

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Monday, July 07, 2008*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

**PRAYERS**[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**PAPERS LAID**

1. The Administrative Report of the Arima Borough Corporation for the period October 2005 to September 2006. [*The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]
2. The Administrative Report of the Arima Borough Corporation for the period October 2006 to September 2007. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

**ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION**

**The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert):** Mr. Speaker, I am happy to announce that we have answers to 100 per cent of the questions on the Order Paper.

**Police Service****(Allegations of Corruption)**

**173. Mr. Subhas Panday** (*Princes Town North*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Further to the answer given to Question No. 21, could the Minister state:

- a) whether any steps have, as yet, been taken, to commence the investigations and/or enquiry into allegations of corruption in the Police Service made by former Assistant Superintendent of the Police, Chandraban Maharaj;
- b) if the answer to (a) is in the affirmative, what is the stage of the investigation; and
- c) if the answer to (a) is in the negative, what are the reasons for same?

**The Minister of State in the Ministry of National Security (Hon. Donna Cox):** Mr. Speaker, hon. Members may recall that in November 2007, Superintendent of Police, Chandraban Maharaj made a commitment to provide to the Commissioner of Police by Monday, December 03, 2007, documentary evidence to formalize and substantiate his allegations.

*Oral Answer to Question*  
[HON. D. COX]

*Monday, July 07, 2008*

Since that time, Superintendent Maharaj demitted office due to the fact that he attained the age of compulsory retirement on March 26, 2008, and has not, to date, submitted the required documents. In the absence of such critical documentation, any meaningful enquiries into the matter cannot be advanced.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Supplemental please, Mr. Speaker. Is the Minister aware that Superintendent Chandraban Maharaj said that he had no faith in the local police, and as such, if a foreigner is brought in that he is willing to give that information?

**Mr. Speaker:** That arose out of the answer given by the Minister. Supplemental?

**Mr. Sharma:** No, I am not on supplemental.

**Mr. Speaker:** No, no, no, we are dealing with supplementals now.

**Mr. Sharma:** Okay.

**Mr. Speaker:** Supplemental.

**Mr. Warner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Am I to understand that the police cannot make an investigation in a matter in the absence of documentary evidence, as outlined by the last speaker.

**Hon. D. Cox:** Did I say that?

**Hon. Member:** That is a next question. Get away with that.

**Mr. Speaker:** Would you like the Member to repeat the question?

**Hon. D. Cox:** Yes please, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Yes please, hon. Member.

**Mr. Warner:** Am I to understand that in the absence of the documentary evidence by Superintendent Maharaj, the police cannot make an investigation in the matter?

**Hon. D. Cox:** I did not say that, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** The Member is asking you a question.

**Hon. D. Cox:** Mr. Speaker, I am not in a position to respond at this time.

**Mr. Speaker:** Sorry?

**Hon. D. Cox:** I am not in a position to respond. Thanks.

**Mr. Speaker:** You wanted to raise an issue?

**Mr. Sharma:** The Minister said 100 per cent; does it include questions for written answers?

**Mr. Speaker:** No, obviously not. He said 100 per cent of oral.

**Mr. Sharma:** But—

**Mr. Speaker:** No, no, please, take your seat. The Minister well knows that there are several questions for written answers, which I am sure he will encourage his ministerial colleagues to provide the answers to the House. Proceed.

#### **MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS (AMDT.) BILL**

*Order for second reading read.*

**The Minister of Local Government (Sen. the Hon. Hazel Manning):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That a Bill to amend the Municipal Corporations Act, Chap. 25:04, be now read a second time.

The purpose of the Municipal Corporations (Amd.) Bill, 2008 is to extend the term of municipal councils for a period of one year, with effect from July 14, 2008. More specifically, the Bill seeks to amend the Municipal Corporations Act, 1990 as follows:

“in section 273, by inserting after subsection (1G) the following subsections:”

(1H) Notwithstanding subsection (1F) for the purposes only of the elections during the year 2008, the term of office of the Mayors, Aldermen and Councillors holding office in a corporation on July 13, 2008, is hereby extended for a period of one year from the date of expiration of such term.

“(1I) All powers exercisable by Mayors, Aldermen and Councillors under this Act shall be exercisable by them during the period referred to in subsection (1H)”

Mr. Speaker, before I delve into the specific issues associated with the amendments being proposed to the Municipal Corporations Act, 1990, I will put the matter of local government reform as it relates to the amendment in its proper perspective.

On behalf of this PNM administration, let me assure this honourable House and the nation, that we are committed to modernizing and transforming the system of local government in Trinidad and Tobago, because it is an integral component of the international benchmarking that speaks to localizing the millennium development goals, while aggressively implementing Vision 2020.

In fact, we see local government as an indispensable participatory democratic structure, a structure of our country, which must be kept, strengthened, re-engineered and sustained. We therefore need to continue to pursue relentlessly the reform initiatives started in the year 2004 by carefully adapting to the environmental realities presented and by making the appropriate adjustments along the way.

Mr. Speaker, the main reason for seeking this extension is that some of the key institutional and systemic requirements for the introduction of the new local government system are currently being reviewed and will not be completed before the constitutionally allotted time frame for holding local government election.

Consultants were hired in 2006 to look into this matter and those consultants reported early in the year 2008. It was only in April 2008 that we published a Green Paper on the proposed roles and responsibilities of local government bodies, inclusive of the main mandate of the head office of the Ministry of Local Government.

The Green Paper was informed by the consensual issues arising from many sources, firstly, the extensive public consultations that were held in 2006 on the Draft White Paper on Local Government Reform, when over 1,000 citizens representing approximately 35 community-based organizations provided responses. Secondly, it was based on the reports and positions documented by international consultants whose services were procured through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to make recommendations on the roles and responsibilities of local government bodies and the Ministry of Local Government as well, and to design appropriate structures and appropriate organizations for the local government system. Thirdly, it was based on the reports and the position documents of local and Caribbean institutions, whose research provided analysis on current situations.

One such research document was written by Dr. Vishnu Ragoonath of the University of the West Indies in the year 2001. It was Dr. Ragoonath who said in his paper titled "Governance and Participatory Democracy in the Caribbean Local Government System", that local government has been, and continues to be a primary vehicle for the institution of governance in the Caribbean. He continues that, therefore, decentralization is postulated as a cornerstone, but the practical administration of local government in the Caribbean leaves much to be desired. To some extent, local government is replete with poor quality of services, the inability to make and implement decisions, weak financial management, the employment of public resources for private and even corrupt interests and a largely closed or non-transparent decision-making process.

In our journey forward, we took the view that the most appropriate course of action was to determine the framework to guide the development of the roles and responsibilities of local government bodies before proceeding to determine the structure and the organization of the local government system of governance. The adoption of such a course of action would provide a clear guidance, we thought, and the platform for designing, unambiguously, the nature of institutional and administrative relationships among the key institutional stakeholders in the local government system. It will also guide the types and numbers of administrative substructures that we need to put in place.

This Government is committed to consulting with the public on major issues affecting the nation. We are currently engaged in public consultations on the Green Paper, the roles and the responsibilities of local government bodies. We are going throughout the 14 municipalities; we are touching each municipality in Trinidad. We have held consultations with the staff at the head office and we have held three consultations in municipalities. So far, over 1,300 persons have shown great interest and these series of consultations are expected to go on until October.

As soon as these consultations are completed and Cabinet considers the consensual position arising therefrom, we will lay the White Paper in both Houses of Parliament, then we will address the important issue of the structure and the organization of the local government system.

**1.45 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, let me talk about the legislative reform at this point. We need to get it right, to ensure that the effective local corporations are well established with a coherent set of powers, a coherent set of responsibilities. We need to get it right to ensure that there is clear authority, there is clear accountability, there is reporting relationships among the ministry, the councils, the executive councils and the administrative divisions. This will promote quick decision-making, operational efficiency and an effective administrative coordination.

We have already set up the legislative review committee consisting of our lead legal officer, our corporate secretaries from all corporations and two consultants to guide us through the examination of our existing legislation, to recommend the style, to recommend the scope of the proposed legislation. We are actively discussing the guiding principles should the Municipal Corporations Act be prescriptive or enabling.

What scope is there under the present legislation to carry out more activities? What could we do differently under the current legislation? These questions are

actively engaging our attention. Cabinet has already given approval to draft the proposed new legislation. We envisage that this process will be completed before the end of the year. We will then be in a much better position to bring to this Parliament the appropriate legislation to give effect to a more effective local government reform and local government reform proposals.

I want to speak now about the revised boundaries. A critical aspect to the completion of the new local government legislation is the revised boundary arrangements for the local government system. The process of redefining the local government boundary arrangements is complex because it involves not only determining the numbers and the types of local government bodies, but it also involves exploring the demographic characteristics of all the communities in this country. Because of its complexity, because of the large size of the project, the ministry has engaged a consultant who is competent in the use of the new technologies, with specific reference to the Geographic Information System also known as the GIS. The use of this technology will ensure effective mobilization of resources. It will ensure coordination of services and service delivery; it will ensure effective planning and sustainable development.

This process is ongoing and it is expected to take approximately six more months to complete the demarcation of boundaries at the local level, at the regional level and at the national level. It is through this system that standards will be established and implemented to monitor, to evaluate and to review administrative and other types of arrangements. A team led by our director of technical operations, and including our director of municipal corporations relations has already begun working in this area. We will be working with an inter-ministerial team headed by Minister Mariano Browne.

Let me talk now about local government reform. There have been several attempts to reform the local government system in Trinidad and Tobago; in 1995 by the UNC, the then government of that time; in 2003, 2006, in 2007, and we have learnt that the question of local government reform cannot be totally isolated from the public service reform. In fact, some of the very old institutional and regulatory arrangements have really been a fetter to significant progress in the reform agenda. Since 2004, the Government has been actively engaging the national community in the process of local government reform. Public consultations have been held and, in addition, MORI Caribbean, a reputable firm of international consultants, conducted a survey on local government. Both events have revealed widespread dissatisfaction with the operations and effectiveness of the current local government system.

Today, as I said before, we have had four successful sessions with over 1,300 participants and the dissatisfaction still exists. In order to address the concerns of our citizens to satisfy their legitimate aspirations, the Ministry of Local Government has embarked on an extremely important and critical programme of local government reform. The primary objective of the reform programme—and I want to quote from our vision and mission—is:

“To promote meaningful decentralization of significant aspects of the local government system in order to improve efficiency while building sustainable communities within a participative local government framework.”

Such a complex and innovative programme requires time, it requires effort and it requires considerable resources, and it cannot be executed in an ad hoc or superficial manner. It also requires significant institutional strengthening and capacity building, especially at the community level. Local government reform must therefore be incorporated into our strategy for modernizing and for transforming the system and, therefore, we have taken into consideration in our proposal for reform two important models:

1. the localization of the Millennium Development goal; and
2. the overarching pillars of Vision 2020.

Internationally, the localization of the MDGs has come about because of the recurring problems of the failure of conventional economic growth to relieve poverty and to relieve the extreme regional disparities, because of the adequate spending on health and education and insufficient aid. One school of thought states that there must be a seismic shift [*Interruption*] in political, and both domestic and internationally, to release the ideals of the millennium declaration by developing a framework, and to do that we must develop a framework, focus on aggregate targets; target local, urban, rural dimensions to prevent disparities; link local strategies to national plans and sectoral strategies; link midterm expenditure and integrate planning systems; reduce regional inequities; promote partnerships; improve service delivery and monitoring and support decentralization and democratic reforms.

Then, Mr. Speaker, there is the overarching pillars of Vision 2020. Vision 2020 speaks to the implementation of a system which will help to nurture a caring society, develop an innovative people, promote competitive economy, sound infrastructure and environment and promote effective governance. We see our mandate as mainly promoting effective governance in the Ministry of Local Government. Therefore, our vision for local government is a reformed environment.

**Hon. Member:** You are speaking like the Prime Minister.

**Sen. The Hon. H. Manning:** Sustainable local communities—

**Mr. Manning:** And properly so.

**Sen. The Hon. H. Manning:**—rooted in the principles of robust participative democracy embracing all.

Mr. Speaker, this means that we must be guided by a set of core values pertinent to effective governance and we have identified accountability; we have identified transparency; we have identified responsiveness; social justice; social equity and all-inclusiveness and value for money as our shared values. If we are to be guided by wave 10 of the MORI polls which indicated inter alia that people perceive local government to be slow, to be unresponsive, unsatisfactory, delivering poor service and wasting taxpayers' money, then we would have gotten it right, insofar as our shared values for effective governance are concerned.

The situational analysis of the local government system suggests that there is a need for institutional restructuring of systems, a re-engineering of systems of both the Ministry of Local Government head office and the Ministry of Local Government in the municipal corporations. At the Ministry of Local Government we need to change the way we do business from what is now perceived as an implementing machinery to essentially a conduit for facilitating the development of policies, facilitating the development of standards, for supporting services for the municipal corporations. At the corporation level, the structures and the business processes need to be revamped to focus on the provision of community services and the maintenance of community infrastructure within a participative democratic framework that allows for the inclusion of all community groups, all community institutions, all community organizations in the decision-making and implementation process.

To this end, the Ministry of Local Government has identified six core areas that will address, not only the immediate concerns of citizens, but also will provide opportunities for the implementation of new and exciting projects within the various communities. The guiding philosophy of the Ministry of Local Government is that people must be at the centre of community development and, consequently, the six main areas of focus for the reformed local government are:

1. roles and responsibilities of head office, and these must be identified;
2. there must be municipal management;



3. there must be economic development;
4. there must be social services;
5. environmental management; and
6. we must develop resilient communities.

We start with the roles and responsibilities of the head office, in collaboration with municipalities. The Ministry of Local Government's head office will, in collaboration with the municipalities, develop policy, coordinate, implement, monitor, evaluate and review projects while monitoring and bringing to the table international best practices and state-of-the-art technology.

Mr. Speaker, our emphasis on municipal management is aimed at establishing the necessary business systems, processes, procedures and techniques that will facilitate the judicious allocation and deployment of resources. This includes proper assets management, financial management and the application of modern accounting procedures, utilization of state-of-the-art information and communication technology, the upgrading of skills and competencies of employees in the local government system.

### **2.00 p.m.**

The introduction of best practice performance management: Already, teams consisting of head office and regional staff have been meeting to discuss operating policies, the development, with heavy emphasis on setting quality standards, standards that are internationally benchmarked and to be able to coordinate activities.

Thirdly, we have economic development. In terms of economic development, we are focusing on the preparation and the implementation of a comprehensive regional and local area development planning system, the promotion of micro entrepreneurship and small businesses, especially in the areas of waste management, local tourism, agriculture and the provision of local products and services.

Collaborating with key agencies, we have been in the construction and maintenance of physical infrastructure. Already, the local area and regional development unit of the Ministry of Local Government, has been established to manage regional planning, with the support of integrated physical, social and economic planners. Regional and local area plans are being developed.

These plans are currently being prepared through a consultative process involving various organizations, various groups and institutions, and sectors within the municipalities and the regions. Stakeholder consultations and these plans have been held in municipalities, such as Tunapuna/Piarco, Chaguanas, Port of Spain and Sangre Grande.

Mr. Speaker, we intend to complete all regions. We have social services delivery. This refers to the social aspect of sustainable community development; the promotion of social cohesion and equity; the utilization of sport and culture to enhance community life; the establishment of effective community policing within the municipalities and the development of close working relationships with community-based organizations. We have already established coordinating mechanisms to collaborate with the Ministries of Social Development and Health, with a view to implementing the Socially Displaced Persons Act.

In a number of municipalities, we have identified the quantum and the categories of socially displaced persons in public places. Moreover, in conjunction with the Ministry of Public Administration, buildings have already been identified for the intermediate and long-term accommodation of such persons.

We have already initiated meetings with the Ministries of Health, Sport and Youth Affairs and Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs. Indeed, we at the Ministry of Local Government are playing our part towards the nurturing of a caring society, an essential pillar of Vision 2020.

Then we have the environmental management. The important aspect of our reform is environmental management. We view this as critical to the development of sustainable communities and this involves the maintenance of recreational facilities of heritage sites, public parks and spaces, the coordination of landscaping and beautification programmes, the implementation and coordinating of proper sanitation services, the facilitation and effective solid waste management.

We have begun several initiatives in the area of waste management. We are modernizing and we are revolutionizing our approach to waste management, with emphasis on reducing waste generated, recycling and reusing waste. We have established an effective partnership with Solid Waste Management Company Limited (SWMCOL) to implement initiatives in these vocal areas.

Mr. Speaker, significantly in the area of waste management, we recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the province of Nova Scotia, Canada. This MOU encompasses a range of activities, including consulting

services for the acquisition and the installation of the latest technology, the establishment of appropriate waste management system, and capacity building and institutional strengthening.

Mr. Speaker, and hon. Members of this House, I am sure that you are aware of the clean-up campaign that is taking place in every municipality in this country, as we respond to the dengue epidemic. We have been sanitizing and cleaning our surroundings. We have been beautifying and landscaping. We have been controlling insect vector and managing waste—*[Interruption]* yes—because they are all critical to our health, to our safety and our well-being.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we talk of resilient communities. In the area of resilient communities, we have taken the steps to ensure communities are able to respond creatively, to take extreme and unexpected events. This includes disaster preparedness and the management of disasters and the extreme events, the establishment of burial grounds and crematoria and cremation sites, insect vector control and environmental preservation.

As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, disasters can damage entire communities and we see disaster management and preparedness as essential to the promotion of sustainable communities. Disaster is not limited to flooding and earthquakes, but also to the events such as epidemics, including the widespread outbreak of dengue.

We are not about “ol’ talk”, but we are action-oriented, and in this regard, we have obtained Cabinet's approval for the establishment of disaster management units in each of our municipalities, with a central coordinating unit in the Ministry of Local Government.

We are collaborating with ODPM to ensure consistency in policy and standards. Steps have already been taken to have these units staffed and equipped before the height of the hurricane season. Furthermore, the complete package of our local government reform policy prescriptions would require new legislative provisions, both primary and secondary.

Mr. Speaker, having regard to the current considerations and impending local government election, best time to occur within the current system of local government, it is recommended, therefore, that local government election be postponed to allow for the determination and implementation of the new systems, new structures, governmental policies and legislation of the proposed local government reform.

