusted, going forward from May 01, 2008. In order to reduce the cost of operating small farms and family farms, the annual lease costs of land has been substantially reduced to make land much more affordable to farmers of this country. Landholdings of 10 acres or less will attract much lower rates.
- g) A farmer on a holding of one hectare or less will now pay \$200 as compared to the previous rate which was in excess of \$1,000.

The Government is committed to releasing unused arable land into food production in a more simplified process and with a faster turnaround time for expediting execution of leases. It is against this background that the initiative to transfer all state agricultural lands to a state company, that is the Estate Management Business Development Company, with a view to expediting such releases of State land has been authorized by the Government.

The Government recognizes that the sooner that land can be made available, market forces will lead to significant increases in food production and so, land distribution is of vital importance for improving food and nutrition security. A corollary of all this is an increase of agricultural GDP with simultaneous reduction in the food price and retail price index.

Some of the major crops identified for increased production in keeping with our food security strategies include: Sweet potatoes, cassava, eddoes, pineapple, pumpkin, hot peppers, tomatoes and mixed vegetable crops. These eight commodities will all have an impact on availability and security as the first three are staples and therefore substitutes for the much demanded rice and flour, while the other five falls into the category that directly causes food price inflation.

Mr. Speaker, permit us to debunk another myth, which is being peddled that some farmers, not yet in receipt of standard agriculture leases cannot access incentives through the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. Farmers who have licences permitting them to enter upon state lands, to cultivate the land can indeed access incentives from the State through the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. Land loans from the Agricultural Development Bank are also available once they are registered as farmers with the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources as are leaseholders or those with title deeds to private lands.

To clarify further, in order for someone to access incentives and soft loans from the Agricultural Development Bank, only three conditions need to exist: outright ownership of private lands by deed or lease; ownership by way of lease of state agricultural land; licence from the State permitting a person or persons to enter upon state land for cultivation and registration of the farmer with the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and engagement in agricultural production of an established level of land cultivation.

Mr. Speaker, in the interim we have made several concessions to ensure speed of access by ex-Caroni workers to the lands to incentives from the Agricultural Development Bank. We are committed to see this programme to healthy agricultural production where new farmers can reap the fruits of their labour.

Dr. Rafeeq: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, supplemental. The 19 leases that have been granted up to February 29; do these plots have the infrastructure in place like agricultural access roads, irrigation and all those sorts of things?

Mr. Imbert: I am unable to answer that question.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, please, supplemental.

Mr. S. Panday: Supplemental, Mr. Speaker. Could the Minister state how many persons have refused to respond to Chief State Solicitor?

Mr. Imbert: Unfortunately, I do not have that information with me. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: One second, please. You know what is going to happen is that supplementals are permissible, but if the substantive Minister is not here to answer it, it puts a difficulty on the Leader of Government Business. But it is the duty of the Leader of Government Business to make sure that Ministers who are to answer questions attend Parliament. [*Interruption*] I do not know, if you insist I will hear you, but—

1.45 p.m.

Dr. Rafeeq: Mr. Speaker, I want to find out, in the plots that have been given, whether the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources has advised the farmers as to what they should plant on these plots or have they compelled them as to what they should plant on these plots?

Hon. C. Imbert: I regret that I am unable to provide that information.

[*Mr. S. Panday stands*]

Mr. Speaker: I do not think it makes much sense, please, and we have nine more questions.

Private Nursing Homes (Sums Paid to Doctors)

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

Could the Minister state what sums were paid to individual doctors working in private nursing homes for professional services rendered to public patients in 2006 and 2007 on behalf of the Ministry of Health?

The Minister of Health (Sen. The Hon. Jerry Narace): Thank you. The Regional Health Authorities have indicated that the total sums paid to individual doctors working in the private nursing homes for professional services rendered to public patients for the years ended 2006 and 2007 were \$88,374.89 and \$408,930, respectively. Additionally, the sums paid by each Regional Health Authority were as follows: For the year 2006 the Eastern Regional Health Authority, none; the South Western Regional Health Authority, \$9,500; the TRHA, \$78,874.89; a total of \$88,374.89. For the year 2007, the ERHA, \$10,000; the SWRHA, \$376,330; the TRHA, \$22,600; a total of \$408,930.

Further, the North West and North Central Regional Health Authorities have advised that the sums paid to private nursing homes for professional services are disaggregated by institutions rather than individual doctors and services rendered. Thank you.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I am not sure whether the Minister got the question right, he has answered how much the Regional Health Authorities, I asked on behalf of the Ministry of Health, and there is a special Ministry of Health surgical initiative programme which I was getting at, not the Regional Health Authorities, and he answered on behalf of the Regional Health Authorities. [*Inaudible*] No, he does not know. That is where the money is spent, I will ask it again.

Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited
(Details of Projects Undertaken)

115. Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*) asked the hon. Minister of Local Government:

With respect to the Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited (PSAEL), could the Minister state:

- (a) the names of those constituencies which are approved for infrastructure projects to be undertaken by that company;
- (b) the criteria used to identify constituencies for approval for PSAEL projects; and
- (c) the quantum of moneys spent in 2007 on projects undertaken by the company?

The Minister of Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Hazel Manning): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited also known as PSAEL does not conduct its work on a constituency basis, but on a regional basis. The PSAEL has responsibility for all areas south of the Oropouche and the Ortoire Rivers, from Icacos to the Rio Claro/Guayaguayare Road.

To answer (c) of the question: The quantum of moneys spent by the company on projects undertaken during the period January 01, 2007 to December 31, 2007 amounted to \$79,202,802.16

Dr. Moonilal: Could the Minister of Local Government indicate whether or not she is aware that the PSAEL, through the CEO, Denise Knights indicated to Members of Parliament that there is a list of approved constituencies? Could you

also indicate whether or not the CEO is correct in asking Members to contact the Ministry of Local Government to have their constituency included on the list of approved constituencies for the PSAEL?

Sen. The Hon. H. Manning: Mr. Speaker, through you, could I ask to whom was that letter addressed?

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, through you, could I indicate that this letter is addressed to Dr. Roodal Moonilal, Member of Parliament for Oropouche East from Denise Knights, Chief Executive Officer (Acting) of the PSAEL indicating that there is an approved list from your ministry and my constituency is not on that list. And that is directly in conflict and contradicts what you have said earlier.

Mr. Ramnath: That is the PNM list.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Sen. The Hon. H. Manning: Mr. Speaker, that letter did not come to me. I know nothing of the letter and I would want to advise that that letter was not authorized, and that we do not do business in that way. [*Interruption*] It is not true. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Ramnath: What are you clapping at?

[*Dr. Moonilal passes letter to the Minister of Local Government.*]

Mr. Speaker: If you have to pass correspondence it must come through the Clerk at the Table.

Prime Minister's Visit to Jamaica (Cost of)

118. Mr. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj SC (*Tabaquite*) on behalf of Mr. Jack Warner (Chaguanas West) asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

- A. What was the cost to the State for the Prime Minister to travel to Jamaica by private jet on or around March 19, 2008?
- B. What was the purpose of this visit to Jamaica?

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira): In response to part A of the question: The cost to the State for the Prime Minister to travel to Jamaica by private jet on February 22, 2008 was US \$20,085.

In response to part B of the question: The hon. Prime Minister attended a function commemorating the 60th Anniversary of the Founding of the University of the West Indies which was held at its Mona Campus, Jamaica. At this function,

Emeritus Prof. Daphne Douglas, former Head of the Department of Library and Information Studies, Mona, was honoured for her pioneering work in that department, as well as for her contribution to library development, both locally and regionally.

The Prime Minister as an eminent graduate of the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, was invited to deliver the keynote address at this function.

Local School Boards
(Details of Constitution)

125. Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar (*Siparia*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Could the Minister state:

- (a) the government schools in which the local school board has been constituted and the date each board was constituted;
- (b) whether any of the boards listed in (a) were constituted by Order in accordance with section 23(1) of the Education Act, and the date(s) of the respective Order(s); and
- (c) the government schools in which no school board has been appointed and the reason(s) for failure to constitute local school boards for each of these schools?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Esther Le Gendre): Local school boards have been constituted in all government secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. There are 91 boards, 85 in Trinidad and six in Tobago. Mr. Speaker, I beg your leave to circulate an appendix which details the number of boards and the dates on which they were established.

With respect to part (b) of the question: In 2000, section 23 of the Education Act, Chap. 39:01 was amended to give recognition to the concept of local school boards and introduced the requirement that they be constituted by a Ministerial Order in accordance with regulations.

In 2001 the said regulations were enacted and were subsequently amended in 2005. Cabinet in March 2002 granted approval for the establishment of local school boards in 12 government secondary schools for a period of two years. This approval led to the introduction of a local school board pilot project which began in May 2002 under the Secondary Education Modernization Programme. Under the pilot project, members were appointed to the respective local school boards by receiving individual letters of appointment under the hand of the Minister of

Education. The practice of providing letters of appointment was carried over from the pilot project into full implementation of the programme in 2004.

Issuing such letters of appointment under the hand of the Minister to individual board members was interpreted as being in conformity with the law as a result of the interpretation of the wording of regulation 3(1) of the Education (Local School Board) (Amdt.) Regulations, 2005.

With respect to part (c) of the question: Local school boards have not been appointed in government primary schools. In reviewing the local school board initiative the Ministry of Education believes that it is not feasible to appoint local school boards to each of 137 government primary schools due to the fact that some of these schools have a very small student population, and as such it is deemed perhaps more feasible to establish cluster boards. This latter proposal would require legislative changes. To this end, the Ministry of Education is reviewing the current Education (Local School Board) Regulations of 2005 and will make appropriate recommendations.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Am I to understand the Minister to be saying that not a single school board was appointed by Order? That Order must then be gazetted, am I to understand that not one Order has been made in accordance with the Act?

Hon. E. Le Gendre: Mr. Speaker, I described at length the process we used and why.

Mr. Ramnath: Say you do not know.

Vide end of sitting for written part of answer.

Local School Boards (Annual Reports Submitted)

126. Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Could the Minister state:

- (a) the local school boards which have submitted annual reports in accordance with section 23(1) of the Education Act, and the date(s) of each report;
- (b) what were the major areas of concern raised in the annual reports submitted and the steps taken by the Ministry to address these concerns;
- (c) the local school boards which have not submitted the requisite annual reports and indicate what steps have been taken to have these boards act in accordance with the law; and
- (d) the amounts paid to each local school board to date?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Esther Le Gendre): Mr. Speaker, with respect to part (a), the response is as follows: Section 23(3) of the Education Act, Chap. 39:01, states inter alia that “A local board shall prepare and submit to the Minister before the end of each financial year an annual report of its operations which includes a financial and management audit of the Board.”

Local school boards have been complying with the aforesaid section of the Education Act as they submit annual reports. These reports outline their operations, income and expenditure for the period under review.

The Ministry of Education's internal audit unit audits the respective local school boards in keeping with the requirements of section 23(3). Further, although not required by law, all local school boards are requested by the Minister of Education to submit an end of tenure report which is prepared every two years. These reports detail all aspects of their operations during their tenure.

I again beg your leave to circulate lists of the local school boards which have submitted their annual reports and the dates on which these reports have been submitted.

With respect to part (b) of the question: The reports of the boards generally relate to projects and activities in which the boards have been involved during the period being covered. The reports identified those activities and projects that are ongoing and proposed projects for the next period of operations. However, the major concerns raised by the boards in their reports have been:

1. a need for feedback from the Ministry of Education on various queries, especially those related to construction, school upgrades and staffing;
2. the identification of training to enhance the effectiveness of the boards; and
3. requests for improvement of support to the local school boards.

When the concerns are noted the ministry addresses the matters in the following manner:

1. meetings are held with the board and the respective ministry division or unit to address the concerns raised;
2. meetings are also held with the board and staff of the school if necessary to identify remedial strategies;
3. there will be a conduct of developmental training to help the board function more effectively;

4. the ministry would provide one-on-one guidance and support to the board as they implement their activities and structure their plans; and
5. the ministry would include their board members in information sharing opportunities with the respective schools.

With respect to part (c) of the question: Boards which do not submit the required reports on time are reminded in writing, if necessary, of the need to submit the documents.

In addition, local school boards' officers upon their visits to the boards are required to obtain any outstanding reports from the particular board.

The appendix which I asked your leave to circulate would indicate which boards did not submit their reports on time.

With respect to part (d) of the question: To date a total of \$2,530,000 has been provided to the 85 local school boards in Trinidad in the form of annual grants. Each board receives a \$10,000 annual grant for the first three years of operations. To date, 83 boards have received the maximum of \$30,000 each and two boards have received \$20,000 each. These two boards are still to receive the final \$10,000 grant. Thank you.

Vide end of sitting for written part of answer.

2.00 p.m.

Mayaro Indoor Sport Facility

136. Mr. Winston Peters (*Mayaro*) asked the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs:

With respect to the Mayaro Indoor Sport Facility, could the Minister state:

- (a) the cost of works undertaken on the facility to date, the status of works thus far and the due date for completion and handover; and
- (b) the name/s of the contractor/s employed on this project, the services provided and at what cost?

The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs (Hon. Gary Hunt): Mr. Speaker, in keeping with Government's 2020 Vision for sport and recreation, the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs is mandated to provide first-class sporting infrastructure towards the development of sports throughout Trinidad and Tobago. The Mayaro Indoor Sport Facility is designed to address this mandate through the fusion of physical recreation and social education programmes. The National Insurance Property Development Company Limited (NIPDEC) is the implementing agency of this project.

NIPDEC has advised that the cost of works undertaken on the Mayaro Indoor Sport Facility is \$13,753,584.98. The construction of the facility is substantially completed. Currently, corrective works highlighted by the Ministry and the consultant for undertaking during the defects liability period, are being addressed. These works are expected to be completed by the end of June 2008, and barring unforeseen circumstances, the facility will be opened for use by the residents of Mayaro and the environs in July 2008.

The main contractors employed on this project are as follows:

Contractors	Service provided	Cost
PR Contracting Limited	Site works	\$1,075,191.72
Haniff Mohammed and Sons Limited	Building works	\$12,179,882.47

This is inclusive of payments to nominated sub-contractors.

Nominated sub-contractors for building works are as follows:

Sub-contractors	Service provided	Cost
Delta Electrical Contractors Limited	Electrical installation	\$710,805.13
Plumbing and Steel Contractors Limited	Plumbing installation	\$665,314.60
Complete Roof Protection	Roof installation	\$256,340.29
Specialist Columbia Marketing and Contracting Company Caribbean Limited	Floor installation	\$958,173
Gresham Gordon	Ventilation works	\$91,800

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Supplemental?

Mr. Peters: Mr. Speaker, is the hon. Minister aware that during the election period this building was handed over as a completed facility to the people of Mayaro?

Hon. G. Hunt: Mr. Speaker, I am unaware of that.

**Mayaro Police Station
(Details of)**

140. Mr. Winston Peters asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

With respect to the Mayaro Police Station, could the Minister state:

- (a) what is the initial estimated cost of the project, the cost on completion, the reasons for the overruns, the initial project date of completion, the actual date of completion, the names of the contractors and subcontractors employed on the project, the value of their contracts and the actual amounts paid to each;
- (b) the number of police officers to be assigned to the police station, the ranks of these officers;
- (c) the number and types of vehicles to be assigned to the station; and
- (d) other resources to be assigned to the station?

The Minister of State in the Ministry of National Security (Hon. Donna Cox): Hon. Members are advised that the initial contract value of the project to construct the new Mayaro Police Station was \$11.9 million, VAT exclusive.

A tender was awarded through the Central Tenders Board for architectural services. The main contractor was employed by the National Insurance Property Development Company Limited (NIPDEC), the designated project manager, while sub-contractors were engaged by the main contractor with approval of NIPDEC Limited. All contractors on the project were local.

The contractors are as follows:

Main contractor	Sub-contractor	Service provided
Saiscon Limited	Electrical Trading Company Limited	Electrical
	WVA Engineering Company Limited	Plumbing
	Climate Control Limited	Air conditioning
	Tropical Power	Generator

The project which commenced on September 26, 2005, was scheduled for completion on July 26, 2006. However, there was a delay in completion, which based on the information provided by NIPDEC, occurred as a result of the following factors:

- design errors and omissions and slow responses on the part of the consultant to request for information;
- modification of design parameters to suit actual site conditions;
- request by the police service for variations to the original design;
- inadequate site management by the main contractor, Saiscon Limited;
- delay in excavation and other work due to the inclement weather conditions;
- shortage of construction material, such as concrete blocks and cement;
- delayed arrival of imported weather shield roofing and window materials suitable for police stations; and
- difficulty in acquiring and retaining labour, particularly evident in such areas.

The Mayaro Police Station was completed on October 24, 2007, fifteen months past the projected completion date and was handed over and occupied on December 04, 2007.

As a result of the delays, an increased contract cost was incurred, relative to such variables as construction supervision and reimbursable costs. This resulted in a concurrent increase in the value of the percentage fees related to project management, construction management and architectural management.

In addition to these items, the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) required additional plumbing works and infrastructure to connect the station to the water main, including water tanks, sewerage works, additional sinks and water lines, at a cost of approximately \$300,000.

To date, a total of TT \$9.85 million, VAT exclusive, has been expended on this project and the Ministry is awaiting submission of the final account from the main contractor, to determine the total cost of construction of the station. The contracted sums and sums paid to the main contractor and sub-contractor to date are as follows:

Main Contractor	Contracted Sum	Sum Paid to Date
Saiscon Limited	\$11,925,165.99 VAT exclusive	\$9,850,546.45 VAT exclusive

The main contractor, Saiscon Limited, was paid \$9.85 million from which payments were made by Saiscon to the sub-contractors are as follows:

Sub-contractor	Contracted Sum	Sum Paid to Date
Electrical Trading Company Limited	\$1,098,138 (VAT exclusive)	\$1,036,596.50 (VAT exclusive)
WVA Engineering Company Limited	\$712,547 (VAT exclusive)	\$1,018,646.96 (VAT exclusive)
Climate Control Limited	\$209,024 (VAT exclusive)	NIL
Tropical Power	\$125,405 (VAT exclusive)	\$125,450 (VAT exclusive)
Total	\$2,145,114. (VAT exclusive)	\$2,180,693.46 (VAT exclusive)

Mr. Speaker, with regard to (b), (c) and (d), hon. Members should note that the resources assigned to any station, including its manpower strength and vehicle capacity, is based on a strategic decision, following careful analysis of the needs of the specific area.

To disclose such information to the general public is to set a dangerous precedent, and it is not considered prudent in the interest of safety and well being of the officers to reveal those details.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Panday: Is the hon. Minister satisfied with the manpower assigned to the Mayaro Police Station?

Hon. D. Cox: Mr. Speaker, I cannot answer that question.

Local Government Reform (Consultations on)

141. Mr. Subhas Panday (*Princes Town North*) asked the hon. Minister of Local Government:

Could the Minister state:

(a) how many consultations were held on local government reform; and

- (b) the venues, dates and public attendance at each consultation listed in (a)?

The Minister of Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Hazel Manning): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the period August 09, 2006 to September 20, 2006, the Ministry of Local Government executed a public exposition programme on the Draft White Paper on Local Government Reform 2006.

It consisted of one internal staff consultation, one two-day national and five regional consultations. In total, seven consultations were held, six public consultations and one internal consultation for staff members.

The 14 Municipal Corporations were grouped in the following zones:

- In the North West region: the Port of Spain City Corporation, the Diego Martin Regional Corporation and the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation;
- In the North East region: the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, the Arima Borough Corporation and the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation;
- In the South East region: the Princes Town Regional Corporation, Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation and the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation;
- In the South West region: the San Fernando City Corporation, the Point Fortin Borough Corporation and the Siparia Regional Corporation;
- In Central and environs region: the Chaguanas Borough Corporation and the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation.

The venues, dates and the public attendance with each of the aforementioned consultations are listed as follows:

- The North West Regional Consultation: the venue was the City Hall, Port of Spain. The date was September 06, 2006 and the public attendance was 148 persons.
- The North East Regional Consultation: the venue was the Centre of Excellence at Macoya. The date was September 08, 2006 and the public attendance was 188.
- The South East Region Consultation: the venue was Paria Suites, South Trunk Road, La Romaine. The date was September 13, 2006 and the public attendance, 157.
- Central and Environs Regional Consultation: the venue was Kam-Po Restaurant, Ramsaran Street, Chaguanas. The date was September 15, 2006 and the public attendance was 134.

- The regional zone for the South West Regional Consultation: the venue was the San Fernando City Corporation at its multi-purpose facility.
- The date was September 20, 2006 and the public attendance was 151.
- The national consultation was held at Crowne Plaza Hotel on August 16 and 17, 2006 and the public attendance was 360; and
- The internal consultation was held at Crowne Plaza Hotel on August 09, 2006 and attended by 331 members of staff.

Thank you.

Mr. S. Panday: Supplemental please, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Before you put your supplemental, you have one more question and watch your time. If you want to get that question answered, now is the time to post it.

Mr. S. Panday: I would forego, Mr. Speaker, and I would go with the other one.

**South-West Regional Health Authority
(Details of Vehicular Purchase)**

158. Mr. Subhas Panday asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Could the Minister state:

- (a) the names of the company from which the South West Regional Health Authority under the present Chairman has been purchasing vehicles;
- (b) the make and model of each vehicle purchased; and
- (c) the cost to the South West Regional Health Authority of each vehicle purchased?

The Minister of Health (Sen. The Hon. Jerry Narace): Mr. Speaker, the South West Regional Health Authority has indicated that the present chairman has been in office since the year 2002. Also, the procurement of vehicles during that period occurred on a periodic basis as determined by the exigencies of the service and with the approval of the board.

The names of the companies from which the authority has been purchasing vehicles during the period May 2002 to May 2008 are as follows:

- AA Laquis and Company Limited;

Oral Answers To Questions
[SEN. THE HON. J. NARACE]

Friday, June 27, 2008

- City & Motors (1986) Limited;
- Neal Massy Motors;
- Southern Sales and Company Limited; and
- TOSL Engineering Limited.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

2.15 p.m.

Notably, the procedures for the procurement of vehicles during the period 2002 to present are conducted in the following manner:

- Board approval is first sought for the procurement of the vehicles;
- Procurement is done through a public tendering process;
- Board members or other employees who have a vested interest in the procurement process must declare such interest to the Tenders Committee in accordance with the requirement of the Regional Health Authorities Act;
- Such board members or employees are not allowed to influence or participate in any aspect of the tendering process;
- The evaluation of tenders is undertaken by an evaluation team comprising appropriate professionals and technical personnel selected by the Tenders Committee and exclude board members or employees who have been identified as having a vested interest in the procurement process. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Sen. The Hon. J. Narace: Mr. Speaker:

- An evaluation report is completed and presented to the Tenders Committee for its consideration and acceptance, and excludes board members or employees who have been identified as having a vested interest in the procurement process.
- When the final decision is made by the board, any member or members with declared vested interest in the procurement process of vehicles must absent themselves from the proceedings. [*Crosstalk*]

Clearly, board members or employees of the South West Regional Health Authority, who have a vested interest in the procurement process, are not allowed to influence or participate in any aspect of the tendering process in the procurement of vehicles. [*Crosstalk*]

The South West Regional Health Authority has purchased the following vehicles over the period May 2002—May 2008:

- one Isuzu pickup truck in 2003;
- one Ford panel van, and two (2) Mercedes Benz fully outfitted ambulances in 2004 and 2005 respectively;
- one Peugeot station wagon in 2005;
- one Kawasaki one tonne tray vehicle in 2006; and
- seven (7) Nissan Urvan ambulances during the period 2006—2007.

The total cost of vehicles purchased by the South West Regional Health Authority over the period May 2002—May 2008 was \$3,374,022.86. The cost of each vehicle purchased is as follows:

Date	Manufacturer	Type/Model	Cost
31.10.03	ISUZU	NKR55E	\$139,342.00
11.06.04	FORD	Ford 350 Transit	\$352,330.00
		LWB Model 5 drive Panel Van	
27.06.05	Peugeot	406 Station Wagon	\$184,190.86
14.02.05	Mercedes Benz	Type 2 Fully outfitted Sprinter 413CD Ambulance	\$352,330.00
14.02.05	Mercedes Benz	Type 2 Fully outfitted Sprinter 413CD Ambulance	\$352,330.00
18.12.06	Kawasaki	Mule OCD Plup 4wd Ti 1 Tonne Tray	\$103,500.00
30.11.06	Nissan	E 25 Urvan Ambulance	\$270,000.00
30.11.06	Nissan	E 25 Urvan Ambulance	\$270,000.00

Date	Manufacturer	Type/Model	Cost
30.11.06	Nissan	E 25 Urvan Ambulance	\$270,000.00
30.11.06	Nissan	E 25 Urvan Ambulance	\$270,000.00
30.11.06	Nissan	E 25 Urvan Ambulance	\$270,000.00
26.02.07	Nissan	E 25 Urvan Ambulance	\$270,000.00
26.02.07	Nissan	E 25 Urvan Ambulance	\$270,000.00
26.02.07	Nissan	E 25 Urvan Ambulance	\$270,000.00
		GRAND TOTAL	\$3,374,022.86

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The following question was asked by Mr. Subhas Panday (Princes Town North):

**Housing Development Corporation
(Detailed Listing of Applicants)**

- 93.** Could the hon. Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment give a detailed list, including names, addresses, date of the application, type of unit and/or plot of all the persons (excluding the tenants and/or occupiers) who have applied to the Housing Development Corporation (HDC) and the National Housing Authority (NHA) for housing units or building plots in Fairfield Estate, Princes Town?

The following question was asked by Mr. Winston Peters (Mayaro):

**Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited
(Details of)**

- 132.** With respect to the Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited, could the hon. Minister of Local Government state:
- (a) what is the mandate of this entity, its specific geographical area of operation and the total expenditure incurred from January 2006—March 2008;
 - (b) the total number and type of projects undertaken, January 2006—March 2008, the areas in which they were implemented and the status of these works; and

- (c) what new projects are being proposed, the areas in which works will be executed, the budget for these works and the projected commencement and completion dates?

The following question was asked by Mr. Subhas Panday (Princes Town North):

**Local Government Reform
(Recommendations for)**

- 142.** Could the hon. Minister of Local Government list the recommendations for Local Government reform received from members of the public at the public consultations held?

Vide end of sitting for written replies.

**DEFINITE URGENT MATTERS
(LEAVE)**

**TSTT Employees
(Robbery of)**

Dr. Hamza Rafeeq (*Caroni Central*): Mr. Speaker, I will have to read your version, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: You have to read the version that is in accordance with the Standing Orders, which is my version.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Nothing is wrong with my version. If you could probably point out where I have erred in the Standing Orders, that would help, because in accordance with the Standing Orders, I do not think mine has offended.

Mr. Ramnath: Just announce that it is the Speaker's version!

Dr. H. Rafeeq: In accordance with Standing Order 12 of the House of Representatives, I hereby seek your leave to move the adjournment of this honourable House for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely the robbery of four employees of the Telecommunication Services of Trinidad and Tobago (TSTT) yesterday by armed gunmen in broad daylight, while conducting their legitimate business for the benefit of the residents of Laventille.

The matter is definite since it raises the specific issue of four employees of a public utility being held up and robbed in broad daylight by six armed gunmen.

The matter is urgent since activities such as these put the lives and safety of public and private sector employees at risk, while conducting their legitimate business.

Definite Urgent Matters (Leave)
[DR. RAFEEQ]

Friday, June 27, 2008

The matter is of public importance since incidents of armed robberies against employees could severely affect the conduct of such legitimate business by the said employees and their companies.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I regret that this matter does not qualify under Standing Order 12, but you could certainly do so under Standing Order 11.

**Scale Road, Williamsville
(Demolition of Houses)**

Mr. Subhas Panday (*Princes Town North*): In accordance with Standing Order 12 of the House of Representatives, I hereby seek your leave to move the adjournment of the house for the purpose of discussing the following matter as a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely, the demolition of poor people's homes at Scale Road, Williamsville, this morning.

This matter is definite because it relates to the actions on the part of the Government against poor people at Scale Road, Williamsville, in the Princes Town North constituency.

The matter is urgent because the demolition took place this morning. May I humbly ask your leave, Mr. Speaker, to amend it to say that as I speak, the demolition is taking place.

The matter is of public importance because Sen. Manning has publicly stated that the PNM intends to win the Princes Town North constituency, and the actions of the Government is one of the steps in that direction. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Again, hon. Members, this matter does not qualify under this particular Standing Order. Standing Order 11 would be more appropriate.

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

[Fifth 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, the hon. Hon. Neil Parsanlal, the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West was on his legs; he has 10 minutes left of extended time.

Hon. N. Parsanlal: Mr. Speaker, I believe it is important for us to remind the House of the resolution before us. That resolution, as we have indicated, is to condemn the Government for its failure in containing food prices at affordable levels for the entire population.

I believe this side has already gone to great lengths and pointed out the fallacious nature of this proposition. We have demonstrated, beyond any shadow of a doubt, that this proposition is bound to fail. During the course of this debate, we have made the following points: that this food price increase is certainly not a phenomenon that is singularly focused on Trinidad and Tobago, but is, in fact, an international phenomenon. We have made the point that there have been numerous interventions by this Government to impact the level of food prices.

Among those interventions have been the removal of VAT on all basic food items; the removal of CET on a wide cross-section of goods; the increase in acreage under farming; the increase of the availability of credit to farmers; the increase in the number of farmers who have been given security of tenure on their lands; the introduction of the concept of the farmers market, thereby eliminating the middleman from the equation. We have also increased the incentives that have been provided to farmers; we have increased the availability of consumables like seeds and fertilizers to communities and individuals.

We have also increased the training opportunities available for farmers and potential farmers. We have also introduced and seen about a new direction with respect to the URP programme into agricultural production. We have also escalated our efforts to expand into other areas, such as hydroponic farming and grow box initiatives. Members would have heard, both on the last occasion and today, other initiatives being taken by the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources to ensure that lands and land rent are now considerably reduced for those who would want to become more involved in farming.

When you look at the list, the plethora of initiatives undertaken by this Government, in the face of all these interventions and initiatives, it would be far from truthful for anyone, including Members of the Opposition, to condemn this Government for not being able to contain food prices at affordable levels. It has not been for want of trying. The list of initiatives I have indicated so far; the list of initiatives and interventions we have undertaken so far, have all been geared to ensuring that the consumers on the other side, the consumers throughout Trinidad and Tobago, have food available to them at affordable levels.

Members on this side would speak a lot more cogently about other initiatives being taken to ensure that consumers in Trinidad and Tobago have the wherewithal to

Rising Food Prices
[HON. N. PARSANLAL]

Friday, June 27, 2008

purchase the food items, even if the prices have escalated over the last couple months. None of these initiatives that we have undertaken would have their intended impact if we as a population do not assume some level of personal responsibility for our own eating habits; and that is a fact. On this point, it is important for us to understand and to concur, at least, with the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, other Members on this side and, indeed, with the *Express* editorial of March 29, 2008.

The editorial says:

“But adversity can be converted into opportunity and the time may well have come for us to begin seriously thinking of the choices we have to make if our usual laissez-faire attitude is not to lead us into catastrophe. One of those choices has to do with the tastes we have acquired over historical time, so many of our food habits dating from when it suited the Colonial authorities to have us import more and more of the food we eat, from absentee landlords living, mainly, in the United Kingdom.”

The editorial writer is quite correct, because what might be perceived in our general population today as a crisis, in fact, represents for us now a time of great opportunity.

All the health statistics point to it in terms of where the diseases are now and where the rise in certain diseases is; they all speak to lifestyle diseases. The time has come for us, and the opportunity is upon us, to think carefully about our eating habits as a population. The health statistics are demonstrating that the most significant increases in mortality rates have, indeed, come from lifestyle diseases like cancer, diabetes, hypertension, et cetera, all of which are related to what we eat or, in fact, do not eat.

I, therefore, want to join with my colleagues from Diego Martin North East, on a previous occasion, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, the Minister of Legal and Consumer Affairs, and all of us on this side who have called for a paradigm shift, as it were, that would see us eating what we produce and, to the extent that it is possible, producing what we eat.

2.30 p.m.

This is an opportunity for us in this country to challenge ourselves. This is an opportunity for us in this very Chamber to challenge ourselves and our national community to engage in the paradigm shift. It is not sufficient for us to say that we have nothing; we can do nothing or there is nothing that we can do. One

person has indicated to the national community that as a country, we have nothing to celebrate. Nothing could be further from the truth. As a country and as we look at this particular issue, there is much that we have to celebrate. We can speak to the individual farmers and the households where they are actually sharing the plants and seeds that have been distributed to them. We are still a community in Trinidad and Tobago where neighbours look out for each other; where nobody would see their neighbour go hungry. We can celebrate that. We as a community must encourage it rather than throw our hands in the air in despair and say that there is nothing to celebrate.

I asked that very question of a number of persons working in my office. They have answered that very cogently and said that there is so much. If you were to listen to some of the detractors you would swear that it is all gloom and doom. I posit this afternoon that in this House we need to challenge ourselves and the national community to recognize the positives that we face in this particular food situation. The question before us is: If not us then who; if not here, then where; if not now, then when?

Thank you.

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar (*Siparia*): Mr. Speaker, as I join this debate, I think that it is important for us to consider the Motion before us in the context in which we find ourselves at this juncture in our history. The hon. Member has said that we have things to celebrate and we should take joy for those positive things to celebrate. I am sure that he would agree that the first thing we must have is safety and security. You must have life before you can celebrate anything. This Government has shown day after day that it is a total failure when it comes to the fight against crime. In that context I ask through you—here comes a time when the Commissioner of Police is reported to have said that he has given up on the job. We have no reason why this has happened. In today's newspapers you see reports that the police service is headless in a time of crisis when it comes to security. In that context what do we celebrate? To celebrate we must be able to eat. That is where we come to another arena of failure on the part of the Government.

The hon. Member talked about the various interventions. Today, I intend to look at some of those interventions when it comes to dealing with high food prices and to see to what extent they have impacted upon or are assisting in reducing food prices in this country. When we start to look at it, I congratulate my colleague, the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla for bringing this Motion for

Rising Food Prices
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, June 27, 2008

debate and thereby forcing the Government to account, give priority to the poor, vulnerable and those hardest hit by these very high food prices in the country. With due respect to the Minister of Information and his pompous pronouncement that UNC MPs did not present supporting evidence to this Motion, contrary to that I am of the firm view that Members on this side gave proof beyond reasonable doubt that this ignorant, insensitive and incompetent Government has failed to contain food prices at affordable levels as put forward in the Motion.

To add insult to injury, it is six months that this Motion is being debated in Parliament. It was filed in December to qualify for the Order Paper in January. Our first debate on this Motion took place six months ago in January. What has happened from January to now? On every occasion that we have met to debate this matter, Minister after Minister of the Government has stood up and basically regurgitated ad nauseam, as it were, the same tried and failed interventions. They have come forward starting from the first Member, the Minister on the other side and thereafter, repetition of the same. If you look at *Hansard* you would see that the words are identical in some cases and they go backwards to the statement made by the hon. Prime Minister in the National Consultation on Food Prices. If you want to see the Government's thrust as enunciated by his various Members, it is playing a CD repeatedly. Their master's voice is being repeated. I remember the Member for St. Joseph with the identical words, "we took the courageous and historic decision to close down Caroni". The words are identical. They are all reading from the same script. You may say that it is a great thing for them that they are consistent.