We firmly believe that more time is required to ensure that the new systems are put in place before elections are held. This will allow the newly elected local government officials to enter a newly reformed local government system with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, more resources for deployment to communities, opportunities for more effective representation and decision-making, and a great measure of contribution to the development of sustainable communities. And so, in light of the foregoing, the Government is proposing that the Municipal Corporations Act, No. 21 of 1990, be amended accordingly to reflect the following:

“In section 273, by inserting after subsection (1G), the following subsections:”

“(1H), notwithstanding subsection (1F), for the purposes only of the elections due in the year 2008, the term of office of the Mayors, Aldermen and Councillors, holding office in a Corporation on the 13<sup>th</sup> July, 2008, is hereby extended for a period of one year from the date of expiration of such term.

“(1I). All powers exercisable by Mayors, Aldermen and Councillors under this Act shall be exercisable by them during the period referred to in subsection (1H).”

We believe that given the circumstances, the extension of the life of the council is the most appropriate course of action, since it will allow for continuity and democratic representation which is an essential facet of good governance.

Mr. Speaker, I therefore urge those on the other side to support the amendments to the Municipal Corporations Act 1990, which will allow the councils to continue to operate whilst we put the new arrangements in place, for more a effective, more efficient, dynamic and progressive system of local government.

And last, but not least, Mr. Speaker, I wish to place on record the support of the staff of the Ministry of Local Government for the years of commitment and dedication to the reform of the local government system. I want to especially mention the former Minister of Local Government, Mr. Rennie Dumas, [*Desk thumping*] who led the charge admirably over the previous years.

I also want to mention Ms. Indra Furlonge-Kelly, the present permanent secretary, who continues to provide steady support; Mr. Cornelius Price, who had and continues expertly to guide the team, and Ms. Analine Innis, our legal advisor, and the rest of the hard-working support staff at the Ministry of Local Government head office and local government out in the regions.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

*Question proposed.*

**Mr. Subhas Panday** (*Princes Town North*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have never seen someone speak such nonsense, with such confidence and I will show you why. [*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** Woo!

**Mr. S. Panday:** Woo? Mr. Speaker, but before I commence—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Manning:** You should never say that.

**Mr. S. Panday:** I should never say that? Okay, Mr. Prime Minister, I should have never said that—I will commence my presentation with a statement by our political leader and the Leader of the Opposition, who was unceremoniously kicked out of the House by that Government, and I quote from the *Express* of today's date—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Ramnath:** You have no shame.

**Mr. S. Panday:** “Opposition Leader, Basdeo Panday said yesterday that the postponement of the local government election was a breach of the democracy...”

And I will show what they have been saying there is a fraud. "O! talk!" Nonsense! I continue:

"He said that the Constitution called for local government representatives to face the polls every three years. He said that councillors have been serving for six years, which is more than a Member of Parliament was allowed to do in one term."

Mr. Speaker, he further demonstrates and I continue:

"It demonstrates Government's level of appreciation of the democratic process."

Mr. Speaker, since there is talk in the air about people coming together, today, I want to speak on behalf of all the forces, all the parties, which are opposed to Government, in that another party was saying, this thing here is wasting time; decentralization is wasting time. The way to go is devolution of power, Tobago House of Assembly style. [*Desk thumping*]

**2.15 p.m.**

**Mr. Imbert:** Why you did not do that? [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. S. Panday:** I would not even bother to respond to that Member for Diego Martin North/East. Having regard to the low level of his contribution on Friday, we should not even mention or let him heckle me.

**Mr. Ramnath:** Nuisance value!

**Mr. S. Panday:** The hon. Minister spoke about their wanting local government life to be extended for one year to give effect to local government reform. We want to say, loudly and clearly, we are not supporting that. The time is due for election; call the election within the law.

Mr. Speaker, she spoke—

**Hon. Members:** Who is she?

**Mr. S. Panday:** The honourable Prime Minister's wife. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Please; you know better than that. It is the Minister of Local Government or hon. Senator, something like that; not “the Prime Minister's wife”.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Mr. Speaker, they have been speaking about local government reform and asking that the life of the local government be extended. She is—the hon. Minister—[*Crosstalk*] Okay, he then. The Minister came today to give the impression to this House that, “Look, we want the life to be extended because of local government reform.” They are giving the impression that this is the first time they have come to this honourable House to have an extension, because they have now embarked upon local government reform. [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*]

“Yuh playing bad.” [*Laughter*] Since she is so rude, I will deal with her.

**Mr. Manning:** Watch what you are saying. I am warning you. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. S. Panday:** In 2006, the Government came to this honourable House and asked to extend the life of local government by one year. If I may read from that Bill No. 18 of 2006, it says that:

“The purpose of the Municipal Corporations (Amendment) Bill, 2006 is to extend the term of the Municipal Councils for a period of twelve months with effect from the 14<sup>th</sup> day of July, 2006.”

When they came on that occasion, what was the excuse made? You were sitting there, Mr. Speaker. The excuse made was that they could have local government reform; and they got that year.

After that, in 2007, last year, they came back to the Parliament to extend the life of local government. If I may read from Bill No. 15 of 2007:

“The purpose of the Municipal Corporations (Amendment) Bill, 2007 is to extend the term of the members of Municipal Councils for a period of one year from the date of expiration of the existing term.”

What was the excuse made then? The excuse then was that they were carrying out an exercise in local government reform. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Manning:** Correct; it is not yet finished.

**Mr. S. Panday:** When they came today, it was the same nonsense. As a matter of fact, the Bill before us today is identical in terms of the last Bill which came in 2007, which the Minister said was:

“...for the purposes only of the elections due in the year 2007, the term of officer of the Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors holding office in a Corporation on the 13th July, 2007, is hereby extended for a period of one year from the date of expiration of such term.”

Last year, what was the amendment for which they came here? The amendment:

“ (1F) Notwithstanding subsection (1D) for the purposes only of the elections due in the year 2007, the term of officer of the Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors holding office in a Corporation on the 13th July, 2007, is hereby extended for a period of one year from the date of expiration of such term.”

It is identical.

The way this Minister spoke today, it was as though local government reform had now commenced and hence, "We are begging for this extension." That is, indeed, not so. It is more than four or five years that they have been speaking about local government reform, and nothing has been done.

Mr. Speaker, in 2003, when persons were calling for constitutional reform, what did the Member for San Fernando East say? He said that the only Constitution reform that this country could expect, was constitutional reform as it related to local government reform. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Manning:** That is not true!

**Mr. S. Panday:** Is that not true? Did you say anything else?

**Mr. Manning:** I will talk.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Then he spoke about how they were going to reform local government and put mayors in the Senate, and what not. He said that they were going to expedite local government reform.

**Mr. Ramnath:** That was if he was an executive President!

**Mr. S. Panday:** Indeed, work was done. The Member for Tobago East was then the Minister of Local Government. I will go into detail and show the work he did, to show that it is really copycatting taking place here, wasting money. I would come to that in a minute.

Before I embark upon that aspect of the debate, I think that what this hon. Minister said in her contribution today has been said many times before. I would go into details of my contribution, but let me answer her a little on one or two things.

She said that there was a school of thought which said that local government was slow, non-responsive, not transparent and corrupt. I want to ask her if she knows that there is a place called Good Hope Road in the constituency of Guaico, Tamana. The Rural Development Company paved a box drain 300 feet long on Good Hope Road in Coalmine, at the cost of \$1.2 million; 300 feet. It is said that the regional corporation could have done the same work for less than \$300,000. So when you are making accusations here about local government, what about the special purpose companies that the Government has set up?

When the Minister spoke about local government being unresponsive, I wonder if the Minister could address her mind to the amount of moneys given to these special purpose companies, compared to local government. As a matter of fact, this Government has been strangling local government; I will come to that in greater detail, as I continue my contribution.

Mr. Speaker, what this Minister did today really reflected the incompetence of this Government. They come here and say that they are caring, but since last year they knew that they had extended the life of local government for one year; they knew that the life of the local government would have expired on July 12. One could ask the question: July 12 is Saturday, why would they lay this paper on Friday night last to debate it on Monday, less than 72 hours?

We did not have the opportunity to have one working day to consult the library, or wherever, to prepare for this debate. Is it that they expected us to come and say that



they did not get time to prepare for the debate and hence the level of debate would be low? Is it that they do not want us to prepare? Is it that they want the level of debate in this House to be so low, that they bring this piece of legislation yesterday for today?

We ask the Minister: Did you not know that this local government would expire on Saturday? Why did you not bring it before? Why did you wait until the last minute to bring this legislation? If that is not incompetence, tell me what it is. This is the *modus operandi* of this Government.

For example, last week the Accreditation (Amdt.) Bill brought before this House—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Manning:** Talk about local government reform!

**Mr. S. Panday:** "Wait nuh; doh rush meh, Prime Minister; hold, wait." I am showing the pattern of behaviour of this incompetent government; that is what I am trying to show.

The Accreditation (Amdt.) Bill came before this House on the eve of the expiration of the life of that Bill. They brought it here on one day and the following day they had to go to the Senate. Why is the Government operating like this? Does the Government not have a legislative agenda? Why do you operate as if by vaps? Why do you operate in a *vaille-que-vaille* system? Do you think the country needs that kind of behaviour from the Government? I have found myself in some problems trying to really do some extensive research for this debate.

They have been coming to this Parliament for the third year on local government reform and they have not gone anywhere. This third year that they are seeking would be the whole length of the life of local government. If they had called local government election without any amendments for the extension of the life of local government, this year would have been the last year in the life of local government. Call the election now; call the election under the present law, [*Desk thumping*] because this piece of reform you are bringing is not as new as you want us to believe. I will show you how. It is not as far-reaching as you say.

As a matter of fact, Act 21 of 1990 is such a good Act. It was brought by the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) government, by Carson Charles, the then Minister of Works and Local Government. Have you read section 232 of the Act? If you read it, what does it say in terms of the functions of local government? In that Act it gives the various functions of local government which are also mentioned in this paper. All the cemetery and burial grounds she spoke about in her presentation, she should have looked at section 232. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you are reminding me very much of the former Member for Tabaquite; he would have objected strenuously when you kept referring to Ministers or Senators as "she". I think you just need to get into the habit of saying the "hon. Minister".

**2.30 p.m.**

**Mr. S. Panday:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, but when I was in school I was told to use a pronoun where necessary, but I will repeat if you give me a few extra minutes to be saying that every minute.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the hon. Minister to look at section 232(p) and this Act is so good that it gives the Cabinet the power to expand the functions of local government by a mere Order. So this thing you are speaking of on your reform document could be included by words to the effect that "such other functions as the President may from time to time by Order prescribe". So the Act is good, it has that window of opportunity where all you are speaking there could take place by an Order of the President.

Mr. Speaker, so when this hon. Member comes to this House and asks for the extension of the life of local government, if the hon. Minister had done her homework, if she had read the Act, or studied it, this hon. Minister would not have had to come to this House today to ask for the life of local government to be extended merely for the aspects of local government reform which the hon. Minister has indicated.

The hon. Minister, as I said, gives the impression that today is the first time that that Government has embarked upon local government, but I want to draw your attention to indicate to you that local government reform was broached by the Prime Minister in 2003, five years ago. In 2004, a Green Paper on Local government reform was produced. That Green Paper on Local government reform was circulated to the population and when that was done, there was extensive consultations on local government reform and sponsored by the hon. Member for Tobago East, they went into every nook and cranny in Trinidad and Tobago and dealt with that Green Paper on Local Government Reform. I think it was a policy on local government reform.

Mr. Speaker, after those consultations—I do not know how long the Member for Tobago East said they lasted—thousands and thousands of people attended and made recommendations, and arising out of them, this Government produced a draft White Paper. So we have a draft White Paper on Local government reform

and everything the Minister mentioned today—as though she is reinventing the wheel—are all that had been discussed and decisions were taken. After the decisions were taken, they went to this Ministry of Local Government Draft White Paper of Local Government Reform.

It says:

“Ministry of Local Government Reform Draft White Paper on Local government reform 2006.

Local Government Reform in the context of Vision 2020 charged towards regional development, sustainable communities with emphasis on decentralization of local government system and the promotion of greater citizen participation in the affairs of local government.”

A complete repeat of what was said here today.

If one looks at this document, one would see all the details which the hon. Minister gave today dealing with local government had already been addressed, so to come today and give the impression that you are bringing this reform for the first time in order to get an extension must be viewed with scepticism.

Mr. Speaker, the process of bringing change is that you have a Green Paper, after that you have a White Paper and after the White Papers you go into legislation. Exactly what you said today, hon. Minister can be found in those two papers, the Green Paper and the White Paper. We believe that after the White Paper was produced we should have gone one step further and the legislation should have come. We should have debated it and election could have been this year. But no, this PNM Government has a habit; it has been its history to extend the life of local government all the time. We ask: Has this Government ever brought local government election on time? At one time it was extended for eight years, now we are on six years going on eight.

Mr. Speaker, what this hon. Minister has indicated today is really no excuse. I want to ask the hon. Minister what happened when you went to the Ministry of Local Government? Did your advisors not inform you that the Member for Tobago East was pursuing local government reform? Did they not tell you that a Green Paper was already published? You did not ask them having regard to the Green Paper being published that a draft White Paper was produced? But you come in this House today with the same items, almost identical to the Green Paper produced by the Member for Tobago East and you are asking us to extend the life to repeat that paper.

Mr. Speaker, what is very noticeable is that this Green Paper on Local government reform is a retrograde step, in that it is not as comprehensive as the first Green Paper and the White Paper. For example, the first Green Paper spoke about the system of financing which I will read for you in a minute. It spoke about executive councils; it spoke about the reformation of the structure of local government, and although today you spoke and repeated most of the items mentioned in both the Green and White Papers before, the paper which you have presented to this House is not as comprehensive as the first paper.

**Mr. Manning:** For good reasons.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Mr. Prime Minister, do not get emotional. I am not attacking anybody personally.

**Mr. Maharaj SC:** That is love boy, love.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Mr. Speaker, I have now found out the Member for San Fernando East's Achilles heel.

The first Green Paper which was presented in 2004 did, in fact, make some improvements on the Act, in that it spoke about flexible financing, modernizing the system, changing the boundaries and it made some recommendations about the changing of the boundaries.

Mr. Speaker, the summary of the Green Paper could be found—the library was not open during the weekend, so I could not have put my hands on it—in the appendix of the White Paper and I refer you to Appendix 3. Before I go to that, let me look at this Green Paper and show you how it has already been dealt with before. It spoke about capital and infrastructural asset management, and this White Paper also spoke about capital asset management. It spoke about utilizing project management and methodologies. The White Paper spoke about that. Hon. Minister, your Green Paper spoke about financial management of municipal corporations; the White Paper also spoke about that.

#### **2.45 p.m.**

If one looks at page 76 of the White Paper on finances, one would see the collection of rates and taxes; collection and retention of revenues, fees, dues and charges; a block vote; unspent balances to move forward and there will be no stage where money not spent by local government would go back to the Consolidated Fund. If one looks at the Green Paper again, one would see under the heading, Financial Management, municipal corporations complying with

accounting policies and procedures; preparing, reviewing and approving annual operations; operating on capital budgets; participating in the valuation of capital and infrastructure projects; monitoring, evaluating and reviewing capital and other expenditures; conducting periodic audits and cost reviews; ensuring the integrity of all business processes and accounting systems; compiling, processing and interpreting; disseminating financial and operational information to internal and external stakeholders; providing cash flow projections for capital and infrastructure projects; facilitating the development of commercially viable options in the sphere of local tourism.

This has been dealt with in Act 21 of 1990. If one looks at section 108 of the Municipal Corporations Act, one will see under Financial Provision that that is dealt with. For this Minister to deal with this, one can see that that was already dealt with in the Act. Having looked at the Act and having had a Green Paper before on this issue, if one looks at Article 3.42 in the White Paper produced by the hon. Member for Tobago East, one will see that that issue has been dealt with. Hear what is said in that White Paper:

“Local Government financing from the National Budget was clearly inadequate, recognizing that Local Government System must serve the needs of the total population in those areas mandated by its governing legislation.

Moreover, approved allocations were not fully disbursed and they were often irregular and unpredictable.”

That came out of the consultation in the Green Paper.

“In this regard, the Ministry of Local Government would initiate discussions with the Ministry of Finance with a view of addressing the following:

- The allowed amount of funding. This should be based on the demonstrated needs of each Local Government body, as well as local government area’s contribution to the national revenue.
- Reliability of funding. The time line for receipt of the allocations approved by the Parliament.
- Disbursement of funds by the Ministry of Finance. Ofttimes, the actual disbursement of funds for effective planning is not a guarantee.”

Look how they dealt with the White Paper which was presented by the hon. Member for Tobago East. When one looks at the Green Paper produced by the hon. Minister, one will see that it is almost the same. If one looks at page 20 in

the White Paper, one will see that that issue was also dealt with. When the Minister came here and gave us the impression that local government reform is so new and they are now embarking upon, it has been dealt with already in the former Green Paper and the White Paper. To come here and give the impression that you so care about local government and are anxious to have local government reform, as though it is the first time you are introducing it, I indicate to you, Madam Minister, that you are just going over the same exercise which has been done before.

They speak about human resource management. Go back and look at the Green Paper and you will see that it had dealt also with human resource management. This White Paper has also dealt with human resource management. It spoke about ensuring that you have experts in local government. Look how detailed it is in the White Paper and look how flimsy it is in your paper. This ground has already been covered. The White Paper at page 34 says:

“Human resource planning, management and development strategies and systems are woefully lacking...”

The hon. Minister told us that today as though it is the first time she is hearing about it. That work has already been done.

“...development strategies and systems are woefully lacking and a multi-pronged approach has to be adopted, if there is to be any serious turnaround, consistent with the new system of local government being envisaged. The issue of human resources is pivotal to decentralization conversation and indeed to the very existence of Local Government bodies, since effective and efficient service delivery to the people can only be realized through the input of the human element.”

Look how deep they went.

Compare that, hon. Minister, with what you have said. In your paper you spoke about human resource management and improving the administrative technical managerial skills to increase and enhance productivity. It has been dealt with in the White Paper since 2006. You spoke about recruiting, training and developing employees—this paper dealt with that—engaging in performance management utilizing best practice methodologies; developing, implementing and evaluating training plans utilizing international practices. You are giving the impression that it is the first time. The words might be different here and there, but your White Paper has it. It says:

“...human resources...needs to be addressed at two levels—quality of councillors and the quality and competence of the staff.”

I am going to talk about the staff. I do not want to talk about the other issues. One of the reasons for the poor quality staff at local government is that when the Central Training Unit (CTU) was disbanded, no alternative was put in place, so that basic human interaction, communication and service skills that would have been taught at the CTU are now unavailable.