To the issues and interventions that we have to deal with, they are the same ones that have been repeated by every speaker in this debate. Six months later those measures obviously, whether or not they had started two years or one year ago, certainly, none of them started in this year. In that six months none of those measures has served to bring down the price of food. Instead the reality is that the food prices continue to rise.

If there are measures that are succeeding we should find the data that food prices have been coming down. The empirical data is to the contrary. If we look at food price inflation just for this year alone when this Motion came on stream, I am taking this from the Central Bank's media releases that are put out every month. In December 2007, food price inflation was 16.8 per cent; January 2008, it went to 20.8 per cent. Now the latest media release on June 20 for May 2008, it has gone to 21.8 per cent. The data for June is not yet available. If these interventions that are being repeated were working, we should have seen a drop in

prices. Instead, the empirical data is clear to the contrary that the prices continue to rise. It is not over the last six months that food prices have been rising. If we look at food inflation statistics over the years it is from day one to the present that we have been experiencing high levels of food inflation under this Government.

Whatever measures they have taken from since they came into office to now, the end result has been that the prices continue to rise. If we consolidate the Central Bank's inflation bulletins—we used 2001 as the base—we would see that prices have continued to increase each year thereafter. By the time we come from 2002 to May 2008, the present time, food prices have increased by 218.24 per cent. If you look at those figures it is clear that the Government's interventions are not working. All their protestations have come to naught. All their boasts of the measures that they have taken have come to naught. The fact is that none of the measures of which they boast has served to stem the tide of the rising food prices. Those are the facts. As the Minister of Information said, facts are stubborn things. They will not go away. These are the facts. Since this Government came into office, food prices have risen by 218 per cent and have continued to rise at each point. They cannot stem the rising tide.

What are their responses? Every government will have policy options, interventions and initiatives which they can take. Given the present circumstances in the world and what we need here you have policy options and you have exercised some of those options. I will look at those. I want to take a look at those policy options and interventions, your responses to the state of food prices in this country. The first response from the Government has been, blame everybody. It is the blame game. Blame the whole world because it is a global phenomenon. I have it quoted here what each said, but I would not go through it.

Basically, starting with the Prime Minister, he opted to take blame, take comfort in the global factor impacting on food prices when he spoke at the National Consultation on Food Prices in August 2007. Thereafter, every speaker talked about these global factors: international realities; external forces; food prices exogenous; large extent independent of Trinidad and Tobago; global phenomena. Blame the world is the first one. Blame the business community and the supermarket owners; they are price gouging. Blame the middleman. Whilst you are blaming them you blame the consumer. You tell the consumers in this country to be more disciplined in how they spend their money. They must think about healthy lifestyles. The Minister has just said it. It has been repeated. The thread has run throughout all the contributions. The consumer must now be disciplined and exercise discretion. Tell me something!

Rising Food Prices
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, June 27, 2008

When you come every month—the items that are contributing to the highest levels of the food prices are the cereals. Let us make it clear. It is not cornflakes that we are talking about. When we talk about cereals we are talking about rice and flour, those basic staples. In this last report there was 35 per cent increase on those items. How are you saying to me, “Be more disciplined”? So do not eat rice and flour? Do I eat cassava, which is what you said, and cassava is more expensive if you have to feed a family? You blame everybody. You want to lecture in this sort of self-righteous way. People, you must now decide to eat more healthily. The whole world had gone global. In this modern age of technology it is instant messaging, access and touch. You will not get people to turn back the clock. They have developed, you say, through slavery. No. It is a global village now so that your tastes are global tastes. It is not just because of slavery you have developed a taste for rice and flour. Is it because of slavery you developed a taste for apples or grapes? That is where the world is now, today.

In a country which is reaping billions of dollars, where we spent \$200 plus billion in the last how many years, a budget of \$45 billion, you are telling people be discriminate and decide what they want to eat. Think about their health. You are saying let us go backwards.

On one hand, this Government is very clear about the global world, being out there in the world, Vision 2020 and a main partner on the stage and it takes retrograde steps. While I congratulate all the students who wrote the Secondary Education Assessment (SEA) exam, it is a retrograde step once again on the part of the Government to tell children that they have failed. They are failing children again in SEA, keeping them down and not giving them a place in secondary schools. Retrograde step! Retrograde Step! You said so many students scored under 30. Why are you discriminating? You are giving some of them places and not others. A retrograde step which I condemn.

You talk about First World status and Vision 2020. In this day and age you are telling children—because you failed them in the system—that they have failed an exam. We are back to that trauma on the day that the results come out of children screaming and bawling down the place because they have a piece of paper in their hands saying that they have failed, when it is the failure of the ministry and the Government. You blame everybody. At the end of that you blame the world, the business community, the supermarket owners, the middleman, the consumer and of course, you blame the UNC.

2.45 p.m.

That is the blame game. You blame everyone else and you are not looking yourself in the eye. You are not looking at what you should do. Everyone else is to blame and you seem to be in Mars; out in space. You have no part in this. Total nonsense!

You blame the external factors for being responsible for the escalation in food prices. Yes, they are, but it is being exacerbated in Trinidad and Tobago by the mismanagement and incompetence of the Government in dealing with food prices. [*Desk thumping*] If these Ministers are correct, that these external factors are to blame for the prices, then we would expect that the empirical data would show, in countries similarly circumstanced, that prices would also rise at similar levels. That is not the case.

When we examine the empirical data of countries in our own region, we find that our food inflation rate is far in excess of theirs. Tell me: Is Barbados not also being impacted by the global factors? Why then did Barbados have a food inflation rate of 4.46 per cent during the period 2001—2006 but in Trinidad and Tobago we had a rate of 16.5 per cent? So the climate change, the demand from Russia and India, adverse weather conditions, the biofuel pull; all these global factors, do they not affect Barbados? That is why I say international escalation factors, yes, but they are being exacerbated here in Trinidad and Tobago because of the failure of Government to contain the prices with suitable intervention.

Let us take the OECS countries. How is it that their inflation rate was 2.15 per cent during 2001—2005, but Trinidad and Tobago's was 16.5? Are they not similarly circumstanced? Are these world factors not impacting on them too? Guyana, from 2001—2006, was 4.13 per cent. How is it that we had 16.5 per cent? Let us think about Barbados. They do not have the benefit of oil and gas. They have a very small agricultural sector. They probably import far more food than we do, yet they have contained their food inflation rate at 4.6 per cent while we have escalated to 16.5 per cent. These figures come from the Governor of the Central Bank's presentation he made at the National Consultation on Food Prices in August last year.

Why is that such a great problem for us here and it is not impacting on the other countries in our own region? If the Ministers are correct, that the culprits are the international factors, then these other countries should be similarly circumstanced. The question then arises: Who is really to blame for the exorbitant prices? Rising prices, yes, but we are talking about exorbitant prices in Trinidad and Tobago.

Rising Food Prices
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, June 27, 2008

Anthony Wilson, writing in the *Trinidad Guardian* of June 05, 2008, puts it in these words:

“It is excess Government spending more than any other factor that must be blamed for the fact that the rate of inflation in Trinidad and Tobago is nearly three times higher than our main trading partners.”

He continues:

“Excess Government spending is the primary contributor to the fact that food prices here became such a burden to people on low and fixed incomes long before the sharp escalation in the cost of food became a global issue.”

That point is echoed repeatedly in all the Central Bank releases which point to Government's fiscal irresponsibility and profligacy. When we read the Central Bank's report each month, that is one of the factors that are being targeted as the cause of the high level of inflation. I quote from page 2 of the Central Bank media release dated February 22, 2008:

“The underlying inflationary conditions are the result of continued high net fiscal injections...Net fiscal injections in the first four months of fiscal year 2008 were 10 per cent higher than in the corresponding period of the last fiscal year and 40 per cent higher than in the same period of fiscal 2006.”

In spite of the warning from the Central Bank, the Government continues to pump excess liquidity into the system, contributing to the inflationary demand pressures which are putting us where we are. That was in February, by April, this is with they had to say:

“Data available for the current fiscal year suggests a continuation of the trend with net domestic fiscal injections in the first five months of this year being 17 per cent higher than the corresponding period of the year before.”

At February, it was 10 per cent higher and by the time we got to April, it was 17 per cent higher. By the time this financial year closes, we would go, maybe to almost 30 per cent. Where would that come from? We see from the 10 per cent in the first four months, it has gone to 17 per cent and is scheduled to rise. If the Government will not face the truth of its fiscal irresponsibility, we cannot deal with the problem. We will not be able to deal with the problem. Inflation will continue to rise and, regardless of the other interventions that the Government makes—they make all these very nice interventions which sound good on paper, but clearly, we need to look at the demand side as well as the supply side.

Many have spoken on the side of increasing agricultural supplies and so on, but all will come to naught, as is happening, if you do not deal with the inflationary demand pressures. And the Government has refused and continues to refuse to deal with the inflationary pressures through over-expenditure and squandermania.

The Prime Minister says that they are managing successfully the worldwide problem of inflation. That is absolute nonsense. When we look at the comparison, it is a cop out to say that it is world prices. I know that the Minister of Finance loves to look at international comparisons—it is interesting that she did not bring some of them when she spoke in this debate. If we look at international food price comparisons—I have already spoken about Barbados, the OECS and others—we can look at other nations and we will see that the Minister did not bring these because the evidence is clear that Trinidad and Tobago's food inflation rate is high by regional and international standards, which gives lie to their premise that the exorbitant food prices are due to this global phenomenon.

Let us look at Table 8 coming out of the Central Bank Monetary Policy Report of April 2008. In that we turn for empirical data in support of what we are putting forward to this House. We look at food inflation in selected countries. We look at Colombia. Inflation in food prices in 2007 was 8.5 per cent. In Brazil, it was 10.8 per cent. In the United States, it was 3.9 per cent. In Canada, it was 1.6 per cent. In the United Kingdom, it was 3.7 per cent. When we come to the region, Bahamas was at 3 per cent, Barbados was at 7 per cent; Belize at 5.8 per cent, the ECCU at 7.2 per cent, and Trinidad and Tobago, in 2007, was 17.5 per cent.

This is empirical data. It is not what we have made up. It is hard data that gives lie to their premise that international factors impact upon the rising prices here when other nations are similarly circumstanced but their food inflation rate is not as high as ours. They boast of prudent management of the economy, but it is clear that they have failed to exercise any kind of prudent restraint when it comes to expenditure and to the fiscal injections that they keep making into the economy. Those are the facts and they will not go away.

If the Government continues to blame everybody else and does not admit to the reality—that their excessive spending is fuelling the problem—then they will never be able to deal with it. If they do not admit that is a problem, they will never be able to deal with it. It is the same denial we saw when the Minister of National Security went to England and came back home and said that there was plenty crime up there, too. It is happening elsewhere, so it is all right for it to happen in Trinidad and Tobago. Heaven help us. If they cannot acknowledge the problem, how can they then deal with it?

Rising Food Prices
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, June 27, 2008

High food prices are a global phenomenon. School violence is a global phenomenon. They think that they are in charge. They blame the UNC for doing nothing when it was there. If that is their opinion, I do not agree with it. What are they doing? What have they done? In spite of all the warnings year after year, this Government came only a couple weeks ago to get an additional \$3.5 billion fiscal injection, putting on further inflationary pressures.

The Minister spoke, maybe this month, about the RBTT share sale and about the fact that this would bring more liquidity into the system and that we needed to mop up some liquidity. That will put further inflationary pressures that will lift food prices more. The hon. Minister says that she has a plan for that to sell what she terms the sterilization bonds, nine-year bonds, at a rate of 8.5 per cent; totally foolish and useless!

Who is going to take these bonds at that per cent when the inflation rate right now is 10 per cent? Every year the inflation rate is going up. You are wasting your money. Maybe some of the larger investors will take it—those with pension plans—but the individual investor will not take up that offer.

The more serious question is: Why do we need to have that liquidity problem in the first place? That sale could have been completed in a different way. Why contribute to this further liquidity problem to further drive up prices? If cash, for whatever reason, had to be paid for the shares, why did they not do it by deposits in Canadian currency? Why did they not do it at Royal Bank Limited for shareholders and then let the cash be absorbed in the Royal family of mutual funds? They could have done that. The failure of the Government to insist on a paper-to-paper exchange will now cost the Treasury and the taxpayers and they will feel it.

The Government has the largest block of shares and because of that they could have insisted, as a pre-condition, that it be done by share-to-share transfer rather than cash-to-share transfer. Why could that not have been done? Why a cash/share transfer so that you end up with an excess of \$4.7 billion that you are now worried about? Why were we so sloppy that we did not insist on a share-to-share exchange? Maybe there are reasons; I do not know, but right now I cannot understand why.

You must have known that that excess liquidity in an already inflationary system would serve to further spiral those prices upward. You are coming to issue these bonds now, at lower than the inflation rate, for nine years, which many people may not take up.

Today, I see in the *Trinidad Guardian* that the Minister plans to offer these nine-year sterilization bonds. Thousands of individual investors will collect millions of dollars over the coming weeks, but are unlikely to be tempted by the nine-year bonds at a rate of 8.25 per cent when inflation now averages 9 per cent to 10 per cent.

3.00 p.m.

Why did we do this transaction in this way? If there were legal issues you should have come to the Parliament first and iron those out. You are the largest shareholder through Unit Trust Corporation, Nipdec and the others. You hold the greatest block of shares and you could have insisted that this transaction—it is done that way in the United States. Why did you not do a share-to-share transfer; a share from Royal Bank transferred into a share in this new bank? Why did it have to be four point whatever billion cash transfers? That too is going to contribute further to the inflationary spiral.

What are your interventions? What are the policy options? What could you do? You could have listed several of them. You have played the blame game, but at the end of the day, on the demand side, it is very clear that Government has failed to take adequate measures to keep down the prices, as the Motion proposes. When we look at the policies and interventions that Government has, fiscal policies, with respect to trying to bring the prices down, we have seen the monetary measures.

The hon. Minister of Finance in her contribution in the debate said:

“We know that in a very broad sense we have taken a number of initiatives, open market operations and financial literacy programmes, in conjunction with the Central Bank.”

That was the Minister of Finance, in terms of how do we try to absorb liquidity to try to bring the prices down.

The Central Bank in its report of February 22 put it this way:

“The Bank has implemented a number of liquidity absorption measures, including open market operations, to dampen the consequential increase...in money demand...While these measures have had some success, inflationary pressures resulting from limited agricultural supplies and higher global prices have intensified.”

The bank had acknowledged that we tried all these things, but we have had only limited success. The fact is that the monetary measures of the Central Bank to address demand pressures and to absorb liquidity continue to fail.

I have, in this House before, described it as a firefight between Government’s fiscal policy and Central Bank’s monetary policy. The Central Bank, through its

Rising Food Prices
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, June 27, 2008

monetary policy, open market operations, issuing and selling of those bonds, pulled money out of the system. But the Government comes back and spends more and continues to pour more. It is always a firefight between both of them and at the end of the day, it is really the Government, with their fiscal irresponsibility and squandermania, that wins, thereby putting the measure on the prices in the country and sending food prices and every other price, sky high.

Your liquidity absorption on the demand side is not working, because the prices are continuing to go up and up. I have given those statistics at the very start, to support the point that the prices are escalating at rates that are far in excess of our Caricom partners right here in the region, as well as internationally.

What other intervention did the Government make? Every Member—Prime Minister Manning in his address at the food consultation—in this debate thus far has trumpeted the removal of VAT and the removal or reduction of the common external tariff on food as fiscal measures or interventions which they have employed to try to bring down the price of food. We heard them. They all said, with great desk thumping: “We have dealt with VAT and we are done with the common external tariff.”

Let us examine those measures and see what actually happened, what has been done and what is the impact. Let us deal first with the removal of VAT on food. That was very well boasted. All the Members boasted about the removal of VAT on food, but the hon. Minister of Finance went further in her exuberance. She was aided and abetted by very profuse desk thumping from her colleagues when she identified some of the items from which she boasted her Government removed VAT. The Minister of Finance said this:

“In relation to food, I believe that the hon. Minister of Legal Affairs has spoken to this on several occasions, but I just want to mention some of the initiatives that have been mentioned. One of them, in consumer measures, removal of VAT and CET. From 2002 and continuing over the years, this Government has been removing VAT from food items. In particular, 29 basic items...are zero-rated and they include bread, flour, rice, sugar, milk, cheese, soya bean oil and pasta.”

Of course, at the sound of every one of those was desk thumping. Do you know what the hon. Minister of Finance said? She said:

“You know what that is a case of, Member for Siparia? Revenue foregone. That is a good case of revenue foregone. We have foregone the VAT revenue for a good cause because we, on this side, are a compassionate Government. [*Desk thumping*]”

This is just an anecdote. Dr. Rafeeq would remember something. When the medical students were in medical school—my husband was a member, together with Dr. Rafeeq—they were on the ward with the people who were mentally-challenged. They were asked to do a little test to decide if they could send these mentally-challenged persons home. Dr. Rafeeq and the young interns on the ward had the three guys lined up. Dr. Rafeeq asked him: “Two and two?” Guy one says: “Two and two is Tuesday.” Dr. Rafeeq said: “Ah, no, no, you have to stay inside.” He then asked the second guy: “Two and two?” He says: “36.” Dr. Rafeeq says: “I am very sorry, you cannot go.” He asked the third guy: “Two and two?” He says: “The answer is four.” Dr. Rafeeq was happy. He said: “It seems you can now leave. You can go.” It was bothering Dr. Rafeeq, because he felt that something was not right, so he said to him: “Tell me, how did you arrive at the answer four.” The guy said: “I took Tuesday and minus 36 and 38 and I got four.” In other words, you arrive at the right answer but the reason and logic is totally flawed. That is what I remembered when the Minister of Finance was thumping her chest and boasting about removing VAT on bread, rice, flour and cheese. The truth is that bread was zero-rated by Legal Notice 37 of 1989.

In 1989, who was in government? Was it the PNM? No, it was the NAR. Rice was zero-rated by Legal Notice 37 of 1989. In 1989, who was in government? Was it the PNM? The answer is no. Flour was zero-rated by Legal Notice 37 of 1989. Was it the PNM? No! Milk, in any form, was zero-rated by Legal Notice 37 of 1989, not the PNM. Cheese was zero-rated by Legal Notice 17 of 1996 by the UNC, not the PNM. Pasta was zero-rated by Act No. 8 of 1996 and Legal Notice 17 of 1996 when the UNC was in government, not the PNM. That is the truth. The PNM did not zero-rate bread, rice, flour, milk, cheese and pasta as the Minister of Finance boasted in this debate. They did not do it. If I were to use the Member for La Horquetta or Arouca, false lie. You misled the House. You might have taken VAT off, but do not take credit for things done in our time. You did not do it. Why boast about what you did not do? The truth is that those are the facts. Facts are stubborn things, they do not go away. The Legal Notice is there.

In our first year in office, in addition to cheese and pasta, the UNC zero-rated approximately 20 items by Act No. 8 of 1996. The UNC zero-rated corned beef, curry, fresh butter, peanut butter, table salt, salted butter, tinned sardines, smoke herring, yeast, baking powder and saltfish. Do not come to the Parliament to say that you did that. That is why I am answering you. You have zero-rated other matters, but do not take credit for the basic items of food such as rice and flour.

Rising Food Prices
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, June 27, 2008

Do not take it. When you come here you are misleading the population by saying: “My intervention is that we moved VAT from rice, flour and all these other items such as bread, rice, flour, milk, cheese and pasta.” It is totally untrue.

Let us move on to VAT. The Government is misleading this population about the VAT revenues and talking about revenue foregone, when the truth is that the revenue foregone in the items that are zero-rated is minuscule in comparison to the revenue that is being pocketed by this Government at the expense of the poor people who cannot afford to buy food.

I would show you how. Again, I go to the empirical data. I go to figure 15 of the Central Bank Governor’s presentation at the National Consultation on Food Prices 2007. With respect to Value Added Tax, in 2003, this Government collected \$128,309,606. I would break it down to just the millions. In 2004, \$136 million; 2005, \$143.4 million; 2006, \$145.8 million. This is up to 2006. The numbers are not ready for 2007, but we know that the food import bill was \$3.1 billion. We expect similar millions of dollars in VAT are being collected. Why does the Government need this VAT revenue, in a time when we are in extraordinary circumstances? We are in drastic times. Food prices are way above the reach of the very poor in this country. Why do we need \$145 million or \$150 million per year in VAT?

That is the exact amount that it cost the Prime Minister to build his mansion. Therefore, I want to recommend today that the Government, in the short term, remove VAT on every single food item in this country, in the short term, because when we come to the supply side we would see your farms will not come aboard anywhere in the short term.

In the immediate term, the first thing you want to do is to remove VAT on every single food item. You can forego \$145 million or \$148 million because you have already built the Prime Minister’s mansion. You do not need another \$148 million for that. You can now give it to the poor people by way of the removal of VAT.

Let us now go to the common external tariff. Everybody boasted, but this time they did not list the items from which the CET has been reduced or removed. They have a good reason why, as we would see.

Before we go there, I want to read something from a study that was done. [Interruption] Not Shakespeare. I would quote and give you the author in a moment.

“One of the most important factors in the low living standards of the masses was the iniquitous taxation system. The necessities of life were taxed through import duties rather than property. Such essential items as rice, flour, bread,

saltfish and salted meat, candles, cheese, butter, salt, sugar, lard, soap and kerosene were all taxed; they were all staple items for the working class.

New Era”—a publication—“thought that high import duties were responsible for much of the poverty in Trinidad and they retarded the material and social progress of the whole working class. By raising the cost of living, the duties made it difficult for the labourer and his family to survive. The consequence was widespread malnutrition.

C.S. Salmon...[wrote] their food was almost all imported and subject to heavy taxes. The people were pauperized as a result...For the black labourer owned no land, ultimate starvation is certain.

‘...taxation deprived the impoverished labourer of a material portion of salary and earnings’

Public Opinion stated”—I continue to quote—“We all see that under the present burden of taxation the people are pauperized...In their present miserable condition, living from hand to mouth, saving is out of the question, money at ruinous interest rates, they cannot marry, they cannot keep their children in health and strength by good feeding. One hears everyday of little innocents dying.’...‘Our rulers have no idea of the poverty of the people. They refuse to see the mass poverty, malnutrition and ill health which exist in both town and country.’”

This is from Prof. Bridget Brereton’s book *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad 1870—1900*, 200 years ago. She was talking about the iniquitous taxation system of import duties on basic staple foods. Even though that was 200 years ago, the words are still totally relevant today, in the context of the CET and import duties imposed in this country. The Government is boasting about the removal of the CET. In this document, *Laws of Trinidad and Tobago, Customs Act, Chap. 78:01, Legal Notice 22/2007*, we get a list of the CET on all items in this country and food imports and the picture is a very, very sorry one.

3.15 p.m.

As you go through this, meat of bovine (beef), swine (pork), goat and sheep—fresh, chilled or frozen—15 per cent import duty; meat and edible offal of poultry—fresh, chilled or frozen—40 per cent duty; fish—fresh, chilled or frozen—apart from skipjack and bonito—all others salmon, tuna, herring, cods, snapper, grouper—40 per cent duty; salt fish, 20 per cent; shrimp and prawns, 40 per cent.

Rising Food Prices
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, June 27, 2008

Powdered milk has been reduced, but with respect to all other milk there is a 40 per cent duty; hatching eggs—thanks to the UNC—by Legal Notice No. 66 of 2001, there has been no duty on it; fresh eggs, 40.

Mr. Speaker, cabbage, cauliflower, lettuce, carrots, cucumbers, fresh or chilled peas, pigeon, blackeye and other beans, 40 per cent; dried peas and beans and pigeon peas, 15 per cent; black eye, 15 per cent; red beans and kidney beans that we all eat with stew chicken and rice on a Sunday or whenever, 40 per cent; nuts, fresh or dried fruits, 40 per cent.

With respect to cereals—as we talk about cereals—rice, 25 per cent. We know that rice has increased 100 per cent year on year from last year. Recently, the National Flour Mills said that they want another increase of 19 per cent. This was carried in the *Newsday* on June 06, 2008.

With respect to flour, we have dealt with this way back in 1996 under Legal Notice No. 184 and No. 185 of 1996 to deal with CET with respect to flour. The PNM has not done that. Flour is taxed at 25 per cent CET duty. So, rice and flour are taxed at 25 per cent.

The new price increase in flour announced yesterday to 29 per cent is now going to take 10 kilogrammes of Lotus Bakers Flour from \$50.65 to \$64.32 and 10 kilogrammes of Ibis Flour from \$50.18 to \$61, but in that price there is a 24 per cent import duty.

Fruit juices, except for infants, 40 per cent; table salt, 20 per cent—the list of items that I read from Prof. Brereton's like the rice, flour and salt and so on, 200 years later, we are still paying these duties, impoverishing the already poor.

Ground nuts not roasted or otherwise cooked, 40 per cent; oil—apart from soyabean oil—all other oils like maize and corn oil and so forth, 40 per cent.

Duties on cane sugar are very interesting. You have made 80 tonnes of other cane sugar which was 40 per cent—by Legal Notice No. 43 of 2008—this has been continuing over the years. This dates back from the UNC's time—it has been repeated that the duty be removed on a certain amount of tonnage of sugarcane sugar.

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

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC]

Question put and agreed to.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Speaker, I was on the CET with cane sugar and there is a very interesting development. You can import bulk sugar duty free, but if you are bringing cane sugar for retail sale in packages of not more than 10 kilogrammes, that is to say small packages, you are going to be paying 40 per cent on duty.

I have been advised that there is a very strange thing that is happening with sugar. There is only one agent for sugar in the country, so they bring in the bulk and get it free, but if anybody else wants to bring it, below 10 kilogrammes you would have to pay 40 per cent. So, it is about friends and families. You have a monopoly. There is one agent in the country who is allowed to import sugar, and that agent has been increasing the prices at will. When you have a monopoly, you can do whatever you want.

So, where sugar is sold in factories in Guyana at TT \$110, the agent was selling it for TT \$197, which is a \$77 difference. So, here you have a monopoly of this one agent. I understand the same applies to granulated sugar from Caroni (1975) Limited where there is only one agent/distributor that is allowed to purchase sugar. Why are you having these monopolies? [*Interruption*] I am not going to tell you. You should know because you are in Government. Why are you asking me? Your friends and your families!

Mr. Imbert: No way!

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Your PNM friends and party hacks. The same thing is happening when it comes to nuts. Now, we all know the nuts man. The small people take nuts—they say you make nuts and you sell it—but with respect to raw nuts, the CET is 40 per cent. If you are bringing in nuts to make peanut butter you are paying zero. So, Vemco and Matouks and so forth are paying zero, and the small man who brings in raw nuts has to pay 40 per cent.

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

I am advised that when they bring it in at zero they are selling it to the trade illegally. So, they import it at a rate of zero, because they are saying it is for manufacturing and they are going to make peanut butter but, in effect, they are doing two things: they get it at a rate of zero and they are trading it in the system. The normal little man who has to buy nuts has to pay the 40 per cent.

Mr. Ramnath: A small Calder Hart.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to just say a final word on this matter. I have gone through all the Legal Notices here, and the

Rising Food Prices
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, June 27, 2008

Government has brought no new reduction or removal of the CET since February 2007. The last Legal Notice was in February, 2007. There is one this year for soyabean oil and cane sugar, but it is a repeat of one that expired in June. There is not a single new item—in spite of all the boasting—that CET has been removed or reduced from.

When one looks at the items, out of about 30 items that presently exist under these Legal Notices, at least six of them you are paying between 15 and 30 per cent CET. So, they have not removed them, but they have reduced some of them. So, out of the 30 items there are only six items and, therefore, the other 24 items are repeats of previous Legal Notices removing or reducing the CET.

When one considers basic items like rice and flour which are the ones with the highest mark-up duties, the CET has not been removed. I am saying that the Government's intervention—they boast of an intervention of reduction and removal of the CET—is totally useless and has not impacted and will not impact. Today, again, I call for the removal of the CET on all foods in this country—[*Desk thumping*]*—VAT and CET. We cannot be pauperizing our people.*

We give the foreign oil companies all kinds of special preferential treatment and tax holidays, in effect, we are subsidizing them. We focus on the energy sector and help these foreign companies, so why do we not focus on the agricultural sector? Why does the wealth not transfer to the ordinary man or the poor man in this country? That is why I am saying to remove the CET from all items. Now, you are going to tell me that is a Caricom regional agreement and, therefore, you have to go and get it fixed. Madam Deputy Speaker, do you know what? In the short term, whilst you are negotiating with CARICOM—listen, their rates are not as high as ours. We have these CET rates to protect those Caricom people, but our inflation rates are higher.

So, whilst you are negotiating with them to remove the CET and reduce it on our basic foods and so on, in the short term, Government should absorb the CET value. That is, in effect, a subsidy and immediately we are going to see a drop in food prices. If you move the 25 per cent from rice and the 40 per cent on many of the other items that I have spoken about—where the duties are 40 per cent and 100 per cent—then every \$100 you spend \$40 is going to the Government. Who is the price gouger? The Government talks about price gouging by the supermarkets, but the Government is the greatest price gouger through the CET—40 per cent, 30 per cent and 25 per cent duties. That is what has the prices up.

When the Member for Caroni East raised the issue with the Minister of Finance on the last occasion, the hon. Minister of Finance was flippant in the response and said that the Member must be talking about champagne; totally flippant. So, the

boasting about removing and reducing the CET does not hold water and it will not help unless you remove the CET from all the food items.

One way in which you can do that in the short term, whilst you negotiate with your partners in Caricom, is for the Government to absorb the \$140 million per year—this is not a lot—and they would be subsidizing the poor people in this country when it comes to food consumption and food prices. That is with respect to fiscal measures for the Government's intervention. I have dealt with the removal of VAT and CET.

On the supply side, the Government's responses have been threefold. They were outlined by the Prime Minister in his statement. He said three things. We all know that the supply is down, let us start from there because I am running out of time. Let us take the situational analysis. I have done it with respect to the inflationary matters and now let us take it from the supply side.

When we look at the supply side, we know that the output to GDP has declined from 3 per cent when UNC was in office to one half of 1 per cent. The GDP to output has declined.

Secondly, we know that the labour force in agriculture has declined, and the production has declined. All those statistics are there—empirical evidence—to show that the labour force has declined. I do not know where the Minister of Information got it from when he said that there has been a 15 per cent increase in the number of farmers over the past five years. The statistics give the lie to that. *[Interruption]*

We have seen where in 2001 there were 40,000 persons in agriculture, and by the time we got to 2007, there were 22,000. I do not know where he got that 15 per cent increase from. Look at the empirical data from the Central Bank in its Monetary Policy Report for April 2008.

When we come to production, under the UNC in 2001, we were producing 2,411,000 kilogrammes of tomatoes and now it is 1,358,000 under the PNM in 2006; cabbage, we were producing 251,000 kilogrammes and it is now 163,000 kilogrammes.

Mr. Ramnath: Why do you all want to spite Indian farmers?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Cucumber, the production was 4,708,000 kilogrammes and it has now gone to 2,297,000; pumpkin was up at 5,795,000 kilogrammes and it is now down to 2,047,000 kilogrammes. So, production has dropped and the labour force has dropped. When we come to the percentage of GDP, again, when we look at the Central Bank's data—from its data centre you can consolidate it

Rising Food Prices
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, June 27, 2008

over the years—the GDP to output is less than one half of 1 per cent. That is the situation analysis. What has this Government done? It says, yes, we must increase the food supply, and increasing this food supply, what do we do?

The Prime Minister said that we are going to deal with small and medium size farmers. The first initiative was the closure of Caroni (1975) Limited. Everyone got up here and boasted about this great courageous move to close down Caroni (1975) Limited as being one of the initiatives to bring down food prices.

Dr. Moonilal: The worst decision!

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: I do not see the logic in it, but that was their reasoning. The second initiative was partnering with Caricom neighbours and the third was 17 large mega farms. This is on the supply side to try and increase food production. The facts are very clear. Not one of those initiatives is off the ground to provide any kind of supply that would help to bring down food prices in the short or medium term.

Let us take Caroni (1975) Limited first. They have repeatedly said that they have liberated all this land by closing down Caroni (1975) Limited. The hon. Prime Minister in the National Food Consultation in 2007 said that we created over 7,000 new farmers from former Caroni (1975) Limited workers.

Again, on May 01, the Prime Minister said that the Government has already established 7,000 new farms. What are the facts? Minister Taylor in the Senate on April 23, 2008 said that by June this year 5,000 of the 7,000 plots would be ready. [Laughter] So, here is the Prime Minister saying in August that we created 7,000 new farmers; in May he said that we have already established 7,000 new farms, but by the time we come to April this year, the Minister in the Senate said by June we are going to have 5,000 ready.

Further fact, in the *Express* newspaper of June 04, 2008, Sen. The Hon. Mariano Browne said that there were only 800 farmers operating on the lands. So, they created the 7,000 new farmers and they have reached 800.

3.30 p.m.

Then we go further, the *Express*, April 28, 2008:

"Caroni lands far from ready...

...workers is doomed to failure, soil scientist...says."

We go to the *Trinidad Guardian* editorial of May 05, 2008:

"State of cane lands counters Govt plans"

So, we are nowhere near anywhere, getting any supply from this closure of Caroni. Megafarms, the Prime Minister at the National Consultation, August 2007 said:

"We are creating 17 large farms."

By the time we get to May 01, 2008 in the *Express*, we are in the process of establishing 17 large farms. This is May 2008. So last year August they were creating them and in May 2008 they are in the process of establishing them. These are the large farms, the megafarms. Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association (TTMA) president, Karen de Montbrun said, "two years after Government announced plans for the megafarms, nothing has been done." *Newsday*, April 17, just a month or two: Megafarms distance away.

The megafarms, which are supposed to help lower food prices are some distance from becoming a reality. In fact, statements by Minister Enill in the Senate, "Government is still in embryonic stages of the establishment of these farms." Still in embryo stage. These megafarms are not off the ground; no supply. When we come to Caricom—

Hon. Member: We got Super Pharms.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: We got Super Pharms instead, we definitely got Super Pharms. The third initiative announced by the Government, by the Prime Minister, by his Ministers here thereafter, had to do with the Caricom partnerships. He said again:

"...the Government is actively pursuing the Guyana initiative through a combination of market-driven and private-sector-led processes and government-to-government arrangements."

Very, very high sounding words. Do you know what it really means? Nothing has been done. Nothing that will give us production, will increase the supply at this point in time. That was in the Senate of April 22, 2008.

When we read the Central Bank Governor again, in his presentation, he said:

"Adding to our concerns about inflation are delays in the implementation of Government's new agricultural thrust involving establishment of a number of small farms, large farms and increasing infrastructural investment in agriculture; introduction of a programme of fiscal incentives."