You did not address that in your paper. Your paper is a White Paper and you have gone back to a policy position. That policy position was dealt with in the first Green Paper of 2004. They flushed out that Green Paper and went into details. What are we doing? Are we reinventing the wheel or playing for time to extend the life of local government for political purposes?

Look how detailed this has gone. I am reading this to you hon. Minister to merely indicate to you and Members of the Government, how detailed is the amount of work that has gone into local government reform and you threw it away. You ignored it. Why? Is it because he did it? You mean to say that you did not read this? It says:

“Local Government authorities need to begin exposing staff to skills training consistent with current and projected future needs...and capacities...

...the system must attract more professionals...”

What did your paper say? Did your paper go into that detail? Why did you have to bring that paper now? Why are you wasting so much money with these consultants? The work has been done already.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Princes Town North has expired.

*Motion made,* That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. P. Manning*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. S. Panday:** I was telling the Minister, “You are wasting time, money and resources because you have said nothing new in this new Green Paper.” We do not trust—as a matter of fact, this paper goes on for three pages, about human resources. All you have to do is to read it and implement it. Put the legislation in place, Mr. Prime Minister.

The hon. Minister came with four aspects of human resources when you have a White Paper which has dedicated a number of pages to that issue.

Social services. Is that something new? Do you need a year for that reform? After we have spent almost three years considering the issues of local government reform, do you need more time to do the same thing? The Act also spoke about the social services. This Green Paper says:

“Social services

- Address the social aspect of sustainable communities to allay tension between groups based on race, politics, religion and gender and income and disparity.
- Build consensus for major projects, through town meetings, focus group meetings.”

You need to spend millions of dollars in consultancy for that? The consultation was to promote local culture, community events and sporting activities while working with the relevant ministries. That has been addressed many times before.

**3.00 p.m.**

- “● co-ordinate the works of social sector agencies, working jointly with the Ministry of Social Development;
- establish street services and installing street furniture;
- develop a vibrant municipal community policing service.”

Hon. Minister, did you read Act No. 21 of 1990? Did this Act address the issue of streets? Did it, hon. Minister? Indeed, I want to humbly submit to you, hon. Minister, this Act dealt with the issue of street naming. Therefore, when you come here today and speak about street naming, as though it is a big thing and you want an additional year to put into effect, I want to humbly submit that the Minister should read section 232 of the Green Paper—*[Interruption]* I am coming to you Mr. Prime Minister.

The social services, as I have said, have already been dealt with in the Green Paper and the White Paper. This paper is a small part of the former Green Paper. Somebody fooled you, Madam Minister. They took out a small part of the first Green Paper and gave it to you and you have presented it as though you have never seen it before and it is something new. What did you speak about? This local government reform speaks only about the roles and responsibilities of local government. The Green Paper spoke more about—When you spoke about the



roles of local government, you spoke about a few issues: municipal management, financial management, social services, economic development, environmental management and resilient communities. Those are the only issues you have addressed. All those issues—if you take the time and go to the White Paper, the Green Paper and the former Act, you would see—and more, have been dealt with in that Act.

Mr. Speaker, they went on to speak about economic development. If you read the White Paper, again you would see that the White Paper has dealt with that issue. The White Paper has spoken about the economic development. In her Green Paper, it spoke about facilitating the preparation and implementation of regional local area development plans and collaborating with other agencies to improve market access and facilities.

Right now, under the present Act, there is a provision where local government meets these various agencies to deal with this issue to encourage partnership, waste management and water distribution, collaborate with agencies to facilitate construction of infrastructure and monitor physical planning and development commercially. I would read yours and I would read the Act and show you what happens.

You say environmental management. What is this new thing that you have come out with, environmental management? The Minister is doing as though you need a space scientist to deal with environmental management. It states:

“To address local government issues to support development of sustainable communities, maintain local recreation facilities, public pastures,”—et cetera—  
“facilitating access to potable water, proper sanitation services and electricity.”

I would not waste much time on this issue, but merely say that the following functions are exercisable by the corporation in the municipality in addition to those already vested under the Act.

I would read section 232:

“distribution of truck borne water; provision, maintenance and control of corporation buildings.”

In this new paper you said that you are going to maintain buildings which are not under any agency. Which building is not under a government agency?

“Maintenance and control of homes for the aged, childcare centres, dealing with watercourses under environmental management, provision and maintenance”—hear it—“and control of parks, recreation grounds, beaches, other public places as the President may, from time to time, prescribe.”

I could go on and on.

“the maintenance of state properties including...”

This Act is wider than the Green Paper. The Green Paper is a regressive step, because the Act speaks of the maintenance of state properties, including police stations, health centres, post offices, other government buildings. You say only buildings which are not under the control of any agencies. This is a retrograde step. To ask for time to put this in order, I humbly submit, is a scam on the people.

“Dey talking about dey so love local government and dey want to protect local government?” But this Government has done everything in its power to destroy local government. They have choked local government for funds. When they say that local government cannot respond as fast as they can, it is because they do not have funds. You have choked them for funds. The method of obtaining finances to run the corporation is laborious and long-winded. By the time local government attempts to get the money, they cannot move. However, what you have done is continuously choked local government. You have destroyed local government. What they have done is formed a number of special purpose companies. Most of those special purpose companies are to perform the same function of local government. How is it that you want to talk about putting a vibrant local government body? You are so loving and caring and you are murdering local government.

With respect to the development funds, when one looks at the disbursements to local government, one would see that it is approximately \$5 million per annum. When one looks at the amount of moneys which they are giving to these special purpose companies such as the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago—you want local government to fix pavilions and recreation grounds and you have given them less than \$5 million per annum for such a wide area. The Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago, in 2006, got \$74,788,188. Why did you not give that to local government if you love local government so much? In 2007, the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago got \$27,764,479. Do you believe if you have given local government that they could not perform?

In 2006, NEDCO received \$238 million; 2007, \$270 million. In 2006, the Education Facilities Company received \$27 million; 2007, \$246 million. Palo Seco Enterprises, in 2007, received \$71,048,100. Look at the kind of money they are giving to those companies. Those companies are performing the functions of local government. Your aim is to destroy local government. When you come here today to ask for an extension to postpone the election and give local government that extra year, that is to get time to further murder and destroy local government

and we are not giving you that time. Palo Seco Enterprises, \$71,048,100. These are questions from Parliament. When one looks at the functions of these companies, one could see that these companies are stacked with PNM hacks. Palo Seco Enterprises, is that not headed by a person who acts as a PNM Senator?

**Mr. Manning:** Who is it?

**Mr. S. Panday:** Primus is his name. I do not want to call people's names. The "big boy" in the Education Facilities Company, was he not a PNM candidate in Cumuto/ Manzanilla? "Yuh forget, Mr. Prime Minister?"

**Mr. Manning:** You are completely misguided.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Who is the Chief Executive Officer of the Rural Development Company? Is it not Prakash Saith? Who is Prakash Saith? "He is not an official in the company?" Therefore, those companies—when you look at local government, there are auditors' reports. Who audits those companies? That is why the Member for Nariva could tell us that a drain 300 feet cost \$1.2 million.

Hear how that operates. They would go into the local government areas without telling the local government authority that they are coming. Local government, with the small amount of money, have to stretch the money and say: "There is a drain 200 feet here." They would do about 50 feet, hoping to do it in a three-year period. After they have spent money there, Palo Seco Enterprises and those special purpose companies would go in and do over the work. They are undermining.

The Prime Minister remembers what he said in the last Parliament. He said that he does not want any politics in those things. "Members of Parliament do not ask those companies to do any work in your constituencies." Did you not say so?

**Mr. Manning:** I would say it again.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Right, I would show you something in a minute. Those companies are under the direct control of the Minister, a PNM Minister, and the PNM Minister tells them where to do the work. There is no mechanism to decide where they are doing this work and they do it only in the PNM areas.

I would tell you about a question which was answered in this House with respect to the number of projects that were done in Sixth Company, as compared with the rest of Princes Town. Tell us, Mr. Prime Minister, how many were done there? I checked my records and I see in the Princes Town area, only where the PNM won those polling divisions, those are the areas where they are spending money. You are discriminating against the people. You are undermining local

government. Mr. Prime Minister, the constituency of Princes Town North have decided that they want to—somebody fooled them and told them that is an area where they could get some votes.

Sancho Branch Road, do you remember, you went to those meetings, Madam Minister? They spent one heap of money on Sancho Branch Road. The Minister was announcing, as though she is the mother giver, that this would be fixed that would be fixed before election. Lo and behold, when the results came out, they did not get the votes they anticipated. It is alleged that the Minister closed down the project. Tell Palo Seco Enterprises—[*Interruption*] The people in the village. They closed down the project. “When dey cyah win it, dey close down the project.” This is the way that the Government is operating.

**3.15 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, when you ask questions in the Parliament, in order to hide the information to prevent us from trying to find out where they are doing the work they would say: “Box drain, 450 feet by Light Pole No. 28. Where? Which street? Where are they doing the work?—box drain, 490 feet; driveways, from Light Pole No. 32 to Light Pole No. 29. Where? When you talk about local government problems and corruption: What about these companies? These companies are under the direct control of Ministers. They have decided to use state resources, not only to undermine local government, but to build bases in certain places to win election. Mr. Speaker, when they got the shock in Sancho Road—after they ate all the curried duck and got all kind of mamaguy—they closed down the project.

Mr. Speaker, when we asked questions about these companies, the hon. Minister replied and said that they did box drains, landslips and paved roads, et cetera, and all those works could be done by local government. So, when the hon. Minister comes here today and says that they want to have this new system, I humbly submit that is not the true reason. As a matter of fact, whenever the PNM does anything, you have to be careful of what they do. When they brought the first amendment in 2006, they did not amend the Bill as they are doing today. In 2006, when they amended the Bill, they said that the life of the council comes to an end and the councillors would now have to choose the aldermen. At that time, hon. Prime Minister, you said that the purpose was to facilitate local government reform, but nothing that the PNM does is for the people. They tried to deal with their own party problems using legislation, because they wanted to get rid of Atherly. [*Desk thumping*] You wanted to “lick up” Atherly. That is why they framed the amendment as they did in 2006.

Mr. Speaker, you will remember that the Member for Arouca North, who was the then Minister of Local Government—when we argued that they were using this for their own internal politics—said that he is sure that we have one or two persons that we want to get rid of. They think that we operate the same way. When the PNM comes before this House and gives the impression that they care about the people, they do not care about the people at all. They only care about themselves. They also wanted to steal the Rio Claro Regional Corporation because the results were 4/4, and destiny was against them. You know which destiny that I am talking about, Mr. Prime Minister. *[Laughter]*

They went to Rio Claro, and when the odds went against them, I think they got one alderman more, but they did not get the corporation. By the polling system, you decided afterwards—Atherly gone! We do not care about Atherly again—to come with this amendment, and that is why the 2007 amendment is identical to the 2008 amendment. The question is: Do they really care about local government reform?

Hon. Minister, do you remember what you read in this House last year with respect to question No. 142? The question asked was: “Could the Minister list the recommendations for local government reform received from members of the public on public consultation.” The reply was—too long to read—community transparency, more facilities for youths, better distribution of water, manner of responses from villagers, well-trained police service, staff and environment. Every single thing that is in this Green Paper is contained in the answer you gave long before you brought the Green Paper.

How could you come now and say that you have this process in train when you had all the answers? Read question No. 142 which was delivered by your good self. *[Interruption]* There were about 50 or 60 recommendations, including what you brought to the Parliament today. So, you really cannot come to this Parliament today and tell us that it is for that reform you want the extension. It is something more than that.

**Mr. Maharaj SC:** The process is flawed. *[Laughter]*

**Mr. S. Panday:** This PNM Government does not believe in democracy. When people vote for councillors they vote for them for three years. Sometimes they might be good, so give them the opportunity to be reelected. Sometimes they do not work properly, so give the people the opportunity to move them, but this Government does not care. They have saddled certain communities with councillors. It is six years, and they are talking about democracy and reform!

*Municipal Corporations (Amdt.) Bill*  
[MR. PANDAY]

*Monday, July 07, 2008*

They have no respect for democracy! They are going to destroy all the institutions. As the hon. Member for Tabaquite said, the process is flawed. People who have been called before the commission, you have called them underhand—undermining and destroying the Constitution and, today, you are destroying local government for your own purposes.

What I suspect is the purpose is having regard to the behaviour of the PNM and the track record of the PNM. They do not care about local Government. What they want to do is house pad. That is why when you asked questions in the Parliament about the list of persons who have obtained government houses and apartments, they said that the provision of the list of names and addresses of applicants to the Housing Development Corporation who received government houses and apartments would undermine the necessary privacy and confidentiality relationship between the corporation and its client. They are only excuses, because they do not want to say who they are putting in those houses. They do not want to give us the names. My feeling is that they want to take time to house pad and voter pad, and next year they are going to postpone this election again if the house padding is not completed. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, when they have put the house padding in place—they are boasting now that they have a member in each corporation—then they are going to come here and behave like a “wajang”, or go outside and behave like a “wajang”. “We will beat them in the North, we will beat them in the South, we will beat them in the East and we will take all the local government bodies.” They are planning for that now. They have no love for local government. You do not want to get it by the sheer efficiency, you want to take your people and plant them in other constituencies to win by that method. Why are you not telling us the names of the persons so that we can check them out?

The same Minister of Local Government said that they would take Princes Town North, and when they got the shock of their lives, they went back to Princes Town North and say now that they are going to put 4,200 houses so that they can win Princes Town North. That is why they do not want to give the names. They are going to give PNM hacks those houses. Why do they not give us the names? They are hoping to win Princes Town by that method. That is why you are going to put houses in Princes Town and bring PNM people to take them. That is what you are doing! You are asking for an extension of the term to complete that.

They are talking about food prices being high, but they are taking good arable lands in Princes Town to build houses. Give people in Princes Town the houses

and not PNM hacks! That is what we are saying. That is why they are afraid to tell us who are the persons they are putting in those houses. The people must open their eyes—whichever party they belong to, they must open their eyes—because there will be a common fight, and the common fight is to prevent the PNM from house padding and stealing the election.

Mr. Speaker, they do not care about winning the election on merit. What you want to do is to use the State's resources in order to voter pad and to change the demographics and win the election. That is the purpose of this amendment. We are not going to support the extension of the life of local government, but we are requesting local government election now. All things are in place for them and we should go to the polls.

Mr. Speaker, thank you.

**Mr. Speaker:** Before I call on the next Member to contribute, by agreement between the Leader of Government Business and the Chief Whip, we will revisit "Statement by Minister". I now call upon the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development.

**STATEMENT BY MINISTER**  
**Privileges—House of Representatives**  
**(Hon. Rennie Dumas)**

**The Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development (Hon. Rennie Dumas):** Mr. Speaker, thanks to you and Members of this House for affording me the opportunity to give a personal explanation in the matter of privileges raised by the Member of Parliament for Siparia on Friday, July 04, 2008, and seeking to refer the Member for Tobago East to the Committee of Privileges of the House for misleading the House on Friday, June 27, 2008.

Mr. Speaker, my statement was based on information provided by the office responsible for VAT at administration, in a guide on the Value Added Tax Act at page No. 64, with reference to Schedule 2, labelled "zero-rating", section 3(8) and citing the amendment of the Finance Act, 1992 as their source, and listing the zero-rated goods (a-z) and (a.a-a.w) from which I quoted.

From her memory, using the benefit of her long service in this House, the Member for Siparia advised me that I may have erred. In full respect, I assured her that with validation of her opinion, I would advise the House of my error. She promised to provide the relevant Orders.

*Statement By Minister*  
[HON. R. DUMAS]

*Monday, July 07, 2008*

I thanked her and she did send me a note on Monday, June 30, 2008, accompanied by copies of two Legal Orders. The Orders provided had no relevance to VAT Orders.

Mr. Speaker, I then successfully engaged my own resources to seek the Orders. On Friday, July 04, 2008, before we could confer in the ladylike, and I hope, gentlemanly and collegial manner in which the conversation had previously proceeded, and before I had the opportunity to address the matter in the House, I found myself ambushed and accused by the Member for misleading the House. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, the information is as presented by the Member of Parliament for Siparia. In 1989, the then NAR government zero-rated a number of items for VAT by Schedule No. 2 of Act No. 37 of 1989. This list was extended by a number of subsequent Legal Notices made by successive governments.

I humbly apologize for the error made on Friday, June 27, 2008. I assure you that there was no intent to mislead the house, but an error on relying, as I did, on a deficient, though official document.

I, therefore, thank you for your advice and your ruling.

**3.30 p.m.**

**MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS (AMDT.) BILL**

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. Member for Tobago East. Are you contributing? [*Interruption*] The hon. Member for Fyzabad.

**Mr. Chandresh Sharma (Fyzabad):** Mr. Speaker, having called the Member for Tobago East, it is clear that the Government really has nothing to say, because it is in the habit of doing very little.

You will agree—and I think all Members here, in fairness to themselves would agree that the contribution of the Member for Princes Town North tells a very, very clear story. It paints for us the real situation in Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, Members on both sides have taken an oath of office to serve and to serve without fear or favour. Having heard from the Member for Princes Town North, what is very, very clear is that this Government is a Government of spite.

It seems to be a Government of hate, because when you listen to what the Member for Princes Town North said to us today, it is clear that this Government has no care, no love for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. How it is and why it is the Government will go at so much pains to punish the people of Trinidad and Tobago? In fact, when I listened to the Minister of Local Government, one could not help but feel sorry for her.



The hon. Minister did indicate that she is making reference to the Market Opinion Research International (MORI) poll, to information that obtains already. In fact, in her contribution she thanked the hon. Member for Tobago East, the former Minister. Why did she thank the hon. Member for Tobago East? He must have done something good in her eyes. What he did at that time was to collect this very information that is presented for this Parliament's consideration on the third occasion. What did the Minister say that is new? What we did not hear; what the country was hoping to hear is how and what corrective measures are going to be made available almost immediately.

We have sitting, the Member for St. Ann's East, a former chairman of a regional corporation and others who have come from the local government arena. There is no need for all these international consultants. In fact, I heard the hon. Minister make reference to Vishnu Ragoonath, a professor at the University of the West Indies and an authority at local government. But when you look at the consultancy, it always goes to their friends and families abroad. You will recall from Jamaica came Mr. Hamilton through the UNDP. What has become of his contribution? We heard a tribute paid to Mr. Price who should be getting a pension very soon, because he has served under the NAR, PNM, UNC and back with the PNM. So, what new information is really coming?

**Mr. Dumas:** You trying to fire the man?

**Mr. C. Sharma:** I do not need to fire him. He has good PNM connections; I am sure he will continue. The point, Mr. Speaker, is what did the Minister need to know to treat with people with some small degree of care and love?

Let me take you to the Siparia Regional Corporation. I first want to pay tribute to all of the 126 local government practitioners. They have served and they have served for very little and I want to make some recommendations, if I can capture the attention of the hon. Minister. Hon. Minister, I want to make some recommendations as they relate to the local government practitioners. They have been going for three-plus years beyond their call of duty, having been elected and nominated some time ago. We had made recommendations for their health package to be considered. In fact, we have one Member who had to receive medical attention; was unable to pay for it in Trinidad; went to the United States and his office was declared vacant.

Secondly, we talked about the pension for local government practitioners; we must treat with them. You cannot have people serving for six years, non-stop, without any vacation and without any consideration. I want to suggest that some consideration be given, that they all obtain financial assistance and another assistance in having a vacation.

We had also made the point of a tax-free car. Why do you treat the local government practitioners that badly? They are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Again, we should make available—and this is one of the recommendations I wish to put on the table—a tax-free car, as obtains in other places. There is the need for offices. Where are local government practitioners expected to carry out their trade? They do not have any offices nor do they get any assistance for that. I want to suggest that one office be made available to them in every electoral district in Trinidad and I suspect the same obtains in Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, we had also suggested that the local government practitioners—because having heard from the Minister, she is saying that we need to lift the level of the programmes at the University of the West Indies, UTT and elsewhere; be made available at no cost, with some encouragement, financial assistance for travelling, the purchasing of books, et cetera, so all local government practitioners would be able to read for the diploma in local governance or the certificate course. I think now there is bachelor's degree course available as well. We need to make sure we lend them support. We need to make sure we communicate with them that help is available.

We have heard, since Act 21 of 1990, all our local government offices are under-staffed and you do not need a consultant to tell you that each should have a chief medical officer, an engineer, a treasurer, an attorney-at-law and those things can be filled. In addition to that, the daily-paid staff. In every corporation in Trinidad the numbers are below 50 per cent at this time. The reason you are not correcting this is because you are using—and I do not mean you, personally, I mean the Government—URP and CEPEP, which is not complementary to the local government work.

The other dangerous thing there is that you are removing the institutional memory. You see in local government you have drains, watercourses and so, that the guys know of who have been there for 15, 20 and 30 years. When the other young employees come on board they are trained and shown the way. In fact, the practice of treating with those concerns are best within the local government bodies and you want to make sure that that is attended to.

You also indicated what are some of the issues. I have made the point of a shortage of manpower and for too long we have been raising this. In fact, every Member from time to time would indicate that. In all the corporations we have found a shortage of building inspectors, so building plans are held back ever so often. We are finding people who have to borrow money, take loans; they are unable to get the completion certificates on time, simply because of the shortage of manpower.

We have seen the land development, the Government thrust on housing, breaking the law and disrespecting the corporations in the process. For instance, building developments and building construction across the country and in particular, Penal, Debe, Couva, Tunapuna, Chaguanas, to name a few, are not considered. So, you go and put up all these fancy building plots. We want to make it very clear, the Opposition is not against the building of houses, not at all, never. We are in favour of equality, fairness, transparency and we want to make sure the law is observed as much as possible.

When you go and do a development, let us take Penal/Debe, there are no recreation grounds on these facilities; there is no garbage collection; the drainage has to be maintained by the regional corporation and they are underfunded; they do not have the manpower. So, what you end up with is a health risk for many, many people. These are simple things that you do not need a consultant, so telling us today that you need a consultant and the likes of so many people from all over the world—

Enforcement of the Litter Act. You spoke earlier about the pick up of solid waste that is totally disorganized. If you pass in front of any community you will see old fridges, stoves and so, waiting there for weeks and months. Let us have a national clean up; make it available. You do not need a consultant for that. When you do these consultations, I notice oftentimes you leave out the Members of the Opposition. There is absolutely no need to ignore our work; we all have a contribution to make. It is the only way we would have a good country.

Supply of food badges. Many areas have one health inspector. The Minister of Tourism is concerned with the eating places across the country, but you are not giving the resources. How are we going to issue these food badges? You see, if you had consulted with the local government and with us on this side, you could have had the election next week; there is not much work needed. The point made by the Member for Princes Town North indicates that you are doing it for other reasons, which I will touch on later.

Hon. Minister, one of the provisions by the corporations is grants of financial assistance for charitable and needy cases from the Chairman's Fund. I want you to request from every chairman where those moneys have gone, and they are small amounts of moneys. You will see 90 per cent go to PNM party groups. It is not a fair distribution. It is very disturbing for the small village community group. If you are not affiliated with the PNM, you get absolutely nothing.

A simple supply—a school is having sports and they seek a tent or so, or a village group is having a bazaar and they ask for a washroom facility. Look and

see where they are going and I will demonstrate some of it in a bit. Lifeguard services are the responsibilities of these regional corporations. In many beaches in this country they are not available. Some come under the Ministry of Tourism and others from the regional corporation. Again, what is the difficulty in hiring people? This is July/August and our children are on holidays, they would go to the beaches. We want to make sure it is safe. So, it is simple little things that do not require consultants; that do not require a whole year to implement. The Government is not short on money, when you look at the quantum of money spent elsewhere.

This collection of property rates and taxes, it does not seem to be uniform across the board and citizens are not sure how it is being done; why it is being done; what is the process. I think the time has come where there must be some public education in that area. Mr. Speaker, have you gone to a rural market in recent times? Have you been to the Penal market, or the Siparia market, or the Couva market? They are lacking a lot of services, simple things like washrooms, et cetera and I cannot see what a consultant has to do with the provision of electricity, cleaning up after a market day, et cetera.

Many, many of the corporations have indicated this whole question of policing and I cannot think of a single corporation—maybe the 10 I have looked at—that are up to mark with their police officers. One reason for it is that the PNM seems to want to have certain people in those areas; there is not a clear process. One would have thought if you wish to become a police officer attached to a corporation there should be a public policy, a public forum from which you could go and apply, whether on the website or there is a national forum—common—throughout the country, so if the guy wants to serve in Siparia, Point Fortin or Chaguanas, there should be a form; all he has to do is tick off Chaguanas or Point Fortin as the case might be.

The hon. Minister made reference to the MORI poll. What did the MORI poll say? It said that people are losing confidence in the local government bodies. Now this MORI poll is less than six weeks old from my understanding. There was a previous poll three years ago that showed good conduct and something has happened. What has happened is the Government has begun to interfere with them politically; they are not making the resources available. Why is it that people are upset? They cannot get their drains cleaned; they cannot get street lighting installed, the cemeteries, et cetera.

I want to suggest that from every corporation within the next one month, that a comprehensive list be made available to this Parliament and to the hon.

Minister, indicating what resources are required; what areas they are falling short on these services. Because as I have indicated, many, many areas are without services at this time. When you look at the moneys available, which I will come to in a bit, it is grossly underfunded, and there must only be one reason, because the Government is aware of that. This matter has been raised with the hon. Prime Minister in his previous manifestation as a Minister of Finance and his capacity as Prime Minister. It has been raised with the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Local Government. Why are you not making moneys available to the regional corporations?

**3.45 p.m.**

In some instances you have \$2 million and \$3 million for goods and services, you are spending \$50 million for salaries and wages, so you have very little money for goods and services, so you cannot get delivery, and at the same time you are making all these projects available, IRID. Now, I want to congratulate all the contractors who have gotten those jobs. I am sure many of them performed to the best of their ability, but they lack supervision in many instances. Many authorities, including authorities within the regional corporations, have indicated and demonstrated that you are not getting value for money. Do you need a consultant to come and tell you that? So what quantum of money are we throwing away at these projects?

Mr. Speaker, when you look at what obtains in Trinidad and Tobago in terms of the holidays, the festivals and so, and you look at the moneys available to maintain them to lend support to them; like Emancipation Day, Eid-ul-Fitr, Divali, Labour Day to name a few, all the public holidays. We are not seeing the funding coming from the corporations or we are not seeing a fair funding arrangement and this should not be so. We should make sure that the corporations are in a position, in the first instance, to celebrate the national festivals and public holidays within the corporation and to lend support where necessary. There must be some efforts to co-ordinate the efforts, meaning that the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs does not give moneys to the same organization that the corporations have to give to. So there must be a clear policy, and for some reason we are not seeing those things availing themselves.

To fully understand and to appreciate what are some of the findings in preparation for this debate, in speaking to most of the corporations—and I have had the good fortune of speaking to both PNM controlled and UNC controlled; nine under the PNM watch and five under the watch of the UNC—one critical area or the main challenge in many of them affecting the work of the corporations was

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[MR. SHARMA]

*Monday, July 07, 2008*

the lack of sufficient funding, and I cannot emphasize on that. Make moneys available, tell the national community what moneys you are making available. Oftentimes when we write to the regional corporations as Members of Parliament, as citizens, the first issue that comes up—funding is not available for that.

In some areas the shortage of funds was so severe that many corporations were unable to deliver simple little work. This cannot be so! We are in the rainy season and we have been seeing a heavy flow of rain recently and many areas are already beginning to flood. Drainage work is very poor because of lack of resources. Road paving in the community, we saw in a by-election in Siparia on election day the Government was paving the roads, as soon as the election was over, paving stopped. Of course, they won the seat, so maybe justified their investment. But this cannot be so.

Now, the Member for Princes Town North—oftentimes when we make these points you ignore them. It is time you stop ignoring them. He indicated, based on scientific evidence that the areas that are receiving Government's attention are areas that seem to be supporting the PNM. Let us assume that is correct—

**Mr. Imbert:** All the areas are PNM.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** And that foolish statement by the Leader of Government business, “all the areas are PNM” is nonsense, because you cannot continue dismissing it so lightly. My fear and the fear of a large sector of this population is that the citizens of this country are going to rise up one day because they are beginning to feel pressured. Too many of our people are beginning to feel that the Government “doh like we”, and that cannot be correct.

Now, assuming what the Member for Princes Town North said is correct, what are we doing about it? How is it that where the projects are, it is always in PNM electoral districts? When they go into UNC electoral districts, it is the geographic area where they get the most PNM votes. It could not be by accident on every occasion. So, somebody in Government is doing ugly things. And that is why I said, it appears as if the Government has a small hate agenda. I know the hon. Prime Minister will not tolerate that, but it cannot be that every time we come and say it, it is dismissed and we say it next year again.

There must be a concerted effort—hon. Prime Minister you must bring to bear your Christian values and say: Is what the Opposition saying correct? I am going to treat with it. Go on national television and tell the country, "I am fed up of hearing from the Member for Fyzabad, the Member for Princes Town North and

others. I have looked at it, it is incorrect or it is correct, and if it is correct we are going to implement these things. Not a single representation made by Members of the Opposition is treated with. You ask your hon. Ministers in Cabinet, ask any Minister to give you five requests made by Opposition Members that you have treated with—

**Hon. Member:** You might get more.

**Mr. C. Sharma:**—and none will come from Lopinot/Bon Air West, none will come from St. Joseph, none from Princes Town, none from Barataria/San Juan, none from Tobago East, none from Chaguanas East, none from Pointe-a-Pierre. I will stop at Point Fortin. But really, it requires consideration; it requires us to treat with it.

When a corporation—and I have chosen to look at Tunapuna which is made up of PNM Members and UNC Members, 275,000 people, with close to 65,000 households. Hon. Minister, do you know what they are getting for a recreation ground? Two cents per day. I have raised that a thousand times, very little money for water trucking. What prevents us from running water lines? Garbage collection is a sad story. Have you looked at the cemeteries? Thank God I want to be cremated. It is in a sad state. You are happy with the country? [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Manning:** You would like to be.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** I am sure I will be.

**Mr. Manning:** You do not know.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Well, you know, I will go to Belgrove and signed an agreement. The point is, the time has come where we must really take hold of this country, all of us. You must not ignore the call of the Opposition Leader, a unity government. It is not that we want power. We are doing pretty good without the power, but we want to be involved in the governance, in delivering goods and services, not to hold office. Like you, I came in Opposition and I came in the Ministry of Works and Transport as a Parliamentary Secretary from which you came and became the Prime Minister, so there is hope for me. I will wait my turn. [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Manning:** Providing that you really want that job. I do not think you want it.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** I really do not think I want it. But the point I want to make is that the time has come where the country must feel loved. You know, a hurtful thing is when a child does not feel love in his/her own country. When a mother has to tell a child: “I doh know why the Government eh running water by we. I doh know why it eh have no school bus by we.” Too many of those stories are told in many communities.

Hon. Prime Minister, it would be worth your time to look at the public transport bus service and see which areas they are serving. You are in Government and one cannot deny that and there may be a lean on Government side, but it cannot be so wide, which is what we are seeing.

Madam Minister, each electoral district in Trinidad and Tobago represented by a local government practitioner has some concerns in terms of goods and services and many of them have told us, in fact, I have spoken with more than 50 or 60 councillors in the last few days. They are telling us that they are not getting the resources. They are telling us that they have made so much representation. For instance, in one corporation area there are more than 100 wooden bridges—

**Hon. Member:** Princes Town alone has 145.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Princes Town for instance has 145. What do we need over the next five years? Twenty bridges to turn into concrete. Let us really deliver. We are not delivering. You are coming year after year with the same story. You cannot go in any district and see a nice piece of road done or a new bridge erected.

Let us engage the local government. There are a number of people—and I had raised this on the last occasion—a number of professionals who have volunteered to make their services available for free. These guys are engineers, medical doctors, or whatever they are there, they want to add value. There is no system that obtains that allows them to actively participate, so when you talk about these public consultations, they really are going nowhere. Oftentimes do you know what has happened, depending on where you are going, they want you to look good, so they go and invite all their friends and family; invite all the PNM party groups and so and say you all come. So, you are not getting the best consultation. I am not suggesting that these people do not have ideas, but they are coming there not for consultation, they are saying, “we have to make the Minister look good”. Depending in which area you are, if you go Princes Town South/Tableland, you will see a village council which is a sidekick of a PNM party group. Who again you said? [*Inaudible*] And a few others, but really, the time has come where we need to revisit how we do business. [*Interruption*] [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, there has been concern lately of the spread of diseases and the public health department in many of these regional corporations do not have simple spray for the mosquitoes at this time. Of course these things pose a health risk and many of the medical practitioners, who are not attached, because many are without the medical doctors, have been asking for simple things to have these sprays take place.



The day-to-day delivery of services to all the communities is affected. In many areas we drive we do not see street signs. You do not need a consultant to tell you we need to erect street signs and they must be uniform. When you look at some of the other areas, when you look at what obtains in the boroughs in the United Kingdom or even the areas in close by Florida, they are nicely laid out. What prevents us from going there? There are directions, the offices of the practitioners are available, their support from it. We do not need a consultant to tell us that in Trinidad and Tobago. We need to simply say that we are committed to Trinidad and Tobago to the development of all our people regardless of who they are, regardless of where they are and they are going to have equal access to all the goods, services and resources of this country.

Mr. Speaker, why is it that the employees at the regional corporations are not replaced when they have retired or have to leave for one reason or the other? But you are finding employees to go elsewhere; you are finding employees to go in the URP, in the CEPEP and in the other areas, even these other companies that you are establishing. The work of the regional corporations has to go on, and it can only go on if you make the resources available. I want to suggest that we deal quickly with the establishment of the proper workforce for all the corporations at all levels. The monthly paid and the daily paid.

When I look at one of the regional corporations it did not seem to have a proper accounting system; it did not seem to have someone to whom the employees would be responsible, because the employees came from the ministry and they were reporting to a chief executive officer at the regional corporation who really had little control over them. So you cannot want to empower the regional corporations but give the CEO less power.

Mr. Speaker, one cannot help but look at the crime situation and ask, what role can the regional corporation play in reducing it, and some of the areas that they can certainly look at, are the recreation facilities. That is very important, because I think if we can get some resources for the regional corporations, we certainly will be able to have matters attended to in a more meaningful and a more measurable way.

When I looked at the Siparia Regional Corporation for instance, or even the Penal/Debe or Couva, as I have done, I looked to see what was involved. In many of the regional corporations there are approximately 30-plus recreation grounds. Resources for them—very little. In some areas the sports companies are taking over, but there is no system. I want to suggest that over the next three, four years

that a plan is issued for all recreation grounds so our young people can have a place to go; this will reduce the crime to some extent. In addition to that, at different times there are seasons for cricket, for football, for school sports, and there is no provision, no maintenance of these grounds. So in the rainy season you want to go and fix it for cricket, and later down the road you want to go and fix the same thing for football. You know the period for which cricket and football is available.

**4.00 p.m.**

When you look at the cemeteries and the cremation grounds, a lot is required. In fact, I have raised with the hon. Minister of Works and Transport, the question about the cremation site at Mosquito Creek which is under the Siparia Regional Corporation. So when you go the Siparia Regional Corporation, they would say, "You know, it is too big a project for us, we have to talk to the Ministry of Works and Transport." Nothing is happening and it is being washed away.

When you look at the markets, it is a health risk going into some of those markets. Do we really require consultants to come and help us fix those markets? Let us put the markets under some care. Let us have some sub-committees that are responsible, because when you have a regional corporation trying to do 100 different things with less manpower and with less funding, you cannot deliver. Let our marketplaces be places of pride where our young kids can go and purchase whatever they need to. Let them be encouraging; let them come back and write an essay. Do you know if they have to write an essay today—I went to the market, it was stink, the prices were too high and I came back home. Let us reverse that and we could.

**Mr. Ramnath:** That is an excellent point.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Thank you. We must support and encourage each other. *[Interruption]* Do you want to say something?

Mr. Speaker, the question about land development and building developers, there must be a common approach, so that no regional corporations will find themselves, suddenly seeing a land development where there was no consultation.

The Member for Princes Town North also made the point to let the local government bodies lend whatever support they can to the agricultural development. For instance, they do nothing with rural access roads, and one would argue that is the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, but again, there is no system in place, so nobody knows where to go.

Mr. Speaker, in some areas we have seen a heavy increase in traffic and one of the things that we can do is to get the local government bodies to fix all those roads that will allow access elsewhere at the regional corporations. I have asked the regional corporations to identify for us—what does a regional corporation do to promote healthy lifestyles? Absolutely nothing. When you go abroad or any country you go to, the parks and so on are maintained by the local government bodies. I cannot think of a single park that you can walk in, in Point Fortin or in Siparia that allows you that healthy lifestyle. Those are simple little things. Make it available; light it up; fence it; make it available to all the citizens; and make sure it is widespread.