So, where are these three supply side initiatives? They are nowhere happening. So, lovely things about incentives, credit and all these other things, but if you do not have land today—the question asked by the Member for Caroni Central, how many people got their leases. How many was it? Nineteen out of 7,888.

Hon. Member: That is the farmers?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: The 7,000 farmers. So, we are nowhere on the supply side and therefore I am saying we are in very serious circumstances at this point in time and I would come back, as I said, to three recommendations that I would like to make in the short term. Whilst you get your act together in the long term to increasing supply in agriculture, we have to deal with the situation of our country and our people at this time.

I want to talk about the social impact. I have looked at the demand side; I have looked at the supply side and the interventions that you have put forward. I want to look at the social impact now; what it is all about; what it is. Whatever we do, it is to improve the quality of life of people in the country. That is what it is about, Madam Deputy Speaker. And what is the social impact?

The Minister of Finance boasted that 18 per cent of the monthly budget is spent on food, but she does not tell us 18 per cent of what. In her contribution she boasts about this 18 per cent and said, she did not know why we are so close to the developed countries. I quote:

“...so closely aligned to the developed countries like Canada and the United States. The reason is clearly, the strength our economy.

‘No, I am not making ‘skylark.’ ‘Yuh know I doh skylark.’”

Hon. Member: Who said that?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: The Minister of Finance saying, boastfully, about people in Trinidad and Tobago spending 18 per cent of their income on food. The reason it is so closely aligned to what is happening is because it is so totally inaccurate. It is totally inaccurate! It is a kind of statistical manipulation—

Hon. Member: Conmanship.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Conmanship is the word I used in the last budget reply. Because, when you look at it, the Minister of Finance does not tell us 18 per cent of what. Because if it is that you are one of those 217,000 people, whom the survey of living conditions done by them says, \$655 is the poverty line, you want to tell me you would spend 18 per cent of \$655? Do you know what that would work out to, Madam Deputy Speaker? You cannot even by a “doubles” per day, because it would not work out to the cost of a “doubles” per day. You cannot buy a roti, much less or pelau; you cannot buy any of those.

I am saying the stark reality is different; it is totally different. If you are talking about the Government Ministers at \$40,000, fine; they can spend 18 per

cent because they would be talking about \$7,000 a month on food. But when we come to the poor—and I am saying the 217,632 persons by their numbers; I do not agree with them; I believe far more than that, but assuming and not admitting that is the poverty number, we can take it and see what happens.

When you take the \$655, these people would have \$117 per month; that is 18 per cent; it works out to \$3.80 per day—cannot by a “doubles”, as I said—and if you add to these 67,013 old age pensioners, if they spend 18 per cent of their \$1,650 per month, it works out to \$9 a day; you still cannot buy a lunch; you cannot buy it. If you add to the NIS pensioners, 18 per cent of \$2,000, same thing. If you add 5,600 CEPEP workers, 18 per cent, you are talking about \$10 a day again; you cannot buy that box lunch.

That is one. We are not talking about you, your sister, your brother, your daughter or your son, you know—one. You cannot do it on that wage. Add the 37,337 URP workers. So, in all we are looking at about 460,000 people, who, if they spend 18 per cent on their monthly income on food, would not be able to eat, live or be nourished. They will starve and they are, in fact, starving under this Government, with the high food prices.

Mr. Ramnath: Even Members of Parliament.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Yes, some Members of Parliament are starving, thank you for that. So, that survey of living conditions really gives us a better indication of how much the poor people spend on food, and what it means is that they have less to spend on health, education and leisure. It gives us that the lowest grouping spend 40 per cent of that \$655—if that is the figure again, I am assuming, not admitting it, those are their figures—and when you really check it out, it is between 30 per cent to 40 per cent that the mass of the population will fall under, spending on food.

So, I totally disagree that people in this country spend 18 per cent on food. I totally disagree that we are so aligned to these developed countries, but the truth and the reality for the poor, the working poor, the vulnerable in this country and those at risk, is that they cannot make ends meet on the grants that they are receiving.

The real poverty line, they have given it as \$655. In 1999 a survey was done, the basket per month cost \$625. You do a second survey of living conditions in the year 2005, that is the present one released in 2007. Do you know what is the basket cost. Madam Deputy Speaker? It is \$655, and you say that is the poverty line. Again, it is total nonsense! How can \$625 be the poverty line in 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 or nine years later, whatever, in

Rising Food Prices
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, June 27, 2008

2008, you are telling me the poverty line is \$655, when everything has escalated; food, as I said, by 218 per cent; inflation from 2001 to now has gone up by 53.4 per cent; overall inflation. So, that poverty line is totally erroneous; it is false and it is just to make Government feel that it is doing something, but the poor out there are suffering in the country.

So, as I close—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Nine more minutes.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: I have nine more minutes, good. Well, I will take my nine minutes then. There are other problems that are happening. There are serious other problems in the country; I have looked at the demand side, the supply side. I am saying the interventions, the policy responses are not working because the prices are continuing to rise. Some of them may take longer, I have no doubt. The supply side will take longer, but I am of the view that there are policy interventions now, that would have immediate effect, given the drastic situation that we are in when it comes to the food prices in this country. Therefore, those are the recommendations I would like to make.

I believe the Prime Minister was very correct when he said and I quote from the *Express*, May 01, 2008:

"There is a potentially destabilizing rise in the cost of food."

And the Prime Minister is right because a hungry man is an angry man. When these food prices are continuing, as I have given all the statistics here, the empirical date to show they continue to rise, that people are not able—cannot buy—with the fixed incomes that they are on, that is the potential for destabilization and that is the Prime Minister acknowledging that that is so. Therefore, it is clear that we need to make interventions to prevent that instability and volatility from any kind of explosion; to dampen it and keep it from exploding.

On the demand side, I have said that the Government is fueling food price inflation by their fiscal irresponsibility; by the continuation of VAT on the import duties on food. On the supply side, it is clear that Government measures will not bear fruit any time soon and if we are lucky, maybe in the long term. The social interventions are insufficient in the face of the exorbitant prices and I want to quote this from *Policy Perspectives*, a publication put out by the IADB in 2006:

"Trinidad and Tobago faces many difficult short and medium-term challenges. Fortunately, oil and gas wealth provide resources and a cushion at a time when the country may address these issues. The window of opportunity for change, however, is small because at current levels of extraction and technology,

oil and gas reserves are projected to last only another 20 years. Though new discoveries and technological improvements in the industry can expand the exploitation period, reserves are finite."

This is on page 21 of that Policy Perspective document, published by the IADB in 2006. I am hearing a bleating on the other side, "What do they know?" But what do you know? You could not even keep a wall standing; the wall fell down when you built it. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*] What do you know? You all are so arrogant and you will not listen! This is the IADB. You are taking all the money in your projects and your programmes; you are spending the money and you cannot even complete the programmes. Go and look at the loan portfolio of the IADB and the projects that you have in education and health and you cannot fulfil the deadlines and carry through on the projects.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am reminding us that the oil and gas resources are finite. The IADB is putting it at 20 years. It may be 20 years, it may be more, it may be less, the point is it will finish; it will not last. Therefore, whilst we have that wealth that is coming from the oil and the gas, it must be transferred to the most vulnerable, to the poor, to those at risk in the society; they must benefit from that too. You cannot monetize the oil and gas at the rate that you are doing and those that are most in need are not benefiting and that is why I will come to the policy options.

There are policy options that anyone can take. We have seen in other countries one of the policy options that is being seriously pursued has to do with the removal of import duties on food. China has done it; I believe Costa Rica recently—I had some documents here on it—but several countries are moving into that direction to bring immediate relief to the poor and those in need. [*Desk thumping*] Therefore, I am saying when it comes to market interventions, which is one grouping of policy options, these are the following recommendations I would like to make and call for:

Taxes: suspend in the short to medium-term, all VAT and CET on food, while you wait for supply to increase. In the short- and medium-term, you absorb VAT and CET on all foods whilst you negotiate with the Caricom partners to remove them and to take your own steps to increase the supply.

In the short and medium-term subsidize rice, flour and milk. [*Interruption*] They talked about corruption. No, Madam Deputy Speaker, corruption is not a function of subsidies, corruption is a function of that Government. [*Desk thumping*] Corruption is not a function of subsidies, so I say subsidize. There are some administrative difficulties, but right now we are subsidizing. We have a gas subsidy.

Rising Food Prices
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, June 27, 2008

Why can we not have a food subsidy and select the basic ones, rice, flour, oil and milk—four basic ones? Subsidize them and if you do not want to go through the private sector, you subsidize NFM.

You subsidize NFM so that they are the distributors. The money will go through that state agency in the same way you subsidize Petrotrin and you subsidize WASA with respect to the gas subsidy and the low price on water. That is the second point. [Interruption]

3.45 p.m.

The third, with safety net interventions. I am saying that the Old Age Pension Grant, the disability, NIS, CEPEP, URP, for every person in the Government sector, including old age pensioners who are receiving less than \$3,000, that you increase every one of those grants and direct transfers to \$3,000. [Desk thumping] That is where we have to go now given the inflation.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: And finally—

Mr. Imbert: You said that in your campaign last year.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Yes, I said that in my campaign last year. [Interruption] I am saying it again and I will repeat it ad nauseam. You have a budget coming. Raise the pensions, the grant, the disability, the NIS, CEPEP workers, URP workers, every state worker under \$3,000, should be brought up to \$3,000 per month.

And finally, Mr. Speaker, those are the suggestions that I have—

Mr. Ramnath: They should cut your pay. That amount of money they are paying you, you do not produce anything.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:—and there are other problems that could be dealt with, administrative problems; the setting up of a one-stop shop. When we come to dealing with efficiencies of the port and the customs, I am told that people who are importing have to go all over the world, to all kinds of different ministries. We can bring all of those together.

Therefore, I have summarized, I have looked at the demand side, I have looked at the supply side and I have looked at the social interventions by Government and I am of the view that this Motion—I endorse the recommendations made by my colleagues who have spoken before and I fully support this Motion.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for your time. [Desk thumping]

The Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development (Hon. Rennie Dumas): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to contribute to

this discussion. My father was a carpenter and when you went to his tool box he used to say to you, make sure you know what the tool is and what the use is before you try to use it. I want to suggest—

Mr. Ramnath: What tool is that? [*Laughter*]

Hon. R. Dumas:—that the enthusiasm of the Member for Siparia does not match the choices of the tools she brought to the occasion. She based her whole argument on the concept of the inflation and inflation rate, and then she sought to support what, at best, is a very flimsy argument, very flimsy suggestion at the base of the Motion, with a total misunderstanding and a misrepresentation of the concept of inflation and how it is used, especially in the context of economic management of the country; the treatment of the national price levels and, certainly, of how they are managed in a development measure.

Let us start with the point that says: Why are we having a higher inflation rate than Barbados, for example, as used, or the OECS? I want to suggest that we started with different bases. We started in a situation in which the food basket—I do not want to accuse the Member for Siparia of picking the facts as a fowl in a yard, as one would want to say, picking insects of choice. But certainly, if she were to quote the Central Bank Governor properly and wholly, she would also remember that the same report says that these economies have price levels a third higher than Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Therefore, if the general price level in these economies start at a third higher than that of Trinidad and Tobago and you use the comparison of the inflation rates of one to the other, then you have to do some smoothening or leveling, if you wish, and that was not done, to make them constant prices or constant rates.

Hon. Member: Like you did some levelling before you come. [*Laughter*]

Hon. R. Dumas: The best school in the country is in Tobago.

The question, therefore, arises that if we cannot trust the root of her arguments, then the whole argument falls. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*] I will want to suggest that we should look at the fact that there is a difference in the economies; there was that base difference and, therefore, the changes have to be smoothened out. But other than that, the data that was used and presented in that argument also showed a skew. You gave us last year's rates when this year's rates are available. There is a 5.4 change in food prices between January and now, in Trinidad and Tobago and, therefore, that is available.

We go further to suggest that the information that we have says to us that the usage of certain products changes as a country develops, as the affluence of an

Rising Food Prices
[HON. R. DUMAS]

Friday, June 27, 2008

organization or a family changes. She was right, you see, except that she uses the argument in one place in her argument and aborts it in the other. It is correct to say that you will expect on the lower level of the income scale people would use more of their income on food and as your income changes you would use proportionally less, if you want to count it in some way, your percentages. *[Interruption]*

In that context, given that the change in the rate of development of Trinidad and Tobago as against Barbados, or against the OECS, or against any of the comparator countries you used by definition, especially since we all are aware that Trinidad and Tobago doubled the size of its economy in five years, and continues to have that economic growth at a faster rate than any of the other countries, it means that Trinidad and Tobago will move along the basket of goods, as you say; the sophistication of the international basket of goods available, Trinidad and Tobago will move in a different pace to that than any of those and therefore the comparison falls. I go so far as to suggest—

Mr. Ramnath: We all would be eating dasheen.

Hon. R. Dumas: I could take that—*[Inaudible]*

[Mr. Ramnath leaves Chamber]

Hon. Member: Please stay. *[Laughter]* He cannot take the truth. *[Crosstalk]*

Hon. R. Dumas: I must say, Mr. Speaker, the 4 per cent for Barbados then, means something totally different. I am saying there is enough anecdotal evidence to say that the Bajans are leaving Barbados—

Mr. Imbert: To shop here.

Hon. R. Dumas:—and come to shop in Trinidad. *[Desk thumping]* It is a reality, and they are buying groceries! *[Desk thumping]* And we could do some simple connection, you know.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Because the dollar is stronger than ours. *[Crosstalk]*

Hon. R. Dumas: Mr. Speaker, you see, I do not want to compare—*[Interruption]* The only sharp thing the doctor from Caroni East knows is a scalpel. He does not know about what exactly is a price. He said the dollar is stronger than ours. What does that mean? It has no meaning, because in the real sense, in the lower priced goods, it is really cultural pricing and cultural pricing treats with a “coke is coke, a dollar is a dollar”. A “coke” will be \$3 in Trinidad and it will be Bajan \$3, or US \$3, because in every culture a “coke is a coke and a dollar is a dollar”, so you will pay three Swiss Francs for a “coke”, but that is \$3 x

\$6.50. The same thing goes on whether you are talking about a “coke” in Trinidad or a “coke” in Barbados.

Hon. Member: Say Coca Cola.

Hon. R. Dumas: Well, if you want to be funny, we could go ahead with that.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Siparia then seeks to compare us with Guyana [*Interruption*] in terms of food production and so on. I am sure that any student of development in the Caribbean certainly understands that Guyana, in terms of the rate of its development of its agricultural production, is in a different position to Trinidad and Tobago or any other Caribbean country.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: They are all different, our food price is higher.

Hon. R. Dumas: [*Laughs*] Mr. Speaker, I cannot respond to that because I think it has been demonstrated by the same evidence that was brought to the table from the same source, that the price level in Trinidad and Tobago is lower than any other price level in the Caribbean. That is the reality! [*Desk thumping*]

When you are speaking about, what, therefore we compare, I am suggesting that the basic level that we compare has to be the price level for the same basket of food across the Caribbean. There is a question also, that treats to the concept of the poverty line. I was quite happy with the contribution of the Member for Siparia, because I know that anything that was said was a mistake and anything else that was said was not intended to hurt. But, certainly, to be accused of manipulating of the concept of poverty line, is carrying it a little far. I want to suggest that there is an international measure you treat with when you are treating with the poverty line and you can discuss that in three or four different ways. But certainly, the number of calories that make up your food requirement is a constant. If you build a basket around that and suggest to us that that determines the poverty line, then that is constant, we can measure that.

I am saying to you that if the basket of goods that make up that caloric measure comes to \$658 then it is \$658. Why should any public servant or any researcher worth his salt want to get into manipulating that? I want to suggest to you that that is the absolute poverty line in Trinidad and Tobago and the fact is that the population does not have a very large section of it under the poverty line. The measurement says, 17 per cent down from 30 per cent. Let us accept that. Why do we want to go elsewhere? In that context then, it means that some progress is being made to eliminate or reduce poverty in Trinidad and Tobago. That is the reality. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: How do you define your poverty line?

Hon. R. Dumas: I would not waste time, “Tim”. [*Laughter*] I would not waste time, “Tim”. [*Interruption*] I just did, it is just that you do not understand it. I just said to you that the absolute poverty line is defined by the caloric requirements of an individual as set by the people. That is what I just said. If you understand that, understand that. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order! Order!

Hon. R. Dumas: Mr. Speaker, you know, what really got me was the argument that the question of food prices and that somehow this Government is performing a Houdini trick by blaming rising food prices on the world, you know, and we pluck that somewhere out of the air and it has no relevance to anything.

The World Bank in its publication treating with it, invited people to discuss this matter, recently; somewhere around June 03rd, June 04th or June 05th. It suggested that it is an emerging consensus that food prices have increased because of fundamental changes in global supply and demand. That did not come from the PNM, that did not come from this Government, this is the World Bank speaking to a global phenomena. That is irrefutable!

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: But I agree.

4.00 p.m.

Hon. R. Dumas: But she is saying to us that we are blaming; blaming. Mr. Speaker, I saw the start and then I saw the end and I am really trying to reconcile both, and I am just wondering, the image that comes to my mind is a snake swallowing its tail.

Mr. Speaker, we are accused of being profligate; excessive Government spending and all the good things that come with the management of an economy and then at the end—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. R. Dumas: Okay, I could learn. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, we are accused of excessive spending, ignoring the Central Bank Governor, just throwing money into the economy, and then at the end of the presentation, we are then informed that the extent to which we are throwing money into the economy, is totally insufficient and, therefore, we should throw more by going to \$3,000 for every single government employee at the lower end. That was what we were told. And then we were told—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. R. Dumas: Mr. Speaker, I happened to have been responsible for both URP and CEPEP—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Oh?