The hon. Minister spoke about developing and encouraging partnership with organizations and really, nothing obtains at this point in time. Why is this so? In every community there are NGOs, CBOs and faith-based organizations. We had suggested on one occasion for the playing fields during the cricket and football, involve the groups; give them some funding to help maintain the ground and they would do a much better job and a much more economical job.

**Mr. Dumas:** *[Inaudible]*

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Say that again.

**Mr. Dumas:** *[Inaudible]*

**Mr. C. Sharma:** From defining. I will allow you to speak in a little bit. Over the years, the UNC had brought information, we had brought consultancy as well, local and foreign, to develop this issue of the collection of garbage and the proper disposal of it, and to make sure we followed what was available internationally. For some reason, it has not come to bear up to this day, so we are destroying the environment; we are destroying our landfill areas; and a lot of it is getting back to our communities and you are seeing illness as a result of it.

You would recall the story of the batteries that were buried in the Wallerfield area. You saw similar situations in Carlsen Field, and today, everything just goes to the dump, and those get back to our drinking water. So again, simple little things and we do not need the consultants for this. There is enough intelligence in this country to treat with the proper disposal of garbage.

Mr. Speaker, there continues to be conflict between the Ministry of Local Government and the Ministry of Works and Transport about responsibility for roads. Perhaps the time has come where all paving of roads should come under one Ministry, maybe the Ministry of Works and Transport. Because what obtains

now is that the Ministry of Local Government does not have the engineers and they do not have the technical staff. As a result, they are paying two and three times and getting poor quality and there is no system. A particular road in the Siparia area was recently paved; right now WASA is cutting it up to lay a water main, so you must know where water mains are required. Let us lay the water mains first; let us do the roads; and when you do the roads, it must be accompanied by drainage and in many instances pavements.

During the last election, in an effort to capture a few votes, the ministry went out and started to build some pavements, they narrowed the roads to get those pavements and it did not make sense. There are more and more vehicles on the road and many buildings are without parking facilities. Many times you go to a business house and the only parking that is available, is on the side of the road, so when two and three vehicles have to pass, they are in serious problems.

The time has come for a uniformed universal approach to street signs. Many people driving throughout the country cannot find signs, cannot get directions. Those are very simple—cost effective ways to do it and we have the ministry with a large capacity to do these signs and sometimes they give it out to private persons and the signs do not come uniformed. The qualities of the signs are failed.

Mr. Speaker, in many corporations, we have raised the question and they have raised the question with us as it relates to utilities: street lights, water mains, even telephones in some areas. I think the time has come where that should be universal. We should agree that every electricity pole in this country should have a street light and it does not require us to say, so much in Fyzabad, so much in Princes Town. Let us make sure it is treated across the board.

Under the partnership that Minister spoke about, should also come from the National Commission for Self-help, water projects for instance. Why is it—hon. Prime Minister, if I may address this question to you—today, some groups still have to raise moneys for National Commission for Self-help projects and others do not have to? Maybe we need to revisit that. So you go into a poor community and they have to raise \$10,000 or \$15,000 and the National Commission for Self-help raises the rest. Other areas get 100 per cent funding. We need to change that.

So all self-help projects, plus the resources of the corporation—oftentimes material should be made available. So if a community is doing a water main, it has to go and pay and hire a backhoe; let the regional corporation's backhoe be made available, as it is available for some communities. So there should be a clear policy. For instance, when I have to do a water project—and you know, Mr.

Prime Minister, have done the most self-help water projects in Trinidad and Tobago, the most [*Desk thumping*]— but the short point of it is that I have to go and get a contractor's backhoe borrowed. The Siparia Regional Corporation will not make it available and that is why I have asked the hon. Minister to look at the requests made to regional corporations. And I will give you the Siparia Regional Corporation as an example. You will see very few requests from the office of the Member for Parliament for Fyzabad treated with very few. That is very sad, more from Point Fortin, more from La Brea. Those are the three services, a little bit of Siparia. What will happen one day? When I run out of excuses of telling the people, "Look, I have sent this letter; I have sent these thousand letters; and I have made 100 phones calls", I will not be able to stop them from taking action that you and I will not want, and I mean that. The worst thing we can do is to frustrate people to the point where you push them around. Because they come into the office of the Member of Parliament and we are making there presentation; we are sending the letters and they are totally ignored.

One may argue, well look, we did not have funding at that time. Whatever the story is, ask all the regional corporations, just tell me the number. You got 100 requests from the Member of Parliament for Fyzabad, forget the personality, and treat with the office. You got 100 requests from the office of the Member of Parliament for Fyzabad, how many did you treat with, and why so few? And that story is told for all of us on this side. We are made to see mas if we just exist. You treat with us as a favour, but it is sad, it is so unfortunate. We do not come here to seek favours; we want to make representation as you do; we want to deliver as you do; and we want to add value to people's life's as you do. Why are you punishing us? Hardly likely you would win any seat if you treat us any worse or any better on this side. Look at efforts you made in Fyzabad; look at moneys you spent in Fyzabad, but a good Member of Parliament is a good Member of Parliament. You would agree with that. [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Stood the test of time for 17 years.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Madam Minister, the need for community markets is increasing. You want to encourage people to plant, but you also want to make sure that they can have a place to sell. They cannot all go to the market because they may not produce that quantum of goods and services. So in every rural community as we had started at one time ago, little roadside markets. This is not to encourage illegal vending—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** Lay-bys.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Lay-bys. Thank you very much. Again, we should make those things available, but the challenge I suspect is that, many times representations that are made by Opposition Members for some reason, go to some file that is not attended to because almost everything that I have said here today, has gone to the relevant Ministers at some point in time. If I write once a year, that is 17 letters more, many ministries will have on their file. A lot of these things are not required for us to raise in the Parliament, but we are raising them because you are not treating with them and you are forcing our constituents to feel that they are not cared for.

When I looked at the minutes of some of the meetings of the regional corporations, there is an arrangement where officers from different agencies will come to those corporations: from WASA, from T&TEC, from the local health, and it seems to me just a courtesy, because they come and listen. If in fact they come, their attendance is very, very poor, that is the first thing, poor, and they come for short periods of time, but they do not treat with the issues raised.

For instance, when the corporations ask for spraying, whoever is responsible for that,—or they ask WASA, "Tell us the roads in our corporations that you are going to lay water mains on, so we will make sure not to pave those roads or wait until you finish." That information does not come, so one day the roads are paved and a few days later the roads are destroyed. So again, there must be an agreement how that is going to be done.

Hon. Minister, the other thing that I have found is that regional corporations, whether UNC or PNM, the CEOs seem to fear treating with correspondence from the Members of Parliament from the Opposition. I do not know why. When I write, I write from the office of the Member of Parliament. I have never written a personal letter to a CEO, but they seem to think that the PNM Government may not like that and do not treat with it. We have seen too many letters unattended and not even the courtesy of a reply. What is the point of writing these letters? What is the point of making representation when you are not treated with?

Mr. Speaker, we have spoken in this Parliament, time and time again about the link with the ODPM and the regional corporations, and for the longest while we have made representation. Up to this day, there is nothing in place to treat with any disaster this country might face. For instance, when you declare a school is a safe centre, nobody knows where to find the person with the keys for that in the event of a disaster. Many times, it is the offices of the Members of Parliament and it is for this reason, I have raised a thousand times with the hon. Prime Minister and anybody else who will listen, the need for a constituency fund.

If I take two minutes Mr. Speaker, as a Member of Parliament, we are required even out of just moral obligation, to treat with the needs of people and every time I give assistance, which I am required to do, which I feel compelled to do, which all Members do, I have to dip into my pockets. For a simple thing, if I want to make tent available for a wake, I have to buy that. If I want to make a tin of biscuits available for a wake. We talk about teenage pregnancy; when a mother comes to my office and she says, "MP, I need help with a tin of Klim." A tin of Klim is \$99.

If I buy 100 tins for the year, that is \$10,000. That is depriving my children of milk, because it is my funds. [*Interruption*]

**4.15 p.m.**

**Hon. Member:** "You have children?"

**Mr. C. Sharma:** The time has come where we need to start treating with our representatives, both at the local level and at this level.

Mr. Speaker, on the previous occasion when this matter came up, we raised with the then Minister the whole question of making sure moneys went for goods and services. The Minister, at the time, indicated that he was going to revisit it and so did the hon. Prime Minister; from then to now there has been no change. There has been absolutely no change. One could quickly make a comparison and say, "Let us look at what obtains in Tobago." [*Interruption*]

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Ramnath:** That time went fast. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Thank you, hon. Prime Minister. You could well imagine the joy the constituents of Fyzabad have in my time extended. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, I was on the point where we have to lay emphasis on funding, because we would be serving no purpose extending the life of the corporation by one year and not giving them the resources. In the conclusion of this debate, from the Government side, there should be a clear understanding that citizens across the country would not suffer as a result of a lack of funding from the regional

corporations. There are really two issues there; one is the question of manpower and the second, of course, is the question of funding. If those two are treated with, in the short-term, we would certainly see an improvement in the delivery of goods and services.

I quickly want to touch on an issue that is emerging; it has to do with landslips in the rural communities. Oftentimes the roads under the watch of the regional corporation get very little money for landslips, so many areas are affected. What is new is that many homes are going down. Once there is a landslip, the house nearest to it would go down, and there are no resources.

The difficulty was that some of these homes are 40 or 50 years old, and they may have been renovated or repaired, et cetera, et cetera. When they have to make a claim, they are asked to give the building plans, but these houses are 30 or 40 years old, there would be no plans for them. They are asked to give the tax numbers; in some of these rural communities there are no taxes collected as yet, so the families are really left alone. Again, they come to the offices of the Members of Parliament; we have to find community help to help them. I thank publicly Mr. Malcolm Jones from Petrotrin, who made some tank sheets available to my constituency and some pipes, and we took this to save a few homes. Again, there is only so much Malcolm Jones could do.

You want to treat with that; you want to make sure where there is a landslip that threatens the home of a resident, some action is given. We need to empower the chief executive officers, wherever they are, to make sure that in the event rain falls heavily over a long weekend, it starts Thursday night, Friday is a holiday, Saturday or Sunday, if we do not move in there very quickly, we would lose homes.

On one occasion when high winds came and roofs were blown off in Fyzabad, I purchased 22 tarpaulins, for which I am still paying. The then Minister, who might have been the Member for St. Ann's East, had promised that they would be paid for, but they were not. The short point is that this could happen to every MP at some point in time. That should have come from the Siparia Regional Corporation, in this instance. They should have known, "Listen, we should have gone out there."

The difficulty was too—and I come back to the constituency fund—when that happened, I was able to mobilize 64 persons. The regional corporation could not respond, because they were closed for the weekend. I was able to bring 64 persons from the non-governmental organizations. I had to feed them; I had to get the materials; I had to get the tarpaulins; I had to get vans; I paid for all of that. Of



course, I got little donations from the community, but the point is, that should not be so. The role of an MP and the role of a local government practitioner were not intended to be that way. You are dealing with a country that has resources, that has money. Where is the money going?

Mr. Speaker, regarding this whole question about safety in the communities; we have written letters. I have written letters about street lighting of the back roads. For some reason, those roads are oftentimes ignored; they are not paved or street lighted. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Manning:** We lit every road in the country! [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. C. Sharma:** I am glad that the Prime Minister's attention has been drawn. We have said on numerous occasions and, again, the evidence is there, that many roads are without street lighting, for which we have made representation. I would be happy to collect, on behalf of the Opposition, and to provide all that information. We have done this; it is not the first time we are doing it.

You see, there is the difficulty of policy. I should be able to communicate with whomever that person is, the hon. Minister in this instance, and say, "Minister, look there are 20 roads that need street lighting." How would I get that information? We go and visit them ourselves; we do not guess this.

You have a situation where there are three sets of persons installing street lights. You have the regional corporation paying for some or getting them installed; you have T&TEC and then you have a national body only. [*Crosstalk*] Let it go to the national body only.

**Mr. Manning:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Excellent. As a short-term measure, hon. Prime Minister, we will make available from each one of us just two roads.

**Mr. Manning:** Send all.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** We will make that available. [*Crosstalk*]

All the regional corporations that I have spoken with—and I have spoken with 10 of them—all need money for drainage at this time. Every single one of them has indicated that they do not have enough money for drainage, and they fear the floods that are going to come; so you may want to consider that immediately.

They have all indicated to me that their recreation grounds are without funding; many have become places for goats, sheep and cows. We need to fence all; we need to

light them up; we need to put washroom facilities in all of them, because we want our kids and elderly persons to make use of those grounds and improve their health.

Every one of the regional corporations I spoke with indicated that more than 15 per cent of their bridges needed repairs or total replacement. I suggest that we consider that immediately. Every single regional corporation I spoke with indicated that they needed moneys to pave roads; that they needed moneys for pavements; they needed money to reduce their water trucking and to start laying water mains. I indicated to those regional corporations that I would certainly raise that today in this contribution.

One of the things that we have found in the communities, and I hope that the Member for Chaguanas East, the hon. Minister, would take it into consideration, was that lately in a number of the rural areas we have power outages. Many areas are without electricity at night. In fact, in my community last night, for more than 45 minutes, the electricity went out. The reason for it was because there are not enough transformers in the area. Again, because of the recent development in the crime situation, more and more persons are increasing their all night lighting; so this is one area that needs to be looked into.

Mr. Speaker, I want to look at some recommendations as indicated. I have made all the observations, and I want to make a few recommendations. One is that an urgent meeting takes place, perhaps, with all MPs, in the first instance, to look at the concerns we have raised. Secondly, a follow up take place with all the local government practitioners, across the board, PNM and UNC. [*Crosstalk*] You could do it for 10 years, whatever you choose. It is your business; you have the majority. Make sure that we do not suffer the people in the process, and that for all the concerns raised there is a timetable for implementation, and where the question of manpower comes up, that public advertisements start to appear.

In many of these corporations where you register to become an employee, do you know how that is done, Minister? You have to go almost every week; that should change. Let us bring one form. Persons who wish to work in the corporations in any field: electrical, plumbing or whatever it might be, they could apply, they are given a number and the system makes available that concern. It does not make sense you send somebody. You have to take a day off; so even if you have a casual job working somewhere, you have to go there every Monday morning to sign. The system is not followed; so somebody could be signing there for three years and somebody else signing for three weeks gets work one way or the other. We need to change that.

Also, we need to make sure that in the regional corporations we do not move persons who do not have the skills into another area. For instance, you need plumbers in every regional corporation, let us make sure we employ plumbers; let us make sure we employ electricians. What happens oftentimes is that somebody who has been there for 10 or 15 years becomes the plumber, of course, acting. I almost said like the Commissioner of Police, but I do not wish to say that.

We want to make sure that the intelligence obtains at the regional corporations. What happens, as is happening now, you are not getting value for money. One of the things I had implemented when I was in the Ministry was that there would be a task force in every regional corporation which would visit every public place, and we had coordination between the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) and the Siparia Regional Corporation; I could use that example. They went to the mandir, the church or the mosque and gave advice, like the plumbing needed fixing, because for every drop of water that drains day and night, we lose thousands of gallons of water.

We looked at the water on the roof, how it was disposed of, because if it was not done properly, it would end up with a landslide; the whole building went down; another building went down. We did the same thing for the electrical, to make sure. All it took was a simple effort that brought back large returns. I would like to see something like that put back into place. Simply put, we need to assist the communities. A number of NGOs in the communities receive absolutely no help.

For instance, I remember during the Eid period, we would send this task force to all the masjids and prepare them for Eid; a simple, little thing; one day or two days work. With the mandirs we would do the same for Divali. For communities observing any of the festivals, Emancipation and so on, we would make that available. Today, what obtains? If you are okay with the PNM, you get help. I better qualify that before it is felt that I am just saying that. I hope this is the last time that I have to show this evidence.

Mr. Speaker, the Siparia Regional Corporation gave assistance for the Independence celebrations to the Siparia West Development Organization; I do not have to tell you that is a PNM party group. In this capacity, they deserved to get assistance, but there were other groups that applied and got nothing. The Fyzabad Development Committee—your side kick PNM candidate Arthur Sanderson—Labour Day celebrations, moneys; carnival celebrations, moneys; Emancipation celebrations, moneys. Do you notice what they celebrate? This is sad. Do you know what another group in the community would say, "We are not taking that anymore." The MP then has to say, "Cool it; things would change."

The Siparia Environ West Committee, carnival celebrations; Siparia Mai; Holy Thursday; Siparia Fete; moneys, assistance. Why is this so? Other celebrations: Siparia West Development Organization, "ol" mas competition; Santa Flora Carnival Committee, a PNM area again, queen show and Monday night mas. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, on that note, it is a good time to break for tea. The sitting of the House is suspended and will resume at 5.00 p.m.

**4.30 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**5.00 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this morning the entire country was saddened by the news of the death of a three-year-old child, whose last name is Ramdial. I do not remember the first name. I just want to direct the Minister's attention to the Act, section 232(d), subject to any other written law, the maintenance and control of child care centres established by the corporations.

The time has come where the corporations need to be given the power to visit these homes or perhaps interim consideration has to be made available where a member of the community, including the parents of the child think that a child could be in a dangerous situation or needs some kind of guidance or attention that the regional corporations could coordinate. That is why I made the point earlier about the coordinating bodies and in many instances some of these bodies do not come to the meetings.

I made the point that WASA needs to attend; T&TEC; the Ministry of Works and Transport, Highways Division in particular; the Drainage Division; Traffic Management Division; the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources; the telephone services; the Medical Officer of Health to include the social services and once you get that coordination you will be in a better position to give help.

Mr. Speaker, I, and many of us, am of the opinion that one of the most important ministries in Trinidad and Tobago is the Ministry of Local Government. From the time you wake up in the morning until you go to bed at night, the first service is that of local government and value can be added to the services that are executed from this ministry.

I want to conclude by making an appeal to the Minister of Finance in particular, that from the investigations done by the staff—and I thank the staff

from the Members of Parliament Offices because this notice came to us on Friday evening and we were able to bring out our staff on Saturday and Sunday and there is no overtime or provision for lunch. But they came out to lend support and do the research and, of course, I thank the House Committee for making the little resources available.