Hon. R. Dumas: Yes, I have been, at different times; reforestation and all of that, and I have had to come here and suffer the insults, the slamming, right here, in which the Members opposite were so clear that CEPEP should not exist; that URP should be wiped off the table; that reforestation should not happen; and consistently suggested that these people were unemployable, non-producers and should not be supported by any government expenditure. Today, we have a complete reversal.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what I consider the hardest statement to take? Because each of us in here knows different and better. The argument that the last supplementary appropriation that we did, was throwing money into the economy, when everyone sitting here knows that at least half of that money was going into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. Therefore, it comes to question whether we are being honest about anything; whether our analysis is based on anything except the creation of hysteria and the suggestion that we do anything to ensure that the population neither trusts this House or anybody in it, or anybody who forms the Government. If we make those kinds of moves when we are in opposition, I want to guarantee you that when people know that they cannot trust you, you end up—God help us on this side.

Mr. Speaker, the Motion that we are here to debate makes an argument that fails in the face of this administration or any administration coming out of the People's National Movement. Because the development of Trinidad and Tobago for the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, has been the central purpose and reason for the existence of the People's National Movement as a party, and the central commandment of each PNM government, the party has spawned. [*Desk thumping*]

Vision 2020 and the programme it carries is the latest statement of that noble purpose. More than that, it is a purpose for which the people have signed on and, therefore, when we treat with the measures that have been discussed, we are treating with the national and household food security of Trinidad and Tobago and that has never been compromised by the People's National Movement or any of its governments. [*Desk thumping*] It has always been an objective to ensure an adequate and affordable food supply for all the citizens of the country. If we want

Rising Food Prices
[HON. R. DUMAS]

Friday, June 27, 2008

the evidence, I would refer Members opposite to the various five-year development programmes of the PNM between 1956 and 1975—they are an education in their own right—and certainly, the budget presentations and the various papers on agriculture that the Government spawned between '91 and '95. Through these programmes, that is how we get the education. The same 1956 programme taught most of us to read.

What is critical, Mr. Speaker, is that through these periods, the PNM established a viable platform for agricultural development and food security in this country, despite some of the suggestions that I heard a while ago. The platform was built to develop and supply, not only the commodity market that we inherited in the colonial times, but also to develop a programme of activities that could deliver food to this country. In other words, we are treating with the significant area of food sovereignty that faced us. In fact, today, Trinidad and Tobago, despite what we say, provides just about 30 per cent of the food consumed in Trinidad and Tobago, and that 30 per cent compares favourably with most countries in the world, because the way food security is assured in these times, most of it is through trade.

The growth and development and provision of that 30 per cent is a significant marker that we should not ignore and, therefore, when I hear that the PNM—*[Interruption]* Sure.

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, the Minister stated that Trinidad and Tobago produces 30 per cent of the food that it consumes and that compares favourable to other countries. Would the Minister be in a position to tell us a comparative data from any other country at this time, or would you have that data elsewhere?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Or he substantiates his data.

Hon. R. Dumas: What do you want me to do, send you to it?

Dr. Moonilal: If you do not have it on you—

Hon. R. Dumas: Do you want me to do your work for you—and you would come back. Mr. Speaker, he wants to doubt. Let me tell him how this has developed, because even as we speak, we had just treated with an agreement with the Europeans and, certainly, you would know that we provide agricultural commodities, as well as foodstuff to the Europeans.

Dr. Gopeesingh: What do you give them?

Hon. R. Dumas: You go and find out. Mr. Speaker—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. R. Dumas: You are saying that alone? [*Interruption*]—I think it is timely that I remind Members opposite that whether you are saying dairy farms, beef farms, food crop farms, pig farms, whether you are talking Carlsen Field, Wallerfield, Moruga Food Crop farms, Mason Hall and Goldsborough in Tobago, these are all products of PNM policy. We want to suggest that the question of subsidies, the question of the Agricultural Development Bank to finance agricultural activities, all have their root in the policy of treating with the food security of the nation.

Mr. Speaker, when I heard the Member for Siparia suggesting that things are so bad and negative, I was reminded that it was really good fortune for this country that the PNM came back into office in 2002. [*Desk thumping*] I want to remind them—and I really want to remind them—that they were about to close down the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB). [*Interruption*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. R. Dumas: Yes. I am suggesting to you that you should go and read your policy from that period. Go back to 2002. You were there, but you forgot that you were going to close down CARDI; that you were agreeing with UWI that they transfer the food crop situation to Jamaica. Those were things that you had already signed on to.

Dr. Gopeesingh: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. R. Dumas: I said ADB and I said CARDI. [*Crosstalk and Interruption*]

Mr. Abdul-Hamid: You remember that; you remember now?

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. R. Dumas: Mr. Speaker, they did not understand the usefulness of agriculture or agricultural research. Despite the posture they take, they never gave agriculture, food security and food sovereignty any study, and therefore, it is quite the contrary on this side. I just want to suggest to the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla—and I know he knows better because when it is time to seek office, he knows exactly where the rice is growing; he knows exactly where the melon is growing; he knows exactly which fields the vegetables are; he knows exactly the agricultural plots that he goes to, to ensure that he gets his vote, but he never admits that all those things that are happening are the result of conscious agricultural development policy by the People's National Movement; all of them. [*Desk thumping*]

Rising Food Prices
[HON. R. DUMAS]

Friday, June 27, 2008

Mr. Speaker, many of the current policy measures in terms of agriculture, trade,—I see “Gypsy” laughing—commerce, social protection and development, education and taxation—I heard discussion about taxation—are all designed for economic development and growth, but consistently, and consistent with those aims, are the impact we expect in terms of enhancing food security, as well as income security of the workers in this country, because the two things are inextricably linked.

The food of this country, the food security of the home, the food security of the community, comes from the income security of the families in this country. Therefore, when the workers receive appropriate salaries and the workers receive appropriate pay standards, that is part of it, and fundamental to all that we do is the concept of the income of the family. I want to suggest that it is from the conscious choice of the Government policy options we have, contrary to the views expressed by the Member for Siparia, that we have a situation in this country in which GDP growth has doubled and, in fact, has grown at 9.7 per year between 2002 and 2006 and people tried to sneeze at that and say it is an accident. It reminded me of an argument that says: “It is yours as blame, but it is not yours as credit when it happens.” So if prices for food are rising in the world, it is your blame, but if prices are rising for oil and the benefits to the country are increasing, you have nothing to do with it, it is an accident that is happening. You have to be serious.

Mr. Speaker, the question arises of the capacity of households to secure the food and I just want to relate that to one statistic.

4.15 p.m.

The fact is that we have had an increase in the per capita income of this country from US \$7,100 in 2002 to \$14,790 in 2006; doubled. In that context, the distributive systems, as set up by this Government, starting with appropriate salary changes in the various industries in the country, facilitates the industrial relations environment that allows workers to ensure that they could claim, argue for and bargain for appropriate wages, and are a fundamental part of the industrial relations climate and our social conditions in this country.

When you add to that the fact that our pension arrangements have changed drastically since this Government came into being, and has ensured that old age pensioners, as well as other socially disadvantaged persons, have received substantial benefits, changing from where they were, I want to suggest that this Government has done its part in terms of income security to ensure that any ill effect of food prices rising have been mitigated.

But I hear the noises, and I say that maybe it is all stemming from a fundamental misunderstanding; but then I am not so sure. When the Member for Siparia started her contribution, she started in a place that we are all familiar with: Nothing is good in this country except we could fix the crime. Mr. Speaker, sometimes you have to ask yourself whether it is ignorance, because we are ill-informed, because we have bad intent or because we are just hopelessly inadequate in terms of policy analysis or policy development.

I am sure that this Opposition would have caucused this Motion and that all the colleagues of the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla would have sat with him and come up with it. They all agreed that the Motion had worth; that it allowed him to stand in this House and ensure that he neither embarrassed himself, the persons who elected him, nor the Opposition. When you come to this House and suggest that you do not understand what the source of the changes in prices is, that you do not understand the policy measures, that you do not understand what mitigation it brings to the people, that you do not understand where it carries us in our development paradigm, I cannot believe that. Therefore, I have to suggest mal-intent. There must be some intent that suggests it is to give trouble.

In discussing the Motion, the mover ignored clearly the whole question of the food crisis. Do you know what is funny and curious about that? We now have 151 countries meeting to discuss this food crisis, but they found a way of suggesting that this food crisis was unique to Trinidad and Tobago, that it was all the fault of the PNM Government and, certainly, the lack of action which had caused it.

Mr. Speaker, just in case we forgot, the factors contributing to the crisis include: Rising fuel costs; erratic weather patterns; the conversion of land to grow crops for biofuels; rising incomes in poor countries; increasing food demand; diminishing global reserves, and restrictions of food exports by some exporting countries. I want to argue that this Government has been doing an excellent job in mitigating this impact of the change in the international price level of food. [*Desk thumping*] I want to suggest further that this country, by the management of this Government, has been spared some of the extreme situations existing and being experienced in some other countries. [*Desk thumping*]

We hear about riots; we hear about food riots; we hear about extreme workers' behaviour in certain countries; you hear about malnutrition; you hear about starvation. I am suggesting that we have been spared that parallel, not because our people are mild and well-behaved and all of that, but because the extreme conditions which drive persons to those kinds of situations and responses have not existed in Trinidad and Tobago. That is the result of good management. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

Rising Food Prices
[HON. R. DUMAS]

Friday, June 27, 2008

This is the comparison; they say things and walk away. Saudi Arabia has oil; Venezuela has oil; Trinidad and Tobago is lucky, we have oil and we have Manning. [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*]

Hon. Members: Sing for your supper!

Mr. S. Panday: "You like a zandolie looking for seat!" [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. R. Dumas: The fortunate thing on this side is that we know that it is the combination of the support we all get which creates the strength and power and authority Mr. Manning exercises. [*Desk thumping*] Unfortunately, on that side, if you open your mouth about anything, Mr. Panday gets rid of you without a wink. That is the reality.

Hon. Members: "Rowley say so!" [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: "Yuh fire Valley and yuh fire Rowley!"

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. R. Dumas: Mr. Speaker, this is *The Economist* speaking, not Rennie Dumas, not the PNM. *The Economist* said that if you measure the numbers correctly, two-thirds of the world's population would properly suffer double-digit rates of inflation this summer. The reality is that occurs in some countries in which there is no growth and there are no mitigating measures for distribution of income or for ensuring food security of the household, the communities or significant parts of the country.

I want to suggest that what we have had from the other side is a hodgepodge of misinformation and propaganda material, as well as a display of ignorance of the relationship between production, mitigating activity by the Government, as well as management of the total economy in which food is but a part.

I heard, coming from that side, some statements; I just want to give you a demonstration of what is ignorance. The quotations are there; the *Hansard* is there, you could pull it up. "Agriculture has nothing to do with oil and gas"; but the whole world is saying to you that biofuel production is inextricably linked with whole energy crisis and the price of oil. "Food and agriculture has nothing to do with oil and gas"; it is like saying food and agriculture are not related or that the production of one does not impact on the other. "Agriculture in this country has nothing to do with town or the East-West Corridor, with lunches and dinners in expensive hotels or with the school feeding programme." Then why are we engaged in agriculture if it does nothing like that?

We are told that advertising the prices only benefits the newspaper; in other words, information is not used by our people to make economic choices. "The provision of cash to the most vulnerable groups via the Smart Card was a con man initiative." Those are the words of the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla; then he goes on to beg, "But I hope Government is not removing the \$2 billion subsidy on gas." I want to assure him that the PNM knows its responsibility; with this Government you do not have to threaten or beg us for that.

Certainly, if you are going to comment on the policy, I hope that the comment on the oil subsidy must have a reflection in terms of food production and food security policy as a whole. He said that we were doing nothing for the people, but he found time to scoff at the fact that the agricultural incentive package, the system of making lands available, was working, et cetera. Then the ultimate political genuflection came when he said that all the proposals they made as the UNC-A were rejected by the Government and the people of this country. I think he does not understand that this is a source of discomfort to him, but it certainly is a cause of pleasure for the rest of the population. What he has demonstrated, as the purveyor of agricultural policy on behalf of the UNC-A, certainly would find acceptance by no sane population.

Mr. Speaker, the people also remember what happened under the UNC-A. I end by making the point that with matters like these: the food crisis, the changing prices of food, the need for agricultural security, et cetera, is a time for conversation within the population; it is a time for consultation; it is a time for building consensus, and a time for concerted action. Certainly the Motion could have demonstrated that, if that was the intent of the Opposition. But, of course, the purpose of the Motion deviates very far from that, and it continued today.

I want to suggest that if some time is spent in conversation, if there are concerns, consultation, consensus, proposals, I am sure if they are useful, they could be used. Of course, some of them would never be accommodated.

Before I finish, I would like to correct an argument that was made. I would like to put into the record the argument which said that our most vulnerable people were having significant challenges and the Government was not responding. When we looked at the old age pension, it grew at an average rate of 15.6 per cent between 2002 and 2007, for the same period that the price index grew at all at the average geometric rate of 6 per cent. In other words, two and a half times the rate of the growth of the consumer index was the rate of growth of the pensions that were paid to our most vulnerable people. [*Desk thumping*]

Rising Food Prices
[HON. R. DUMAS]

Friday, June 27, 2008

Mr. Speaker, I am sure that the last piece of mischief should also be answered. Rice, flour, milk, unprocessed foods, et cetera, were zero-rated by the PNM in 1992. [*Crosstalk*] [*Crosstalk*] Oil, sausages, ghee, fruit juices, et cetera, were zero-rated in VAT in 2005. [*Crosstalk*] [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Members: Shame!

Hon. R. Dumas: Mr. Speaker, misinformation continues—

4.30 p.m.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr Sepaker, in accordance with Standing Order 90 (1) and Standing Order 10(2), I beg to move that the House continues sitting to the conclusion of the matter on the adjournment.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that his House do now adjourn to Monday June 30, 2008 at 1.30 p.m. on which day we would do the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago (Amdt.) Bill.

Mr. Speaker: Before I put the Motion on the Adjournment, it has been moved that the House continue to sit notwithstanding the appointed time for tea until the conclusion of the Motion on the Adjournment.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: I call on the hon. Member for Caroni East.

Guanapo Dump Site (Government's Failure to Respond)

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (Caroni East): Mr. Speaker, I do not want to detain this house for long. It is important for some discussion and answers to the plight of the citizens of Arima and the environs on the issue of one of the solid waste disposal sites in Arima. They have asked me to discuss this in Parliament as a result of the disastrous medical effects that this site is having on the population particularly in Arima and the surrounding areas and the eastern part of the East-West Corridor.

The Motion is the failure of the Government to respond appropriately and urgently to respond to the serious health and environmental hazards resulting from the disastrous chemical and toxic effects, both air and water borne, from the industrial waste and

the polluted Guanapo dump in Arima which is affecting the citizens of Arima and the East–West Corridor. You will remember that earlier on I sought to bring this as a matter of urgent public importance and you indicated that it would qualify under Standing Order 11 for some discussion.

The citizens of Arima and the environs have taken some photographs of what is happening. [*Member shows photographs*] They are not enlarged. I will indicate that what we see is not enlarged. It is fumes emanating from the dump site. It is not as a result of a fire but a chemical reaction occurring at the site. A chemical reaction is occurring and it is causing something looking like smoke from the site. It is noxious fumes being emanated from the site as a result of a chemical reaction from materials on the site. It is very telling. This is a picture that was given. As the wind is blowing from east to west in Arima, the citizens are inhaling these noxious fumes from this chemical reaction. There are many homes that are close to this site which is like a mountain. These are the homes that are close by; if you can look at the chemical reaction emanating close to these homes.

These citizens of Arima are extremely concerned like the citizens in Demerara. Some of you will remember the Demerara site where there was lead poisoning and a number of children suffered the teratogenic effects of the lead. Pregnant mothers subsequently had serious abnormalities as a result of the presence of these chemicals in the waste system in Demerara. It is a situation I proffer that has to be looked at critically at this time.

On one hand, the air is being polluted as a result of the chemical reaction and the noxious agents that are emanating from the site and moving westward are causing serious problems of asthma, skin problems and dermatological reactions. A number of people have gone to hospitals. For pregnant mothers this can have serious teratogenic effects on their unborn babies. That has to be looked at critically.

The second issue is that this dump site sits close to a water bed and the chemicals in the dump site are seeping into the water system, the Blanchisseuse River moving into the Pinto River and into the Piarco reservoir. This is why I thought it urgent. It does not matter what filtration process takes place at a reservoir site, heavy chemicals are very difficult to remove by filtration. We know that lead and mercury are difficult to remove. The fluorescent bulbs are loaded with mercury. We have no sort of disposal system for fluorescent bulbs in Trinidad and Tobago. Lead and mercury are on the site. No sort of filtration process will eliminate those heavy metals from the water system. We might be taking water from the Piarco reservoir which supplies the East-West Corridor into our water system and we might be causing untold damage to our citizens as a result.

Guanapo Dump Site
[DR. GOPEESINGH]

Friday, June 27, 2008

This is one of the reasons I have been asked in my medical capacity to inform the country of this problem at the moment. They are extremely concerned. There are people who signed and indicated that they want to know what the Government is going to do about it. It is a similar situation at the Demerara site as I mentioned earlier.

In the Beetham site there is another problem. The country does not know what the Solid Waste Management Company is doing about the waste on these sites in Beetham, Guanapo, Demerara and South Trinidad. The people want to know what SWMCOL is doing about it, their policy and the Government's plan in terms of a policy on the removal.