Mr. Speaker, I think one of the assistance that is required for officers of Members of Parliament is the provision of a motor vehicle and a driver, because we have to use our own cars or the cars of the staff to do these things and there is no provision for them to be compensated. Perhaps the time has come where at another place we can look at the provision of a vehicle with a driver.

In conclusion, I wrap up by saying that for the regional corporations to improve their goods and services for the delivery of services that benefit all our citizens, require us to have a good planning unit and many of the corporations I spoke with are without planning units. Many are of the opinion that they are not ready in terms of resources, direction, and in terms of manpower for any disasters, and they are fearful of the rains. They say that this leap year would have a lot of rain. You may also want to look at the required number of police officers for the corporations.

Many have indicated to us that the infrastructure under their watch, the markets, in particular, and the cemeteries are not getting the resources. The shortage of staff needs to be looked at, both daily and monthly-paid and they have suggested that a system be put in place that guarantees a supply of employees available with some degree of training and there must be a meaningful working and measurable relationship with the URP and CEPEP. A suggestion came that where these entities exist in communities that they come under that particular regional corporation watch. The reason being that they will be able to coordinate their efforts; there will be no duplication of work and certainly, they will be adding value. The corporations should be encouraged to develop strategic plans and once they are accepted, the resources follow because very often you come with these plans and there are no resources to go with them.

Finally, as you know, this is a simple majority Bill that does not require support for the extension. I started off by paying tribute to the local government practitioners and I want to conclude by saying that all of them who had been serving for the last six-plus years be treated in meaningful and measurable ways and the resources they require—I highlighted the need for an office, a tax-free vehicle, provisions for a driver—be made available so they will continue to serve.

Thank you very much.

**The Prime Minister (Hon. Patrick Manning):** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to intervene however briefly in this debate which I consider to be one of tremendous import relating as it does, not just to the question of local government election which is the instant matter before us, but giving us an opportunity in discussing that matter, to look at this whole question of the system of local government and the acknowledged need for reform of that system of government.

In making my contribution, I would be very remiss if I did not take the opportunity to congratulate the very distinguished Minister of Local Government on her contribution on this matter. [*Desk thumping*] I thought that her contribution was very lucid, and under normal circumstances, it may not have been necessary for me to intervene in the debate, but hon. Members opposite, particularly my good friend from Princes Town North, and the distinguished Member from the constituency of Fyzabad, made contributions that ought not to be left entirely unattended.

Mr. Speaker, local government has been an issue and the system by which local government is conducted in Trinidad and Tobago has been an issue for some considerable time. Some say that because of the size of countries like ours, there is no need for local government at all. Indeed, in Barbados, not too long ago, the system was abolished. As you go to larger societies, not only is the system more entrenched, but also the responsibilities given to local government in larger jurisdictions mirror to a very large extent, as they ought to, the circumstances of the particular countries and cities as we see it operating in New York, London and other cities of similar size.

Trinidad and Tobago is a country of 1.3 million people and issues that are applicable to us in Trinidad and Tobago may not be as applicable to a country like the United Kingdom which is much larger. The plurality of our population in Trinidad and Tobago always places on us a responsibility to be very careful in the political prescriptions for governance that we outline lest, in so doing, we accentuate the divisions and differences among us. These differences as you know, always conspire to divide rather than to unite, and in so doing by putting inappropriate systems in place, we can actually see the demise of the society of Trinidad and Tobago as we know it.

Mr. Speaker, in the Local Government Election of 2003, Local Government Reform was an issue. In fact, I can tell you it became an issue in my mind in 1974. As you know, I became a Member of Parliament in 1971 and my interfacing with the local government bodies within a period of three years caused me to wonder—well not wonder, but to conclude that something was wrong in the way local government bodies were conducting their business.

I am not blaming individuals, but before you can get to the position of individuals you have to look at the system, and look at what you are asking local government bodies to do in the context of the arrangements that have been put in place to do it. We have made the point that it is not just applicable to local government; it is applicable to the public sector as a whole that we have come from a colonial past and the public service as it was set up was done as an administrative and not as an executing agent.

To the extent that we are asking the public service, whether it be at the central or local government body, to compute decisions of the Government, we are asking the civil service and the public service to carry out exercises for which they were not structured and designed. That is why, as we seek to accelerate the rate of development, we have had to put a high priority on the reform of the public sector and on this question of the establishment—at least for the time being—of special purpose state enterprises. We sought to take the execution function outside the public service and put in the hands of structures that were established for that purpose and, therefore, given the appropriate arrangements by which these functions could be properly carried out, and that is the reality of the situation.

When we go the route of special purposes enterprises, it is not because we wish to discriminate against anybody; that is not the reason. If it turns out that in the conduct of their business there is some element of discrimination, then the Government has a responsibility to do something about it, and it will. That is the reality. But that is not the issue before us now. The issue is: What are the arrangements by which we will carry out the functions of local government?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Hon. Prime Minister, thank you for giving way. I have a list of projects done by the PSAEL for the entire year of 2007. There are 220 projects and not one has been done in the Penal/Debe area.

**Hon. P. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, to put it that way is to suggest that Penal/Debe is the only area where none has been done. My colleague next to me has just indicated that none has been done in Diego Martin either. What is the point? *[Interruption]* CISL, which is another special purpose state enterprise, does. In other words, it is not a question as hon. Members opposite would have the national community believe that we set up these state enterprises and are only conducting business in constituencies or local government bodies under the control of the ruling party.

Indeed, my colleague on the left and in much of the East-West Corridor you will hear the same position. It is not that we were discriminating against the Penal/Debe Corporation as the Member for Siparia would have us believe, but as

you put these arrangements in place they were now starting up and therefore, the companies did not have the capacity in the initial stages to conduct business over the entire geographical range of responsibilities that had been entrusted to their care. Whenever hon. Members opposite see something that they do not like they say discrimination. I would wish that my friends opposite will take a broader and more omnilateral view of the way the Government is conducting its business.

In response to my friend, the Member for Couva South, the very first project done by one of the four special purpose state enterprises set up for the purpose of improving communities, was done in Cocoyea Village, South which happens to be in the constituency of the Prime Minister. I wonder if the Member for Couva South is saying that because Cocoyea Village, South is in the constituency of the Prime Minister, it does not qualify for pilot project status. *[Interruption]* That is what we are saying and, therefore, hon. Members just be very careful, please, in the way you put things over, lest you give impressions that were not intended.

Let us get back to Local Government Reform. In the Local Government Election of 2003, Local Government Reform was an issue. We had much to say, and following that election, the Government sought to keep faith with what it had committed itself to the population by doing a Green Paper and subsequently arriving at a Draft White Paper on Local Government Reform, 2006 to which the very distinguished Member for Princes Town North had adverted in his contribution before this honourable House. This was absolutely correct.

**5.15 p.m.**

There was a White Paper and he put it quite correctly, the next stage would have been to transmit and convert this White Paper which is a policy statement into law with appropriate administrative arrangements. We sought to do exactly that. If we had to postpone the local government election in 2007, and we are now seeking to postpone the local government election again in 2008, it is not that we are afraid of election or we are afraid of hon. Members opposite at the polls.

The last time that they accused us of that, which was in the general election of 2007, we obtained the best result in a general election that the PNM has had in 26 years. It cannot be that. Whether the local government election was in 2007, or it will be in 2008 or 2009, we will still beat them in the east; we will beat them in the west; we will beat them in the north and we will beat them in the south. It does not matter.

What is important to us is that we get the system of local government right. We agreed entirely and we will tell you why. After this draft White Paper was put



out, we employed consultants. The consultants we employed were Trevor Hamilton and Associates; Consultants of Seaview Avenue, Kingston, Jamaica, very well known in the Caribbean for their involvement in local government exercises all over the Caribbean. We thought that with their background and experience in local government systems and the thinking associated with it, Trevor Hamilton and Associates would have been the right consultants to translate the policy positions adumbrated in this White Paper into law.

I am able to report to this House that the consultants did complete their work and was presented to the Government in five volumes. *[Interruption]* I will tell you when. One of the dates on those volumes is December 14, 2007. Hon. Members will remember that we had an election on November 05, 2007. In other words, shortly after the general election was over, the Government took possession of this revised document as submitted by the consultant, in the context of our determination to put new systems of local government in place. That is the reality. The first document—*[Interruption]* Sorry. Will you like to see it?

We can lay it in Parliament at the appropriate time if you wish. We can. There is nothing to hide. Revised Report No. 1, Evaluation of Local Government Capacity for Enhanced Function. That is the first thing that it did. It looked at the capacity of local government bodies to decide whether the local government bodies were able to carry out an enhanced function as was contemplated in the White Paper. Of course, if that were not so we would have made appropriate recommendations.

The second document, The Functions and Responsibilities of Local Government Bodies and the Role of the Ministry of Local Government, is a separate document by itself. It examined the question of the role and function of the local government bodies and the role and function of the Ministry of Local Government.

The third was the final report document, Institutional and Organizational Structures and Authorities. Having arrived at responsibilities as they saw it, proceeded to devise an administrative structure by which these functions could be carried out. It is incorporated in the third final revised document.

Document no. 4 is Draft Legislative Framework and Provisions to Give Effect to the Local Government Reform Policy Prescriptions and Programmes. They went so far as to devise a new law. It is all here. The legislation was intact.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** What happen?

**Hon. P. Manning:** I am coming to that. “Hurry dog eat raw meat.” Take it easy. *[Interruption]* Not hungry; hurry dog. I would say it for the benefit of the media. They always get it wrong. Hurry dog.

The fourth revised document, Draft Legislative Framework and Provisions to Give Effect to the Local Government Reform Policy Prescriptions and Programme, a legislative framework was presented to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Only a government whose intentions were honourable and honest would have taken it along this route. In the normal course, we would have been able, subsequent to the general election of 2007, to come to Parliament with a revised law; give effect to that law in Parliament and not be accused, as we have been by the hon. Member for Princes Town North, of being lawless. We are not lawless; that is why we are in Parliament today. We would have had to come to Parliament; enact this into law and then hold our local government election under a new system of government in accordance with new legislative arrangements.

The fifth document was The Implementation Plan for Transforming Local Government in Trinidad and Tobago. There was an implementation plan associated with it. How in the face of these five documents received by us—In fact the implementation plan was received on March 19, 2008; the final revised report on the legislative framework, November 30, 2007; the institutional and organizational structures of authorities, November 23, 2007; the function, November 23, 2007 and the evaluation of local government capacity on December 14, 2007. The last of the documents which is the implementation plan came to the possession of Government on March 19, 2008.

We were operating in accordance with a timetable. Under normal circumstances we would have been able to come to Parliament; enact legislation and hold local government election in accordance with the commitment that we had given to the national community.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Thank you, hon. Prime Minister, for giving way. Did the formulation of those policy documents from the consultants follow as a result of consultations nationally with the various stakeholders? I understand you said this afternoon that consultations are still ongoing. If these reports are formulated, would there be subsequent consultations? Could you explain that?

**Hon. P. Manning:** Take it easy. You are getting ahead of the discussion. Let us follow the discussion. These documents were arrived at in accordance with a policy that was adumbrated in a draft White Paper in 2006 with one important difference. The difference was that in talking to the consultants, we asked them to bring their not inconsiderable experience to bear on this whole question of the role and function of local government.

What has happened is this, the report of the consultants on the role and function of the local government bodies is different from the role and function as

outlined in the White Paper. We realized immediately that that is the crux of the matter. Unless there is agreement on the role and function of the local government bodies, there is no point in proceeding. We would have no basis on which to proceed. That is the reality of it. When we came to Parliament this afternoon, it is not that we are trying to run from anybody or the democratic process. The PNM is the most democratic organization in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] If you put God out of your thoughts and come to our convention on Sunday, you would see democracy at work. It is because of that difference it opened the debate on the role and function of local government bodies, again.

I can tell you that at the end the day what would happen is this. Different people have different views and the views on this matter are diverse and varied. At the end of the day the political directorate in whose hands the responsibility for the country's governance falls, would have to decide what role and function we assign to local government bodies in accordance with the not inconsiderable experience of the People's National Movement. That is how it would have to be resolved. It is like constitutional reform. We have gone this route before in constitutional reform.

In 1971 to 1976, we had set up a Constitution Commission of technocrats. They did a report and recommended all kinds of things. Eric Williams as the then prime minister having a fundamental disagreement with the recommendations of that Constitution Commission, came to Parliament and argued this. He said that Parliament and Parliament alone has the authority to pass a new Constitution and therefore, it is to the Parliament that he appealed. He addressed this Parliament for about eight hours. I was here and following that address, a new Constitution was passed by this Parliament which, today, governs the conduct of business in Trinidad and Tobago. That was the will of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The Government was democratically elected. If those opposed to us chose to stay out of the process, you cannot blame us. The process was there. They had access to it like everybody else. If they chose to stay out of the process, it was a matter for them. Is it not?

We have participated in the process the option of which is that we were given an overwhelming mandate by the people to govern the conduct of the people's business and that we did. We are not arguing with anybody. We are not fighting with anybody.

In the same way a dialogue is taking place on the reform of the country's Constitution. It is worth our while to spend a minute on that, with your kind permission. It is a round table discussion in the Prime Minister's office, involving the Attorney General, Minister Karen Nunez-Tesheira, Minister Paula Gopee-Scoon, Minister Christine Kangaloo and Sen. Dr. Lenny Saith.

**Hon. Member:** Rowley.

**Hon. P. Manning:** No. He is not involved in it.

It involves five academics. They are Prof. John La Guerre, Prof. Selwyn Ryan, Prof. Hamid Ghany, Mr. Tajmool Hosein, Prof. Spence and Sir Ellis Clarke, the author of the first Constitution. On this occasion we are trying to find a mechanism that does not suffer from the disability of the mechanism used in 1971—1976, that is to say, a mechanism that leaves it purely in the hands of the academics, but instead, to marry the expertise of the academics with the experience of the politicians. I am in a position to say to you that even if a report is not yet out, this approach is far superior to any other approach that has been used to identify new constitutional arrangements in the past.

In 1987, the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) also set up a constitution commission. Do you know what was the upshot? It has gotten nowhere. Flawed. The process was the same Constitution Commission. The process was fundamentally flawed and even the government that set it up decided to throw it aside. That is the reality. We have decided not to go that route. We considered the route of discussion with the Opposition. The Opposition behaves one way when they are in opposition and a different way when they are in government. Now that they are in opposition all reason goes through the window.

I have said before that one of the most satisfying exercises in which I have been involved in my political career was the exercise of dialogue with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago when they were in government in 1999—2001—I think that we started in 1999—for the reform of the police legislation. It was one of the most satisfying exercises in which I have been involved. I began to realize that the Member for Tabaquite is not all bad. He has a modicum of good in him, Mr. Speaker—*[Laughter]*—difficult as it is to identify it sometimes. There were occasions on which his contribution in that discussion was one that redounded to the credit of all of us. It was a pleasure to see him; Mr. Basdeo Panday, the Member for Couva North and Mr. Dookeran, Member of Parliament, emeritus, sit around the same table and discuss an issue with Members of the Opposition.

**5.30 p.m.**

It means that they are listening. We will come to that one, but it is the two of them. It worked very well indeed. The only problem is that after they moved from government to opposition, their position changed. That is all that happened. It is exactly the same thing that happened with the Caribbean Court of Justice. They supported it in government—*[Interruption]*

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** What is happening with the Local Government (Amdt.) Bill?

**Hon. P. Manning:** I am coming, please.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** No, you are going too far away man.

**Hon. P. Manning:** Are you the Speaker?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Yes.

**Hon. P. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, it was a pleasure to have been associated with that exercise. They changed their mind exactly the same way that they did with the CCJ Bill. That is the way they conduct their business. What I am saying, therefore, is that we have all these reports and we have a situation where the consultants have now made recommendations that are different from the prescriptions of the draft White Paper and they have opened up the whole debate on the responsibilities of local government.

As we examine it and pursue our discussions on constitution reform, which necessarily would have to examine the question of local government, the more we do that, the more we realize that the responsibilities of local government is one of the major decisions on which this country would have to pronounce, as we seek to put new governance arrangements in place. Therefore, what the Government has decided to do is to take out the whole question of the responsibilities of local government, have a technical team identify policy prescriptions and subject those prescriptions, because of their importance, to the scrutiny of the national community—consultation. That is what we are doing. We are consulting because, even if we did not fully realize how critical that was before, this is the role and responsibility of local government, now that we have gone through a process and have come to the place to which we have come, it is pellucidly clear to us.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** I like it.

**Hon. P. Manning:** Yes, you like it. It is pellucidly clear to us that there must be agreement on the responsibilities of local government. This Green Paper that is out is a Green Paper that does not deal with local government reform. It deals only with the responsibilities of local government, because it is a critical matter. If you go to pages 10 and 11 of the document, it clearly identified in point form the responsibilities that we are suggesting. We are suggesting these as the responsibilities of local government. We are asking the population and all relevant stakeholders to examine it and tell us your views. We would like to know your views, because we would like to take that view into account in arriving at a final position.

For that purpose, the Minister and the Ministry of Local Government have embarked on a process of public consultation. Look at what has happened. They have held four consultations to date. The surprise that I got from all of them was the attendance; in other words the interest that has been demonstrated by the people of Trinidad and Tobago in this question of the role and function of local government. I was surprised. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Ramnath:** PNM party groups.

**Hon. P. Manning:** You could say what you want. Are they people or are they not? Are they citizens or are they not? This is the point. What he is saying is that those who support his party group, whether he has them or not, they have not participated in the exercise and that only PNM party groups have been involved in it and, therefore, since PNM people are not people under the law in Trinidad and Tobago, according to him—*[Interruption]* That is what he is saying. That is the implication.

**Mr. S. Panday:** He never said that!

**Hon. P. Manning:** He said it in not so many words. *[Interruption]* Of course. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Ramnath:** I would reply.

**Hon. P. Manning:** Then reply. Mr. Speaker, they are fast and loose in their public utterances and when we put a proper construction on that which they have said, they are the first to deny it. That is what you said. In other words, what he was saying is that it is only PNM people was involved in this. *[Interruption]* What did you say?

**Mr. Ramnath:** I am saying that it was a consultation of PNM party groups.

**Hon. P. Manning:** Which PNM party group forms the staff of the Ministry of Local Government? One of the consultations was held among the employees of the Head Office of the Ministry of Local Government where 300 people attended that consultation. Tell me which party group is that?