Something was supposed to be done by SWMCOL as a result of the pollution in the Beetham into the water system in the Gulf of Paria. I am not straying; I am just mentioning it. What is happening with the water moving into the Piarco reservoir is of major concern to the population.

In 2001, the United National Congress government had basically a solid waste management policy that was in place at the time waiting to go for tender and procurement for the management of all these waste areas. This Government has lagged behind in not being able to deal with it effectively. Last week I had a little by the way chat with the Member of Parliament for Arima, Miss Penelope Beckles, distinguished attorney. It was indicated in a cursory discussion that came up for mention about a year ago and I have not been told whether anything has been done about it and what the Government intends to do about it. I speak on behalf of the citizens in Arima and the environs, particularly those on the eastern side of the East-West Corridor to understand and determine what the Government's action would be, in terms of alleviating their suffering from the noxious fumes and their fear about the pollution in the water system.

I rest my statement on this and we wait on a response from the Government on this issue.

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment (Sen. The Hon. Tina Gronlund-Nunez): Mr. Speaker, as I stand here this afternoon, I must say that I am most pleased to address this honourable House for the first time [*Desk thumping*] especially with regard to this Motion put forth by the Member for Caroni East.

The Guanapo site was established by the Arima Borough Corporation as a dumping ground for waste in 1964. The Solid Waste Management Company took over the operations of this site in 1983 as mandated by the government with a

provision of a subvention. Since that time, SWMCOL converted the site to a controlled sanitary landfill where general household and non-toxic industrial waste are accepted daily. The operation of the site changed considerably after SWMCOL assumed management and introduced better equipment, frequent coverage of waste, a landfill structure and security.

It must be noted that SWMCOL also imposed restrictions on the type of waste accepted at the site inclusive of bulky, hazardous and non-toxic waste. Guanapo like the other landfills operated by SWMCOL will not accept even e-waste. The Guanapo site is not utilized for the disposal of any type of special waste, either toxic or non-toxic.

In addition, it should be brought to the attention of the hon. Member for Caroni East that some of the problems with the management of landfills in Trinidad by SWMCOL developed under the administration of his very own, the United National Congress, when a cap was put at the amount of \$12 million annually as its subvention and that was utilized to manage all three sites, Beetham, Forres Park and Guanapo. This cap seriously affected the operations such that it covered only the cost of minimum equipment requirements and not the full operations and maintenance cost required to make these sites functional.

The increase in funding in recent years was done under this very Government, the People's National Movement and this has permitted better management of the sites by SWMCOL. I would like to appraise the House and the hon. Member for Caroni East of the existing consultancy which is evaluating the ground—*[Interruption]* Listen, Sir. Please. There is an existing consultancy which is evaluating the ground and surface water impact of both the Beetham and Guanapo landfill sites.

4.45 p.m.

The data gathered on the Guanapo Landfill with respect to water assessment indicates that both surface and ground are in keeping with the standards established in the Water Pollution Rules, 2001 and as amended in 2006. Mr. Speaker, since this specific landfill site has been managed by the Solid Waste Management Company Limited (SWMCOL) under this administration, there have been no reports from surrounding communities of illnesses directly related to its operation. The incidents in the past, where complaints were related to smoke from fires on the site, have been reduced to a minimum. The smoke that had emanated from the site in the past had never caused any of the surrounding communities to be evacuated as a result of any toxic fumes.

I wish to thank the House for the opportunity to address this Motion.

Mr. Speaker: Before I put the motion on the adjournment, let me clarify that the hon. Member for Tobago East was a bit confused. I do not think that he has concluded his contribution. He has two more minutes of original time and if he seeks an extension, we will deal with that. [*Interruption*] I think he was a little confused. [*Interruption*] I am just clarifying the situation.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 4.47 p.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The following question was asked by Mr. Subhas Panday (Princes Town North):

Housing Development Corporation (Detailed Listing of Applicants)

- 93.** Could the hon. Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment give a detailed list, including names, addresses, date of the application, type of unit and/or plot of all the persons (excluding the tenants and/or occupiers) who have applied to the Housing Development Corporation (HDC) and the National Housing Authority (NHA) for housing units or building plots in Fairfield Estate, Princes Town?

The following reply was circulated to Members of the House:

Provision of a list of names and addresses, date of application, type of unit and/or plot, of all persons (excluding tenants and/or occupiers) who have applied to the Housing Development Corporation (HDC) and the National Housing Authority (NHA) for housing in the Fairfield Estate, Princes Town area would undermine the necessary private and confidential relationship between the HDC and its clients. This is not in keeping with proper business practices which the Corporation seeks to uphold. Accordingly, the Minister seeks the understanding of the House of Representatives in this matter.

The following question was asked by Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar (Siparia):

Local School Boards (Details of Constitution)

- 125.** Could the hon. Minister of Education:
- (a) the government schools in which the local school board has been constituted and the date each board was constituted;

- (b) whether any of the boards listed in (a) were constituted by Order in accordance with section 23(1) of the Education Act, and the date(s) of the respective Order(s); and
- (c) the government schools in which no school board has been appointed and the reason(s) for failure to constitute local school boards for each of these schools?

Pursuant to her reply to question 125 earlier in the proceedings, Minister of Education (Hon Esther Le Gendre) caused to be circulated to Members of the House the following:

Trinidad

Phase 1 (Pilot) Local School Boards

Schools	Date of First Inauguration
1. Blanchisseusse High School Local School Board	October 2, 2002
2. Cedros Composite School Local School Board	April 10, 2003
3. Diego Martin Junior Secondary School Local School Board	April 3, 2003
4. Mt. Hope Junior Secondary School Local School Board	October 4, 2002
5. Pleasantville Senior Comprehensive School Local School Board	October 1, 2002
6. Queen's Royal College Local School Board	May 10, 2002
7. San Fernando Government Secondary School Local School Board	October 1, 2002
8. Success/Laventille Composite School Local School Board	September 20, 2002
9. Tunapuna Government Secondary School Local School Board	October 1, 2002
10. Waterloo High School Local School Board	April 8, 2003

Phase 2 Local School Boards

	Schools	Date of First Inauguration
1.	Cunupia High School Local School Board	October 8, 2004
2.	Carapichaima Junior Secondary School Local School Board	October 8, 2004
3.	Chaguanas Junior Secondary School Local School Board	October 8, 2004
4.	Preysal High School Local School Board	October 8, 2004
5.	Carapichaima Senior Comprehensive School Local School Board	October 8, 2004
6.	Aranjuez Junior Secondary School Local School Board	October 8, 2004
7.	Couva Junior Secondary School Local School Board	October 8, 2004
8.	Five Rivers Junior Secondary School Local School Board	October 8, 2004
9.	Bon Air High School Local School Board	October 8, 2004
10.	Barataria Junior Secondary School Local School Board	October 8, 2004
11.	St. Augustine Senior Comprehensive School Local School Board	October 8, 2004
12.	Tranquility Government Secondary School Local School Board	October 8, 2004
13.	St. Francois Girls' College Local School Board	October 8, 2004
14.	Sangre Grande Junior Secondary School Local School Board	October 8, 2004

Schools	Date of First Inauguration
15. Guaico Government Secondary School Local School Board	October 8, 2004
16. Princes Town Senior Secondary School Local School Board	October 8, 2004
17. Rio Claro College Local School Board	October 8, 2004
18. Rio Claro High School Local School Board	October 8, 2004
19. Princes Town Junior Secondary School Local School Board	October 8, 2004
20. Pt. Fortin Senior Secondary School Local School Board	October 8, 2004
21. Pt. Fortin Junior Secondary School Local School Board	October 8, 2004
22. Palo Seco Government Secondary School Local School Board	October 8, 2004
23. Vessigny Secondary School Local School Board	October 8, 2004
24. San Fernando East Junior Secondary School Local School Board	October 8, 2004
25. Marabella Senior Comprehensive School Local School Board	October 8, 2004
26. Barataria Senior Comprehensive School Local School Board	October 8, 2004
Phase 3 Local School Boards	
1. Belmont Junior Secondary School Local School Board	June 24, 2005
2. Chaguanas Senior Comprehensive School Local School Board	June 24, 2005
3. San Juan Senior Secondary School Local School Board	June 24, 2005

Schools	Date of First Inauguration
4. Couva Government Secondary School Local School Board	June 24, 2005
5. Malick Senior Secondary School Local School Board	June 24, 2005
6. Curepe Junior Secondary School Local School Board	June 24, 2005
7. South East Port-of-Spain Secondary School Local School Board	June 24, 2005
8. Mucurapo Senior Comprehensive School Local School Board	June 24, 2005
9. Mucurapo Junior Secondary School Local School Board	June 24, 2005
10. Diego Martin Government Secondary School Local School Board	June 24, 2005
11. Matura High School Local School Board	June 24, 2005
12. Coryal High School Local School Board	June 24, 2005
13. North Eastern College Local School Board	June 24, 2005
14. Arima Senior Secondary School Local School Board	June 24, 2005
15. Valencia High School Local School Board	June 24, 2005
16. Malabar Composite School Local School Board	June 24, 2005
17. Mayaro Composite School Local School Board	June 24, 2005
18. Barrackpore Secondary School Local School Board	June 24, 2005

Schools	Date of First Inauguration
19. Tableland High School Local School Board	June 24, 2005
20. Fyzabad Composite School Local School Board	June 24, 2005
21. Siparia Senior Secondary School Local School Board	June 24, 2005
22. Marabella Junior Secondary School Local School Board	June 24, 2005
23. La Romain High School Local School Board	June 24, 2005
24. Gasparillo Composite School Local School Board	June 24, 2005
25. San Fernando Secondary Comprehensive School Local School Board	June 24, 2005
Phase 4 Local School Boards	
1. St. George's College Local School Board	September 16, 2005
2. El Dorado Secondary Comprehensive School Local School Board	September 16, 2005
3. El Dorado Secondary School Local School Board	September 16, 2005
4. San Juan Government Secondary School Local School Board	September 16, 2005
5. Russell Latapy Secondary School Local School Board	September 16, 2005
6. Woodbrook Government Secondary School Local School Board	September 16, 2005
7. St. James Government Secondary School Local School Board	September 16, 2005

Schools	Date of First Inauguration
8. Morvant/Laventille Secondary School Local School Board	September 16, 2005
9. Manzanilla High School Local School Board	September 16, 2005
10. Toco Composite School Local School Board	September 16, 2005
11. Arima Government Secondary School Local School Board	September 16, 2005
12. Brazil High School Local School Board	September 16, 2005
13. Williamsville Junior Secondary School Local School Board	September 16, 2005
14. Tabaquite Composite School Local School Board	September 16, 2005
15. Moruga Composite School Local School Board	September 16, 2005
16. Barrackpore Secondary Comprehensive School Local School Board	September 16, 2005
17. Guayaguayare High School Local School Board	September 16, 2005
18. Siparia Junior Secondary School Local School Board	September 16, 2005
19. Penal Junior Secondary School Local School Board	September 16, 2005
20. Union Claxton Bay Senior Comprehensive School Local School Board	September 16, 2005
21. Ste. Madeleine Secondary School Local School Board	September 16, 2005
22. Debe High School Local School Board	September 16, 2005

Schools	Date of First Inauguration
23. Corinth Sixth Form College Local School Board	May 8, 2006
24. Sixth Form Government Secondary School (Polytechnic) Local School Board	May 8, 2006

Tobago

1. Signal Hill Senior Comprehensive School Local School Board	November 18, 2004
2. Scarborough Secondary School Local School Board	November 18, 2004
3. Goodwood High School Local School Board	June 20, 2006
4. Speyside High School Local School Board	June 20, 2006
5. Mason Hall Government Secondary School Local School Board	June 20, 2006
6. Roxborough Composite School Local School Board	June 20, 2006

**Local School Boards
(Annual Reports Submitted)**

- 126.** Could the hon. Minister of Education state:
- (a) the local school boards which have submitted annual reports in accordance with section 23(1) of the Education Act, and the date(s) of each report;
 - (b) what were the major areas of concern raised in the annual reports submitted and the steps taken by the Ministry to address these concerns;
 - (c) the local school boards which have not submitted the requisite annual reports and indicate what steps have been taken to have these boards act in accordance with the law; and
 - (d) the amounts paid to each local school board to date?

Pursuant to her reply to question 126 earlier in the proceedings, Minister of Education (Hon. Esther Le Gendre) caused to be circulated to members of the House the following:

Phase 1 (Pilot) Local School Boards

Schools	Annual Reports Submitted
1. Blanchisseuse High School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Close out Report for October 2002 to October 2004 – October 10, 2004 ○ Annual Report for December 2004 to October 2005 – 8 November 2005 ○ Close Out Report for 2004 – 2006 – November 8, 2006 ○ Annual Report for November 2005 – October 2006 – November 8, 2006
2. Cedros Composite School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report - August 2005 ○ Annual Reports from June to September 2004 – September 2004
3. Diego Martin Junior Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for 2004-2005 – July 22, 2005 ○ Financial Report for September to December 2005 – 23 December 2005 ○ Financial report for January to December – January 8, 2007 ○ Status Report for September 2007 to April 2008 – April 10, 2008
4. Mt. Hope Junior Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report - August 30, 2005 ○ Status Report –April 26, 2007 ○ Status Report - April 17, 2008

Schools	Annual Reports Submitted
5. Pleasantville Senior Comprehensive School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Close Out Report for 2004-2006 – 30 November 2006 ○ Status Report – March 2006 ○ Annual Report for February – December 2006 – December 2006
6. Queen’s Royal College Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for September 2005 to July 2006
7. San Fernando Government Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Close Out Report 2002-2004 – November 2004 ○ Close Out Report 2004-2006 – November 2006 ○ Annual Report October 2004 – September 2005 – October 25, 2005 ○ Status Report – September 8, 2007
8. Success/Laventille Composite School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report - September 2005 ○ Status Report – May 2006 ○ Annual Report – September 2007
9. Tunapuna Government Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for May to October 2005 – 26 October 2005
10. Waterloo High School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report 2003 - 2004 – April 23, 2004 ○ Close Out Report for April 2003 to April 2005 – February 2005
Phase 2 Local School Boards	
1. Cunupia High School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Close Out Report 2004-2006 – September 2006 ○ Annual Report for September 2005 – August 2006 – September 2006

Schools	Annual Reports Submitted
2. Carapichaima Junior Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report as at October 2005 – 31st October 2005 ○ Annual Report as at June 2006 – June 2006 ○ Close Out Report for 2004-2006 – August 30, 2006
3. Chaguanas Junior Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for 2005 – September 2005 ○ Annual Report for 2005-2006 – September 1, 2006 ○ Close Out Report for October 2004 – September 2006 – July 11, 2006
4. Preysal High School Local School Board	--
5. Carapichaima Senior Comprehensive School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for December 2004 – August 2005 – August 31, 2005
6. Aranjuez Junior Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Close Out Report October 2004 to July 2006 – August 3, 2006 ○ Annual Report for October 2005 to June 2006 – August 3, 2006
7. Couva (Junior) Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report as at October 2005 – November 2005 ○ Annual Report as at April 5, 2006
8. Five Rivers Junior Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for December 2004 – July 2005 – July 2005 ○ Close Out Report 2004-2006 – December 2006

Schools	Annual Reports Submitted
9. Bon Air High School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for December 2004 to July 2005 ○ Annual Report for December 2005 to July 2006 ○ Close Out Report 2004 – 2006 – September 27, 2006
10. Barataria (Junior) Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Close Out Report for 2004 – 2006 – September 2006 ○ Annual Report for April 2005 to August 2006 – August 25, 2006 ○ Status Report – June 2007
11. St. Augustine Senior Comprehensive School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for period Oct. 2004 – August 2005 ○ Annual Report as at April 30, 2007
12. Tranquility Government Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for 2004 – 2005 – September 15, 2005 ○ Close Out Report for 2004-2006 – August 1, 2006
13. St. Francois Girls' College Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for August to October 2005 – 23 February 2006 ○ Annual Report as at December 2006 – 26 February 2007 ○ Status Report for period December 2005 to July 2006 – 26 February 2007
14. Sangre Grande Junior Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for February 2005 – August 2006 – September 2006 ○ Close Out Report for 2004-2006 – September 18, 2006 ○ Annual Report as at June 2007 – June 28, 2007

Schools	Annual Reports Submitted
15. Guaico Government Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report as at December 15, 2005 ○ Annual Report as September 13, 2006 ○ Annual Report as at May 14, 2007
16. Princes Town Senior Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for 2004 – 2005 – November 2005 ○ Annual Report from September 2006 to July 2007 – 28 August, 2007
17. Rio Claro College Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual report for December 2004 – December 2005 – January 11, 2006 ○ Annual Report for 2005 – 2007 – May 9, 2007
18. Rio Claro High School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for December 2004- August 2005 – September 2005 ○ Annual Report as at August 2006 – September 2006
19. Princes Town Junior Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for period ending October 28, 2005 – October 31, 2005
20. Pt. Fortin Senior Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Close Out Report for October 2004 – July 2006 – August 2006 ○ Annual Report for October 2004 to December 2005 – June 16, 2006 ○ Annual Report as at August 2005 – February 2006

Schools	Annual Reports Submitted
21. Pt. Fortin Junior Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for December 2005- July 2006 – July 31, 2006 ○ Close Out Report for 2004-2006 – September 2006 ○ Annual Report as at October 31, 2007
22. Palo Seco Government Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Close Out Report for 2004-2006 – October 8, 2006 ○ Annual Report – June 6, 2007 ○ Annual Report – September 5, 2007
23. Vessigny Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for January 2005 to June 2006 – June 2006 ○ Annual Report as at May 10, 2005 ○ Annual Report for October 2006 – March 2007 – June 2007
24. San Fernando East Junior Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for March – July 2005 – July 2005 ○ Close out Report for 2004-2006 – 10 September 2006 ○ Annual Report as at July 2006
25. Marabella Senior Comprehensive School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for December 2004 – July 2005 – August 10, 2005 ○ Close Out Report 2004-2006 – August 2006
26. Barataria Senior Comprehensive School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for period ending October 31, 2005 ○ Annual Report for January to June 2006 ○ Annual Report as at August 31, 2007