**Mr. Ramnath:** CEPEP party group.

**Hon. P. Manning:** That is the CEPEP party group. Is it? Mr. Speaker, what is wrong with my good friend from Couva South this afternoon? I do not understand him. He is showing all the signs of frustration. If you are frustrated with your leader—if my good friend is frustrated with his leaders present and not present, then do not take it out on me—I have nothing to do with that. Mr. Speaker, I do not know if this is a characteristic of those who are resurrected from the political cemetery. I am in no position to say. He is my good friend. I do not want to tease him unduly this afternoon.

Three hundred people from the Head Office of the Ministry of Local Government attended this consultation. At the consultation, in the local government body of San Juan/Laventille, another 300 attended. In the consultation in Point Fortin, which as you know is the smallest borough, 200 people attended, representing 40 community organizations. In the consultation held in Sangre Grande some time last week, 550 people attended. The surprise that I got was the interest of the public in the debate that is now taking place on the responsibilities of local government. That is the point. I should not have been surprised by that because I am in possession of the MORI poll, Opinion Leaders Panel Wave 10, April 29, 2008. This is what it had to say on local government:

“Satisfaction with the top 10 priorities

For those two or three you think are most important, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way your local government body does it?

	% Dissatisfied
Treat all residents equally	68
Maintain good quality local services	71
Treat all areas equally	72
Listen to local people	70
Promote well-being of area	73
Involve local people	75
Encourage investment/new jobs	78
Be helpful	60
Be efficient	70
Be transparent in activities	76”

*[Interruption and crosstalk]*

Well, the Member for Couva South is now suggesting that this report is something other than that which it really is, but it is a matter entirely for him. I hasten to point out that there were 2,362 respondents in a nationwide survey that was done. This is wave 10. This is the 10<sup>th</sup> occasion on which this is done in Trinidad and Tobago, so that there is a track record that we can look at and when we get those reports, we know that the reports are authentic even if hon. Members opposite

would like to scoff at it, belittle it and treat it with contumely. That is not the way we do it. We take these reports very seriously and we are able to look and see what people have to say about the way local government bodies are conducting their business.

What is clear to us is that in the past, where the participation rate in local government elections has been low, while I am sure that there are many reasons for this, one of the main reasons for that is dissatisfaction with the system of local government and dissatisfaction with the delivery of the local government bodies. That is the reality of the situation.

We could go to election now if you want, under the old system; it would just be worse. In the face of what people have had to say in this survey, if you have a decision to make, what would you have done? It is a rhetorical question. I am not trying to draw the Speaker into the debate. I ask the question, not just to hon. Members opposite, but to all right-thinking citizens of Trinidad and Tobago: If you had this decision to make, what would you have decided?

We are not unlawful, as the Member for Princes Town North will have hon. Members and the national community believe. Unlawful activity would have been the postponement of local government election without the proper legal authority. The fact that we are before the Parliament this evening seeking the Parliament's approval for that, attests to the fact that the People's National Movement subscribes and continues to subscribe to the rule of law. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, in the consultations, two things have already emerged. One is that there must be a proper relationship between the local government bodies and the village council movement; something not taken into account in this Green Paper in the responsibilities that we have pointed out. That has not been adequately taken into account and we are going to have to modify the document. We have to change it, yes. But a Green Paper—[*Interruption*]

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** To a third?

**Hon. P. Manning:** No, you reform it to get to the White Paper. That is what a Green Paper is; it is a discussion document. A Green Paper is put out for discussion and review. In other words, folks listen, if you all in your wisdom choose to do the process in a different way from us, then it is a matter for you. When the population reposes their confidence in you to put you back in government, then I am sure you would put your approach in place. But, for the time being, that possibility, remote as it is, it is not about to descend on the people of Trinidad and Tobago. For the time being, they have asked us to sit in



Government and we can only do it the way we understand it is best for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and in so doing we consult. We are consulting and as we consult new things arise.

Another thing that has arisen is that it is quite clear that the local government bodies have a very important role and function to perform as a watchdog over other government executing agencies and a coordinating role; most important. That is emerging. As we identify responsibilities for local government, this is emerging, perhaps, as one of the most important.

It was the Member for Princes Town North who said that all the paving of all roads—no, it was the Member for Fyzabad, I think it was—should come under one body. I do not know if he realized what he said. The Member for Fyzabad argued that some roads are the responsibility of central government, some roads are the responsibility of local government and the best thing to do is to make all roads the responsibility of one body. He sounded like a Member of the Cabinet of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, because that is our policy. We have made it clear to the national community that we propose to establish a roads authority. Yes, we are doing that. In other words, this dichotomy of responsibility for roads between local and central government, we are now saying that the best thing to do is put it under a statutory agency; an agency established by statute responsible for all the roads in Trinidad and Tobago. *[Interruption]*

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Not a special purpose company.

**Hon. P. Manning:** Does that make it wrong? It is a PNM plan too. On one matter we agreed.

**5.45 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, I remember some years ago when the delivery of water was handled by a number of different agencies. When the Government of Trinidad and Tobago approached the World Bank for a loan to upgrade water, the World Bank said that Trinidad and Tobago is too small a country to have so many different agencies responsible for the delivery of water. It was mandated by the World Bank that we establish the Water and Sewerage Authority. We centralized it under one agency. Today, anybody looking at it would ask: How could they be doing water in that way? It appears naturally, that is the way to handle water.

Mr. Speaker, there was a time when electricity was handled by a number of different agencies. Today, it is the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission. It is one agency for 1.3 million people. That is a small arrangement.

As you examine the responsibilities of local government, especially in the context of the determination of Trinidad and Tobago and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to bring developed country status to this country by the year 2020, we have to ask ourselves the question: Which of the functions conducted and carried out by local government bodies today are best handled by a central agency? As you talk to people in local government, one of the things that they would tell you is that local government bodies must have an independent source of finance. And, therefore, they want the authority to raise taxes or to deal with Land and Building taxes. They want the authority to do that.

Mr. Speaker, in the same way that we came to the conclusion that water is best handled by a central agency, or roads is best handled by a central agency, we have also come to the conclusion that tax collection is best handled centrally, and by one agency. That is why we are establishing the Revenue Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. That is most important.

A comment made by the Member for Siparia has triggered something in my head, and that is the question of centralization and decentralization. There is the question of decentralization as opposed to devolution. Let us deal with that issue. Let me make the difference clear. Decentralization means decentralizing the execution function, and the policy formulation remains at the centre. That is decentralization.

Devolution is a decentralization of the policy-making function. Once the policy-making function is decentralized that is devolution. That is what the PNM is saying can result in the fragmentation of the society.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** What about Tobago? Are you going to be pulling them back into this net?

**Hon. P. Manning:** I can tell you that the Tobagonians are saying—there is a big debate presently in Tobago—that the system is not working well. The Tobagonians are saying that. The Tobagonians are saying that the arrangements under the Tobago House of Assembly are not working well. In fact, presently in Tobago a debate is going on in search of a new arrangement.

**Hon Member:** Is there a fallout?

**Hon. P. Manning:** What fallout? It is their right. We do not have to fall out over that. [*Interruption*] One of the possibilities is that it could lead to the fragmentation of a unitary state. It could lead to that. It could end up into a federation. We have to understand that. This is not child's play. These are serious issues.

You have to understand this—let me be careful how I put it. There is a regime that governs the conduct of marine business, the law of the sea. You have to be very careful in the context of that regime and the national marine resources, how you put prescriptions in place that have the potential to fragment a unitary state. Do you understand? We have to be very careful about that. I hope that hon. Members opposite could understand the seriousness of that. I am sure you can. We are not trying to frighten anybody. That is the fact.

Mr. Speaker, the PNM is saying decentralization in Trinidad. [*Interruption*] I am not saying what you are saying. You have not said anything yet for the evening.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** I am going to speak after.

**Hon. P. Manning:** That is fine. Be my guest. That is the debate. Be the Speaker's guest. I want to tell Members opposite that we are not afraid to talk. They cannot frighten anybody on this side. We have a number of persons who could talk after. We could take you on any day, anywhere and on any subject. [*Desk thumping*] We are not afraid. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** I am coming afterwards.

**Hon. P. Manning:** That is no problem.

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. P. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, I am grateful to hon. Members for extending my time. I think the strategy of hon. Members opposite is to try to put me off what I am saying. That is their strategy. It is an old strategy, not unknown to me.

Mr. Speaker, we are back on the same issue of decentralization and devolution. The PNM is afraid of devolution in a society that is as plural as this, and where the differences are not just based on race, but they are also based on religion and other differences that exist between us and we have to watch that.

**Mr. Ramnath:** You are opening this debate wide.

**Hon. P. Manning:** As wide as you want. In the same way that we are afraid of proportional representation it is for the same reason.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Why are you house padding?

**Hon. P. Manning:** We do not have to pad. We are going to beat you any day of the week. [*Interruption*] In what cardinal point do you want licks? Is it in the East, the West, the North or the South? [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, they are having a good time this evening.

In the past and many years under colonial times, the country was divided into administrative districts called counties and wards. There was St. George, St. Andrew, St. David, St. Patrick, Victoria, Mayaro and Caroni. What has happened is that over the years we have changed that system, but that system has not been standardized. Look at what we now have! I just want to point out a small difference in the way two government departments carry it out.

In the Ministry of Works and Transport in Trinidad, we have St. George West, St. George East, St. Andrew and St. David, Caroni, Victoria West, Victoria East, St. Patrick and Nariva/Mayaro. There are eight.

In the Ministry of Education, there are seven. In the Ministry of Education there is no Victoria West and Victoria East, but there is Victoria. When one looks at government departments, one would realize that they are not standardized at all.

As we pursue the question of constitutional reform, and as we pursue the administrative and more effective and efficient administrative arrangements by which the business of the State is conducted, one of the things that we have to address is the administrative districts, and the number of administrative districts into which we will break up Trinidad and Tobago. We have looked at it and we have concluded that the best number for Trinidad is six—

**Hon. Members:** What?

**Hon. P. Manning:**—administrative districts. We are going to use that as a base for consultation. Mr. Speaker, this is part of constitutional reform. [*Interruption*] That is separate from local government. This is how the constitutional reform exercise impinges on local government. In the administrative arrangement, we see six.

What is emerging is a role for local government as a watchdog over the executing functions of a number of state agencies. The boundaries of administrative districts must be coterminous with the boundaries of local government bodies. If you do it that way, two sets of local government bodies can fall into one administrative district, hence our conclusion that we need 12 local government bodies instead of 14. It is our judgment that is the best way to do it.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** There was no consultation.

**Hon. P. Manning:** That is a proposal. We have been working on it. The Office of the Prime Minister works. We have been working at it. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, you see, the way it is now going to operate is that there are going to be two local government bodies for one administrative district. That is our proposal.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Why six districts?

**Hon. P. Manning:** That is a judgment, because it is six administrative districts.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Why not seven?

**Hon. P. Manning:** You could have nine times two which is 18; or five times two which is 10. That is our judgment.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Based on what?

**Hon. P. Manning:** If the hon. Member for Siparia does not have any judgment, then do not blame me. We are exercising ours. It is our judgment and it is based on demographics and the size of the population. That is how it is based. It is our judgment that is the best way to do it. I am sure that somebody else looking at that problem could come to a different conclusion. You could do it anyhow you want to do it. It is your judgment. It is your experience that you are bringing to bear. It is the wealth of the sum total of all you have gone through over the years and the institutional memory of your political party. All of that has been brought to bear on the conclusion of this matter. We have concluded that six is the best number. We are going to put it out and hear what people have to say and so forth, and we would come to a conclusion. If you do it that way and if you say that no local government body will be involved in more than one administrative district, then you are going to see the boundaries coterminous with the local government boundaries, and two local government bodies reporting to one administrative district.

Do you know what that means? Let us use the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission as an example. They are doing a Street Lighting Programme for the year, and they would consult the local government bodies, and the local government bodies make recommendations. The Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission says, well, okay, in addition to the recommendations that you have made we are seeing “that and that”, and they put a programme together for each administrative district, because that is how they are now structured. They would then consult with the local government bodies. “Do you all agree? Let us agree on this programme.” The local government body would then say that we wanted a change, but we agree on that. Now, the local government bodies are going to hold regular meetings with those utilities to monitor how the programme is being executed in that area for the year. That is how we see it.

*Municipal Corporations (Amdt.) Bill*  
[HON. P. MANNING]

*Monday, July 07, 2008*

Mr. Speaker, I could only give you our view and our perspective. If hon. Members opposite have a different view, we would like to hear it. We would like to hear what are their views so that we could take them into consideration. We are not dismissing anything. That is how we see it happening.

When we say that we believe that there should be 12 local government bodies and not 14, there is a basis for it. There is a good reason for it. We are looking at the total administration of the State. In doing that, this is the conclusion to which we have come. Mr. Speaker, we are here this afternoon debating an extension of the life of local government bodies.

**6.00 p.m.**

We made the point that a big dispute has arisen over the role and function of local government and that we believe that it is necessary to settle that before we can move forward. We have taken that out of our policy prescriptions and we have used that as a basis for public consultation. We are doing consultations on a local authority basis. There are 14 of them in Trinidad at this time and we have done three so far and therefore we have 11 more to do. The deadline for completing them is September 2008, it is not going to be drawn out.

They will be concluded by September 2008 and when that is concluded then the Government will take a decision on it and we can then proceed to put administrative structures and a legislative framework in place, which we believe we will be able to complete in time to hold local government election over the next year. That alone is the reason why we are before this honourable House with this particular Bill.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to support the Motion so ably moved by the Minister of Local Government.

**Mr. Jack Warner** (*Chaguanas West*): Thank you Mr. Speaker. As I rise I want to again—though I did tell you, privately—publicly apologize for my absence last Friday, due to my illness.

I have listened attentively to the histrionics of the Member for San Fernando East, the hon. Prime Minister. I want to say that the issue this afternoon in this House is the extension of the local government body, the life of that body. It is not about all the fancy sounding terms and explanations and so on; it is why do you have to extend the life of this body for a year? As far as I am concerned, this has not been given to us on this side by any speaker on that side. The fact remains—*[Interruption]* I will come to you just now, hon. Prime Minister, we have a long

evening together—why do we need 12 months for the life of this body to be extended so as to take in everything that has been said? Where is the timetable that is given to us that you have to have 12 months? At the end of the day this Government suffers from a lack of trust. No one could really believe what the Government says. If it has taken the Government three years, three postponements—today included—to give us these highfalutin and high sounding promises, this Government's confidence is on trial.

This is the very same Government that took two years to bring here a commissioner of police, which they debunked. Where is the trust? Who knows if a year from now the Government would not come a third time, then a fourth time for extensions. This is the Government that promised to have a commission of enquiry into UDeCott. Six weeks have gone, where is the commission of enquiry? If I were you I would be ashamed. And to come here with highfalutin, fancy words and phrases, to fool whom? The Government is on trial. This Government has failed in every single area and today to ask for a one year postponement is an indictment on the Government. [*Desk thumping*] It has failed again and if there were competitions in the Olympics—[*Interruption*] you are going home late tonight—called failure, this Government would get gold, silver and bronze. [*Laughter*]

I have been here for six months and it is no secret I am frustrated. You know why? For six months I have seen a Government of "do nothing". The Government has failed national security on crime. The Government has failed on education. They could do what they want, leaks like crazy and the real culprits are in Barbados and taking two little OTJ from the ministry and saying they leak. Failed in crime—[*Interruption*] OTJ, OTJ, OJT. Well, no problem, I am coming to you just now. [*Laughter*] "Wait nah man." If you think you would get me sidetracked—

They failed in education. [*Interruption*] Yeah, I am. You want to thank God for that? You want to blame God for that? If I am stuttering then blame God for that. But I stutter, but it is here. [*Member points to his head*] What I have here, Mr. Minister of Works and Transport you will never have. They have failed in works and transport, in education, in agriculture, in health, in every department and today they have failed in local government.

At the end of the day, you have to ask yourself, why should it take three years, whether White Paper or Green Paper or a combination of the two, for us to come to this? [*Interruption*] I understand that, because the ayes have it, do not worry. The point I am making, it is contemptuous of a government to treat a country that way. You know what is sad, the hon. Prime Minister says to us that we are a

plural society and we have to be careful, because we must not put a system that may exacerbate the division in the society.

In Nigeria—and I use Nigeria because he likes to travel, particularly in Africa and so on—there are 36 states. Nigeria has 250 different dialects, 250 different tribes, 36 states, along the same lines that we have here in our local government. You know what they did? They take 30 per cent of the budget and say that is for the 36 states and that 30 per cent based on set criteria, demographics, the works are bid, and that of course, is then divided among the 36 states. [*Interruption*]

I am picking a system which you are knowledgeable about, that is all. But I am saying to you, Mr. Speaker, I was in Lagos so I asked the governor to the central government how does this work, because you were in opposition. How does this work? He says to me, “Jack, I can be in opposition, I will know what my budget is next year because these are the criteria”. But this Government chokes and squeezes those constituencies and districts which are opposed to them. So, Siparia, Penal/Debe for example, will get none. The Prime Minister can say what he wants, the system will always be flawed because of the fact that those on the other side are contemptuous of us on this side. I have told the Prime Minister in jest and in serious. The Prime Minister is the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago and that includes Chaguanas West, Siparia, Fyzabad, Cumuto and so on.

**Hon. Member:** Tabaquite.

**Mr. J. Warner:** The Prime Minister makes a big hurray about consultation and he says that consultation in Barataria/San Juan, X 100; head office, 300; Point Fortin, 40 communities—and he smirks—then in Sangre Grande and so on. And I ask myself, is that a national representation? Of the four or five he had so far, why did he not have one in Chaguanas West, Tabaquite, Siparia, Oropouche, Mayaro, Fyzabad, Naparima, Cumuto/Manzanilla? Of the five so far, Madam Minister—

**Mr. Manning:** The three so far.

**Mr. J. Warner:** Of the three so far; of the half so far. Stop at the three, let us say you had half. Of the half you had so far, why did you not have any in these areas?

I went to the Minister of Works and Transport and asked him to give me some lights and a jogging track in La Paille Village where there are two grounds.

**Mr. Manning:** Will you give way?

**Mr. J. Warner:** Most definitely, Sir.



**Mr. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, as the hon. Minister of Local Government was just saying, it is the councils that determine when the consultations would have been held in their areas. That is the way the timetable has been worked out.

**Mr. J. Warner:** I really thought you wanted to say something, Mr. Prime Minister; I really thought so. Next time please, "doh do meh that".

Mr. Speaker, I was saying, I asked the Minister of Works and Transport for life.