Phase 3 Local School Boards

Schools	Annual Reports Submitted
1. Belmont Junior Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report June 2005 – June 2006 – October 2006 ○ Annual report July 2006 – June 2007 – October 2007
2. Chaguanas Senior Comprehensive School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report as at October 30, 2006 ○ Annual Report as at September 30, 2007
3. San Juan Secondary Comprehensive School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report as at September 2005 ○ Annual Report for June to July 2007 – July 31, 2007
4. Couva Government Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report as at November 21, 2007
5. Malick Senior Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for September 2005 – July 2006 – August 29, 2006 ○ Annual Report for May 2006 – February 2007 – April 2007
6. Curepe Junior Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report as at December 6, 2006 ○ Annual Report as at September 6, 2007
7. South East Port-of-Spain Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for June 2005 – June 2006 – August 24, 2006 ○ Annual Report as of May 28, 2007
8. Mucurapo Senior Comprehensive School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ December 2005 – December 2006 – May 2007 ○ Annual Report as at December 2007

Schools	Annual Reports Submitted
9. Mucurapo Junior Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for December 2005 – July 2006 – July 27, 2006 ○ Close Out Report for 2005 - 2007 – May 24, 2007
10. Diego Martin Government Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for July 2005 – July 2006 – August 28, 2006 ○ Annual report as at July 7, 2007
11. Matura High School Local School Board Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for June 2005 – June 2006 – August 28, 2006 ○ Annual Report as at December 2007
12. Coryal High School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report July 2006 – July 2007 – June 29, 2007
13. North Eastern College Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for June 2005 – June 2006 – September 2006
14. Arima Senior Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for June 2005 – May 2006 – May 31, 2006 ○ Close Out Report 2005-2007 – May 2007 ○ Annual Report as at December 31, 2007 – February 14, 2008
15. Valencia High School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report as at November 21, 2005
16. Malabar Composite School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for 2006 – 2007 – May 23, 2007 ○ Close Out Report 2005-2007 – June 12, 2007
17. Mayaro Composite School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Status Report as at October 2, 2006 ○ Status Report as at December 4, 2007

Schools	Annual Reports Submitted
18. Barrackpore Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report December 2005 – July 2006 – August 2006 ○ Annual Report for period ending December 31, 2007 – April 2008
19. Tableland High School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for July 2005 – July 2006 – August 18, 2006 ○ Annual Report for period ending April 2007 – april 30, 2007 ○ Close Out Report June 2005 – April 2007 – May 17, 2007
20. Fyzabad Composite School Local School Board	--
21. Siparia Senior Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual report for December 2005 – August 2006 – September 2006 ○ Close Out Report 2005 – 2007 – July 15, 2007
22. Marabella Junior Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report December 2005 – July 2006 - August 7, 2006 ○ Annual Report as at March 2007 – May 2007 ○ Close Out Report – June 2007
23. La Romain High School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report as at December 11, 2006 ○ Annual Report as at October 16, 2007
24. Gasparillo Composite School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report as at July 17, 2006 ○ Annual Report for 2006-2007 – July 12, 2007

Schools	Annual Reports Submitted
25. San Fernando Secondary Comprehensive School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for July 2005- July 2006 – August 22, 2006 ○ Close Out Report for June 2005- June 2007 – May 24, 2007
Phase 4 Local School Boards	
1. St. George's College Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for 2005-2006 – December 2006 ○ Close Out Report for 2005-2007 – October 2007
2. El Dorado Secondary Comprehensive School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report January – December 2006 – December 31, 2006 ○ Close Out Report for September 2005 – September 2007 – October 2007
3. El Dorado Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Close Out Report for 2005-2007 – November 8, 2007
4. San Juan Government Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for 2006-2007 – August 16, 2007
5. Russell Latapy Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report as at May 21st, 2007
6. Woodbrook Government Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for September 2005 – September 2006 – October 2006 ○ Close Out Report for 2005-2007 – August 22nd, 2007
7. St. James Government Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Close Out Report for 2005-2007 – August 24, 2007
8. Morvant/Laventille Secondary School Local School Board	--

Schools	Annual Reports Submitted
9. Manzanilla High School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for 2005-2006 – August 9, 2006 ○ Close Out Report for 2005-2007 – August 2007
10. Toco Composite School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for 2005-2006 – July 31, 2006 ○ Close out Report for 2005-2007 – August 30, 2007
11. Arima Government Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for October 2005-September 2006 – February 8, 2007 ○ Close Out Report for October 2005-July 2007 – August 2007
12. Brazil High School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report as at March 13, 2006 ○ Annual Report as at August 31, 2007 – September 12, 2007
13. Williamsville Junior Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for December 2005 – July 2006 – July 31, 2006 ○ Annual Report for December 2006 – July 2007 – July 31, 2007 ○ Close Out Report for 2005-2007 – August 2007
14. Tabaquite Composite School Local School Board	--
15. Moruga Composite School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for 2005-2006 – November 22, 2006
16. Barrackpore Secondary Comprehensive School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for January 2006 – December 2006 – January 29, 2007 ○ Annual Report as at November 29, 2007

Schools	Annual Reports Submitted
17. Guayaguare High School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for December 2005 – August 2006 – August 31, 2006 ○ Annual Report for September 2006 – August 2007 – August 31, 2007 ○ Close Out Report for 2005-2007 – September 2007
18. Siparia Junior Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report for September 2005 – August 2006 – August 29, 2006
19. Penal Junior Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Close Out Report for 2005 – 2007 – August 24, 2007
20. Union Claxton Bay Senior Comprehensive School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report as at February 2007 ○ Close out Report for 2005 - 2007 – August 16, 2007
21. Ste. Madeleine Secondary School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report as at July 2006 ○ Close Out Report for 2005-2007 – August 2007
22. Debe High School Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report September 1, 2006 – June 14, 2007 – June 15, 2007
23. Corinth Sixth Form College Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report as at 4th December 2006 ○ Close Out Report for the period May 8, 2006 to May 7, 2008 – May 2008
24. Sixth Form Government Secondary School (Polytechnic) Local School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Report as at 23rd April 2007

Phase 1 (Pilot) Local School Boards

<i>Schools</i>	<i>Grants provided to each Board to date</i>
1. Blanchisseuse High School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
2. Cedros Composite School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
3. Diego Martin Junior Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
4. Mt. Hope Junior Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
5. Pleasantville Senior Comprehensive School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
6. Queen's Royal College Local School Board	\$30,000.00
7. San Fernando Government Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
8. Success/Laventille Composite School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
9. Tunapuna Government Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
10. Waterloo High School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
Phase 2 Local School Boards	
1. Cunupia High School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
2. Carapichaima Junior Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
3. Chaguanas Junior Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
4. Preysal High School Local School Board	\$30,000.00

<i>Schools</i>	<i>Grants provided to each Board to date</i>
5. Carapichaima Senior Comprehensive School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
6. Aranjuez Junior Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
7. Couva Junior Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
8. Five Rivers Junior Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
9. Bon Air High School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
10. Barataria Junior Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
11. St. Augustine Senior Comprehensive School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
12. Tranquility Government Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
13. St. Francois Girls' College Local School Board	\$30,000.00
14. Sangre Grande Junior Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
15. Guaico Government Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
16. Princes Town Senior Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
17. Rio Claro College Local School Board	\$30,000.00
18. Rio Claro High School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
19. Princes Town Junior Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00

<i>Schools</i>	<i>Grants provided to each Board to date</i>
20. Pt. Fortin Senior Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
21. Pt. Fortin Junior Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
22. Palo Seco Government Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
23. Vessigny Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
24. San Fernando East Junior Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
25. Marabella Senior Comprehensive School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
26. Barataria Senior Comprehensive School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
Phase 3 Local School Boards	
1. Belmont Junior Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
2. Chaguanas Senior Comprehensive School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
3. San Juan Senior Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
4. Couva Government Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
5. Malick Senior Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
6. Curepe Junior Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
7. South East Port-of-Spain Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00

<i>Schools</i>	<i>Grants provided to each Board to date</i>
8. Mucurapo Senior Comprehensive School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
9. Mucurapo Junior Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
10. Diego Martin Government Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
11. Matura High School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
12. Coryal High School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
13. North Eastern College Local School Board	\$30,000.00
14. Arima Senior Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
15. Valencia High School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
16. Malabar Composite School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
17. Mayaro Composite School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
18. Barrackpore Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
19. Tableland High School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
20. Fyzabad Composite School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
21. Siparia Senior Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
22. Marabella Junior Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
23. La Romain High School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
24. Gasparillo Composite School Local School Board	\$30,000.00

<i>Schools</i>	<i>Grants provided to each Board to date</i>
25. San Fernando Secondary Comprehensive School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
Phase 4 Local School Boards	
1. St. George's College Local School Board	\$30,000.00
2. El Dorado Secondary Comprehensive School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
3. El Dorado Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
4. San Juan Government Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
5. Russell Latapy Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
6. Woodbrook Government Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
7. St. James Government Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
8. Morvant/Laventille Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
9. Manzanilla High School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
10. Toco Composite School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
11. Arima Government Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
12. Brazil High School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
13. Williamsville Junior Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
14. Tabaquite Composite School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
15. Moruga Composite School Local School Board	\$30,000.00

<i>Schools</i>	<i>Grants provided to each Board to date</i>
16. Barrackpore Secondary Comprehensive School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
17. Guayaguayare High School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
18. Siparia Junior Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
19. Penal Junior Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
20. Union Claxton Bay Senior Comprehensive School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
21. Ste. Madeleine Secondary School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
22. Debe High School Local School Board	\$30,000.00
23. Corinth Sixth Form College Local School Board	\$20,000.00
24. Sixth Form Government Secondary School (Polytechnic) Local School Board	\$20,000.00

Tobago

<i>Schools</i>	<i>Grants provided to each Board to date</i>
1. Signal Hill Senior Comprehensive School Local School Board	Grants are paid by the Tobago House of Assembly
2. Scarborough Secondary School Local School Board	
3. Goodwood High School Local School Board	
4. Speyside High School Local School Board	

<i>Schools</i>	<i>Grants provided to each Board to date</i>
5. Mason Hall Government Secondary School Local School Board	Grants are paid by the Tobago House of Assembly
6. Roxborough Composite School Local School Board	

The following question was asked by Mr. Winston Peters (Mayaro):

**Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited
(Details of)**

- 132.** With respect to the Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited, could the hon. Minister of Local Government state:
- (a) what is the mandate of this entity, its specific geographical area of operation and the total expenditure incurred from January 2006—March 2008;
 - (b) the total number and type of projects undertaken, January 2006—March 2008, the areas in which they were implemented and the status of these works; and
 - (c) what new projects are being proposed, the areas in which works will be executed, the budget for these works and the projected commencement and completion dates?

The following reply was circulated to Members of the House:

The Minister of Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Hazel Manning): The mandate of Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited (PSAEL) is to develop the resources of and turn to account any land belonging to, or in which the company is interested. PSAEL is also responsible for managing the residual assets of Trintoc and Trintopec. The company's geographical area of operations covers all areas south of the Oropouche and Ortoire Rivers from Icacos to the Rio Claro Guayaguayare Road.

The total expenditure incurred from January 2006 to March 2008 was One Hundred and Fourteen Million, Nine Hundred and One Thousand, Seven Hundred Dollars and Sixty-Four Cents (\$114,901,700.64).

The total number of projects undertaken from January 2006 to March 2008 was Two Hundred and Fifty-three (253). The breakdown by type, area and status of these jobs is summarized in Appendix A.

New projects are yet to be finalized.

**Total Number Of Projects Undertaken
(January 2006 To March 2008)**

AREA	TYPE					STATUS	
	Drain	Pavements	Roads	Other	Total	Complete	On Going
Fyzabad	20	4	15	-	39	39	-
La Brea	5	10	6	-	21	20	1
Mayaro	43	-	3	-	46	44	2
Oropouche West	5	1	3	1	10	7	3
Pt. Fortin	11	4	-	-	15	11	4
Princess Town	51	10	22	-	83	81	2
Siparia	12	9	14	-	35	26	9
Carapal	-	-	3	-	3	-	3
Guayaguayare	-	-	-	1	1	-	1
Total	147	38	66	2	253	228	25

The following question was asked by Mr. Subhas Panday (Princes Town North):

**Local Government Reform
(Recommendations for)**

- 142.** Could the hon. Minister of Local Government list the recommendations for Local Government reform received from members of the public at the public consultations held?

The following reply was circulated to Members of the House:

The Minister of Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Hazel Manning): Recommendations received from members of the public at public consultations held were as follows:

- Protocols to deliver transparency in decision making and awarding of contracts by the Corporation should be developed. The Corporation's revenues for financing infrastructure and other projects should be retained. This would alleviate problems of funding shortfalls from the Central Government.
- Community members would like to see a greater relationship between the Corporation and the people the Councillors represent.
- More facilities in place for the youths.
- A better distribution of water, lights and environmental clean-up.
- Equity in the manner of responses to villagers' problems.
- Timely implementation of the Reform Plan.
- There is need for a well trained and fully staffed Municipal Police since the Siparia region is so wide.
- Systems to safeguard the environment and laws to protect the environment, particularly from noise pollution, need to be put in place and enforced as a matter of urgency. Well-trained Litter Wardens need to be employed immediately.
- The Licensing Department should cooperate with the Regional Corporations to provide a seamless service to the people.
- People (through their Community Village Councils) should have an input in setting measurable standards for the delivery of services offered by the Municipal Corporations. They should be very involved in this Reform Initiative.
- A Restoration Clause should be written into law so that firms/contractors who damage public property would be liable and would be required to restore the property to its original state. A good monitoring system to ensure compliance would be necessary.

- Under the aegis of the Siparia Regional Corporation, a Committee should be established to mark all historical sites and so establish a museum of the history and culture of the town of Siparia.
- Adequate pipe-borne water supply, proper drainage, a pre-school and primary school.
- Proper maintenance of the recreation ground.
- Access to the Councillor.
- More focus on self-help groups in the village.
- Regular patrolling of Police Officers.
- Social issues must stay within the boundaries of the Ministry of Social Development.
- Booklets of the Draft White Paper should have been circulated before the meeting so that it could have been studied.
- Councillors should visit residents often and not only at election times.
- Educational courses and jobs for youths and for older persons who want to further their education.
- A regular Police presence in areas to assist in crime prevention.
- The Local Assembly should meet twice a month and at least one town meeting should be held annually in each Electoral district of the Corporation.
- A proper operating hospital with a 24-hour service.
- Construction of a Fire Station and a Trade School.
- Regular bus transport.
- Training for teachers.
- More emphasis on the aged in the community.
- Better management of the monies given to the Corporation, so that all in the community would benefit.
- The Local Government Representatives must have regular discussions with the community so that they would be aware of what is taking place in their community.

- Employment for the people in the community to do the work needed as to improve the standard of living.
- Serious people should be placed in the Corporation – people who can get the job done with minimal resources.
- The community should not remain stagnant because the Councillor is a non-performer. People should try and help themselves.
- At the completion of the Local Government Reform process, all promises would be delivered.
- Financial assistance to the various Village Councils since many of them are small and now getting started.
- The power of recall. This is where the vote against a particular Councillor could result in the Councillor being recalled by the community the person represents.
- There is need for greater collaboration between the Local Government body and the various Village Councils and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), so that the basic needs of the people could be met.
- Basic infrastructure for recreation grounds – construction of a pavilion.
- Improvement/implementation in lighting and proper drainage.
- Community centres should be constructed so that “stay-at-home moms” could acquire technical skills at night so that their standard of living could be improved.
- All work such as landslips and box drains should be done during the dry season.
- The Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) should repair roads as soon as they have completed the necessary rehabilitation work.
- Local tourism should be given greater emphasis.
- The Corporation should be given adequate funding so that work started could be completed and more work initiated.
- A greater say in the choice of people who would represent the residents in the Corporation.
- Better collaboration with Corporations which border each other.
- Councillors should reside in the electoral district which they represent.

- Residents should determine their needs and prioritize projects to be undertaken in their community.
- Community groups that are dormant should be re-energized and youth groups established.
- Implementation of Reform measures to prevent it from becoming another “white elephant”.
- The Town and Country Planning Office should be accessible to the public.
- The date for Local Government Elections should be constitutionally scheduled.
- The specific role and function of government offices should be clearly identified so that duplication of services would be prevented and efficient services provided.
- Notices and invitations to the public for consultations should be done well in advance of scheduled meetings.
- The public must be told the criteria used for funding the various activities/services in the management of the region by the Corporation.
- A system is needed which makes Councillors responsible for the needs of the community.
- Community participation should be increased and more town meetings held.
- Local Government should be authorized to raise funds for special projects in the community.
- Employees recruited for public service should be better qualified and committed.
- Priority must be given to construction, repair and maintenance of pavements and rails.
- Councillors should have ready access to funds to disperse within their districts when the need arises.
- The Councillor should be present at the Consultations.
- A system which provides information to the public with respect to a Corporation’s funding, expenditure, accounting practices, should be put in place to prevent mismanagement.

- A system of redress from Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago (TSTT), Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission (T&TEC), and WASA and should be institutionalized for poor service and injury.
- The Environmental Management Authority (EMA) should be decentralized.
- Residents should be made aware of the approvals for business licence being granted in the area and modernized systems should be used to make approvals.
- The existing system lacks professional credibility and needs more spirited administration.