**Mr. Imbert:** For life?

**Mr. J. Warner:** The scars you have put on the Prime Minister's back, he will learn the hard way eventually, you know.

**Mr. Imbert:** For life?

**Mr. J. Warner:** For life, Rowley thought so too.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Mr. J. Warner:** Mr. Speaker, I was saying, I asked him to put it in La Paille Village, there are two grounds there in Caroni and so on. I said, "Give me some jogging tracks and some lights for the community." He said, "This is not for me, it is for local government." I said, "Okay."

**Mr. Imbert:** But you know that.

**Mr. J. Warner:** Have some respect, "nah". I said, "Okay." I went to the Minister of Local Government, I met her behind here, I said, "Madam Minister, I was advised to come to you for help for some lights and a jogging track for La Paille Village." She said, "Write me." I love to write, so I wrote her. After a month I got no answer. So, I wrote her again and said, "Possibly you forgot, would you be so kind to condescend to give me an answer." The response is words to the effect, your letter is hereby acknowledged.

What do I tell the people in La Paille Village, Mr. Prime Minister? You said just now, all the community grounds that want lights and so on just tell you. I observed today that you consistently defend two persons in this Parliament, the Minister of Local Government and I could understand that and the Minister of Works and Transport, which I will never understand. *[Laughter]* *[Desk thumping]* One thing I am sure, it cannot be for the same reason.

**Mr. Manning:** I want to assure the Member for Chaguanas West that it is not for the same reason. *[Laughter]*

**Mr. J. Warner:** I am absolutely sure. It is nice when you could make some fun, that is nice. You know what pains me? The people in La Paille Village do not ask for CEPEP work. They do not want work. All they want is to get their box drains fixed, a jogging track and some lights. That is too hard?

The Prime Minister is talking about local government reform. What will reform do to Chaguanas West? Last night we were in Chaguanas West—*[Interruption]* Mr. Prime Minister, please, you had your turn. We are talking about reform—talking about reform and the Bill and so on and we were asking what is happening tomorrow. Then I had to leave to go to Tabaquite with my colleague to a function and I left the Member for Princes Town South/Tableland to open my function for me in Chaguanas West.

I came back today and said thanks to him. Today we were speaking, there are no lights. The lights the guys have played on, I asked him who are seeing about the lights, they said, the sports company. I said I cannot go there that is out of bounds for me. So I asked the Mayor, "Mayor can I send in a crew to repair the lights at my cost?" He said no, I cannot do that.

#### **6.15 p.m.**

But the lights that have been bad, Mr. Speaker, have been so for six months. Reform! At the end of the day the people want to know that whatever government you have makes an improvement in their lives, and the reform which the Prime Minister has spoken about, as far as they are concerned, would make no reform in their lives. You must tell them, therefore, that the same thing would obtain, and why. Why do you have to have this Government again for another 12 months?

**Hon. Member:** Yes.

**Mr. J. Warner:** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister said at some point in time that he is not concerned about his legacy, or words to that effect. I want to say to this House today that this extension is denying the simple man in the villages, in the communities, the right to exercise his franchise.

**Hon. Member:** True!

**Mr. J. Warner:** In these local communities, as the Member for Fyzabad said the first person you interact with at government level is their local councillor. In some areas these guys, of course, are non-existent and the guys are asking for a chance to be able to elect their local councillors in their communities and they are denied this.

The legacy of this Government has been so far, one of denial. We are denied certain measures under the Freedom of Information Act. We are denied certain measures because we are told that we cannot have 'X' number of joint select committees. We are denied answers to our questions in Parliament in this House or the next, so, therefore, it is wrong to know how many scholarships taxpayers' money paid for. Today our people are denied the right to use their franchise in local communities by this one year extension.

The Prime Minister has asked: If you had the decision to make, what would you have decided? The answer is simple. We would have decided to hold the election. On three occasions, for three years the people have been so denied, and I am saying, therefore, the reforms that have been adumbrated—you like the word?—are not reforms in my humble view that should deny the people this participation.

The Prime Minister said that they want the authority to raise taxes. The local government wants one reform—ask them? [*Interruption*] Well, okay, words to that effect—and what they want is to have the same kind of authority as the Tobago House of Assembly. That is all they ask for. [*Desk thumping*] What is so big about that? They want to be able to manage their affairs as Tobago is managing theirs, and not to raise taxes. Tobago does not raise taxes. Tobago is pumped, is given, of course?

**Mr. Manning:** Tobago does raise taxes.

**Mr. J. Warner:** Well, okay. Could you please advise me otherwise? Could you please help me; tell me where? [*Interruption*] Okay, thank you. That is your answer. [*Interruption*] Tobago gets—[*Crosstalk*] I gave you a chance to advise me.

**Mr. Maharaj SC:** They do not raise taxes.

**Mr. J. Warner:** They do not raise taxes. Mr. Prime Minister, let me help your Government. Tobago does not raise taxes.

**Mr. Maharaj SC:** The taxes collected remain in Tobago.

**Mr. J. Warner:** That is different. They do not raise taxes.

**Mr. Maharaj SC:** They do not raise taxes.

**Mr. J. Warner:** You think we are stupid on this side, “eh”? [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Manning:** I do not think; I do not want to think.

**Mr. J. Warner:** You do not think, right! No, thinking is hard for you. [*Laughter*]

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Mr. Speaker, therefore what we are saying is let us have the same thing as Tobago. What is the big effort? If by some chance Tobago has to be revised, then revise it, but give the local councils here a chance to conduct their own affairs in a way that, of course, the Act will stipulate. What is wrong with that?

I heard the Prime Minister say, I can only give you—he was telling the Member for Siparia—our view. And I looked around this House and I said, who is “our”? There is not a single view here but yours, Mr. Prime Minister. There is not a single view on that side but yours, and there is no reason to fool us. So we understand that. Mr. Speaker, do you know what is sad? The Prime Minister comes and he says—

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** And they are not denying it. No one is denying it.

**Mr. J. Warner:** They cannot deny it. The Prime Minister has spoken on this side too.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** The Prime Minister has spoken. [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Manning:** The Prime Minister has spoken—[*Inaudible*]

**Mr. J. Warner:** On this side too.

**Mr. Maharaj SC:** Yes. [*Laughter*]

**Mr. J. Warner:** He says: “We have to have, not 14 but 12 municipal councils.” [*Laughter*] Straight out. He said today, not 12 but six districts. Mr. Speaker, who could tell the Prime Minister seven or eight? Who among them would say, not, 12, 13 or 16; not one of them. Not even the Minister of Local Government.

**Mr. Maharaj SC:** No, no, she will; she will. No, she will. [*Laughter*]

**Mr. J. Warner:** All right, well you feel so. Right? I am making the point—

**Hon. Member:** How you know that? [*Laughter*]

**Mr. J. Warner:**—that the reasons which have been advanced by the Prime Minister for me are frivolous. [*Interruption*] I have no intention of going into the detail and the substance and what of course has to be done. All I ask is to tell the national community—which is your word. [*Interruption*]—tell us why you need a year? Why not six months? Why not nine months? Why a year, in fact, why not two years? Is this a Government we can trust? What have they done in the last six months that I have been here that they have kept? Which word have they kept? What word has this Government kept that one would say that the Government is one you can trust? This for me is the question.

Mr. Speaker, the ideal for everyone in this country is to participate in Government. That is the ideal. Therefore, when for three years we deny them that ideal, Mr. Prime Minister, it is wrong. You have to understand, I repeat, ask the Member for Princes Town South/Tableland. Go Chaguanas West last night, over 1,000 people were playing football under one bulb and a candle fly. Do you know something? This is a country of plenty. Ask him, he was there. Ask the Member for Tabaquite.

**Hon. Member:** You were there?

**Mr. J. Warner:** They want to extend the grounds and so on. They are asking who must we turn to. Ask the Member for Tabaquite.

**Mr. Maharaj SC:** The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs refuses to—[*Inaudible*]

**Mr. J. Warner:** For me, Mr. Speaker, there is no Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs in this House.

**Hon. Member:** You are right.

**Mr. J. Warner:** So, I am saying again, to whom can they turn, and I am saying therefore that at the end of day, Mr. Prime Minister you have to behave as the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago whether people like you or not. I may come here and try to berate the Prime Minister but when I go outside there is nobody who could talk this country or my Prime Minister bad. I will talk him bad here, because he deserves to be “spoken bad” [*Laughter*] but outside there I will defend him.

**Mr. Maharaj SC:** But you good boy. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. J. Warner:** I will defend him. No, I will do that, because it is the correct thing to do. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Manning:** You soften my chest. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. J. Warner:** No, no, Mr. Prime Minister. That is not for you alone. Mr. Speaker, the true Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs came to Bermuda to see the match between Bermuda and Trinidad and Tobago, and when he came—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Mr. Maharaj SC:** Who is the true Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs?

**Mr. J. Warner:** The Member for Princes Town South/Tableland, Minister of Legal Affairs. [*Interruption*] When he came to Bermuda, they had him down on the first bench as a vagrant. I was sitting next to the Prime Minister of Bermuda I

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said: “Prime Minister, that is my Minister of Legal Affairs.” He said: “But he is not the Minister of Sport”, I said: “If he was the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs he would stay there.” [Laughter] But, you see, as Minister of Legal Affairs—[Laughter] No, I said this to him. He must come up here. Mr. Speaker, ask the Minister. They brought him up. I said to them: Now, he must join me on the field to go and meet the teams. Give him the respect he deserves. So, I am making the point, it is not only for the Prime Minister. Anybody who is here—

**Mr. Maharaj SC:** With the exception of the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs.

**Mr. J. Warner:** I do not even see him. [Laughter] As far as I am concerned this side has 25 Members. [Laughter]

Having said so, Mr. Speaker, I made the point, but what is important is to make sure that those communities play a part in the decision-making process. They do not understand the reform, you know. I will tell you honestly, they do not care about the reform. All they are concerned about is that their lives must be made better. Whatever reform we have to do, Minister Joseph, let us do it quickly. The Prime Minister said that he had spoken to Trevor Hamilton and Associates—I think that is what he said, yes.

**Hon. Member:** Yes, I know—[Inaudible]

**Mr. J. Warner:**—and they gave him five documents in December—

**Mr. Manning:** They did not give me—[Inaudible]

**Mr. J. Warner:** Okay, they submitted five documents.

**Mr. Manning:** They gave the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Mr. J. Warner:** I am sorry. Trevor Hamilton and Associates gave the Government of Trinidad and Tobago—

**Hon. Member:** FIFA.

**Mr. J. Warner:** Why do you all not leave FIFA alone? [Crosstalk] They gave the Government documents in December 2007. We are now in July 2008 and you got it in December 2007. Where is your priority? July 2008, seven months, and until today those documents were a secret, because this is his Government, his documents, his country. He does not understand [Interruption] that at the end of the day whatever happens, we all have a role to play in making this country better. Therefore, those documents you received, Mr. Prime Minister, are documents that could have offered advice would have said, listen, let us fast track this, let us appoint a committee and let us do so and so, and in the meantime the funding is denied.

So, I would like to make the point this evening that while the consultants have completed their work, while the Prime Minister and the Minister of Local Government have said we will consult the relevant stakeholders and the local government bodies, I want to say that politics—

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:**—has a morality of its own.

**Mr. J. Warner:** It is not a business; it is really a mission. Politics is about making people's lives better and we can only [*Interruption*] do so, first, through efficient local government and then, hopefully, by a good central government. We have failed and are failing in the latter—central government. In the history of government this one will go down as the worst ever.

I ask today, let us not fail the people in local government. I ask the Prime Minister and the Minister of Local Government to try to expedite the process, because I know at the end of the day whatever we say on this side, the ayes have it. Nothing good comes from here. I make the plea, whatever can be done to expedite the process of local government election, I ask the Prime Minister to do it.

I thank you.

**6.30 p.m.**

**The Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development (Hon. Rennie Dumas):** Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to join this debate, so as to encourage the House in its entirety to support the Bill that is before us this evening.

Mr. Speaker, the issue of local government reform and the process of local government reform, holds out a large hope for this national community, in terms of the present system of governance being changed to look closer to what most of us would consider to be ideal; to treat with some of the ways in which our various communities can be managed, and to treat with the extent to which our general population can participate in the system of governance which manages Trinidad and Tobago. And in that context, to ensure that the work that has preceded previously, is saved and continues to give us the best likely outcome the argument can be made, and the argument is succinctly made, that the amendments to the law that are proposed today, should proceed.

Mr. Speaker, I heard the last speaker say "Give us a timetable." I am sure I heard the timetable. The timetable says, that you will have a report from the consultations available after September; that you will then have the administrative measures being

designed, relevant to those roles and responsibilities, which we can together agree will carry us sometimes beyond September. Then, there is a statement that says,

“The legislative framework shall be put in place subsequently, preparations for election, the determination of the boundaries, and an election.”

So the arguments as to why it should take a year are clearly and succinctly put by the two previous speakers on this side, and certainly, the statement that the Prime Minister made and the perspective in which he places the matter is very clear. I do not dare to elucidate that, but for the advice of the Member for Chaguanas West, the reason oftentimes that you hear one voice, has to be clear. It is the result of consultation; it is the result of consensus; it is the result of participative government, [*Desk thumping*] a government which comes to you with one voice, that voice having been informed, as you yourself and your people on your side have claimed, by thousands of people in communities right across Trinidad and Tobago, certainly that is an action of a government that you should support.

If you come to the table with a participative consultative process which has been so exhausted, and which has thrown up clearly for consideration of the parliamentary arm, and the Executive arm, considerations for change that can all be positive, then on what grounds can we argue against proceeding in a way which takes that into account and says this is the production that we shall have from it?

I am sure the Member for Chaguanas West, with full consideration of those issues will agree. And since he claims that he is the Prime Minister on that side, I am sure he will convince all his colleagues to support the extension for a year, and I hope that he does.

Mr. Speaker, we are in a situation in which this country's prospects are arguably beneficial to most of our communities, if not all, I would say all, and in which we have a system and situation for which we have all the grounds for the development of a gratuitous, a virtuous cycle of development, for individuals, for families, for communities and for the nation. And in that context, best demonstrated by the arguments laid out in the Vision 2020, that we need to treat in all our relationships in such a way, that we go forward rather than backward, and that we go forward at a pace that is relevant to the competition we face and the creation of a livelihood for all our people.

That is one of the ways in which we have all agreed, and certainly, the results of the MORI poll demonstrate that the population also agrees with us at the administrative and political levels, that the local government system needs to be



changed, and that the local government system can be beneficially changed. In that context, providing the time, providing the opportunity, providing the resources to ensure that reform continues and in fact is achieved, should be the responsibility and the response of the Parliament.

I want to suggest that when we look at what has happened, it cannot be described as failure. Mr. Speaker, for a community to do the policy research, and the policy development work that resulted first in the Green Paper, as we found so exhaustively quoted by the Member for Princes Town North, he was able to go down that Green Paper, and word by word agreed with every proposal. We did not hear him object to one proposal, and then, he was able to go through the argument and demonstrate the White Paper, taking into account a number of things, and basically agreed that what is before us, is a more succinct placement of what exactly is in the White Paper, all of it being embodied.

Then we hear that in the conversation that we had with the population, the issues that emerged, needed sharpening. They needed the benefit of our experience. That experience being developed, that experience being delivered by the consultants who came in at that period; we should ensure that we benefit from what we paid for. We had a clear reason, a clear process of selecting the consultants, and a number of Members on the other side, as well as Members on this side, took part in those consultations across the country. I remember the consultant meeting with the team from the other side, and basically agreeing that the objectives of that reform process, that the activities that were identified, including the information, the data, the process that informed those five volumes as demonstrated to us a while ago, and therefore, we collectively engaged in this process, and the benefits that could come from this process should be made available to the nation as a collective.

Mr. Speaker, it is very easy to say a number of things, but when one looks at the specifics of the Green Paper; when one looks at the specifics of the law, the argument can only be that the law should be supported so that the objectives of this paper can in fact be delivered. When we get over the peak and we get over the arguments and the jostling, then one could argue that the time as requested is required. When you match the timetable that was asked for, with the realities of what we know to be the practices of administration, the practices by which you come to make decisions in the Cabinet system; and how the results of these processes come into the legislative system and are likely to impact, including the argument which will tell us that the proposed legislation should also constitute dialogue between the Opposition and the Government—

I am sure that we will hear voices saying that you are pushing this down our throats. Although those voices now are saying, why do you need the time, therefore, if we are going to give full consideration to the results of the study, full consideration to the results of the consultations and the conversations, we know that we need to be here. After we have gone to that, we know that we have to speed up that process, we have to apply all the processes for project management to speed up a process to deliver not only the legislation, but to deliver the minimum reform in the administrative processes that will allow the insertion of a new management system, whether we talk about the boundaries, the human resource management issues, the financial management issues, including financial regulations, tendering procedures and rules and so on for the local government bodies that are emerging.

I want to suggest further, that the reorientation required for consideration of the proposed bodies and the reports that will come out of it, will engage us in a lot of work. But as one Member said, the Member for Princes Town North and I think the Member for Fyzabad agreed, that the capacity for managing change; the capacity for ensuring that we deliver on the things that we consider important to Trinidad and Tobago; the capacity to ensure that success comes out of this process is available to Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, we will argue that despite the constraints of process, despite the constraints of time required in that year, we will be able to speed up this process and ensure that we deliver it in a year.

We are clear that there are inefficiencies in the present system, and that is why we came for reform.

**Hon. Member:** But what is the point now?

**Hon. R. Dumas:** Mr. Speaker, the MORI poll was one of the brilliant interventions designed and put in place by this Government [*Desk thumping*] and Caroni East is right. We are capable of a number of interventions which will demonstrate the kind of capacity that the country has. Having been told what the specific measurements are for satisfaction and dissatisfaction, it makes it very clear and very correct to suggest that we cannot put people into a system in which they will be continuing the dissatisfaction, continuing the processes, continuing the administrative structure, continuing the system of finance, which will lead to an answer which we do not want.

Somebody suggested that to continue to do the same with which you are not satisfied, and to continue to do them is one of the measures of madness. And we want to suggest that it is because we want different results; it is because we want a

different way of doing things; it is because we want to seek to satisfy the population and become more likely to satisfy the population, why we are proposing the measures we are proposing.

Mr. Speaker, in the context of that argument, someone suggested that we are penalizing the people who are presently serving in the local government system. Those people in the local government system have expressed the view that they are willing to make another year of sacrifice to ensure that other people do not go through the frustration that they go through.

**6.45 p.m.**

Someone said a while ago that the wholeness of the experience must be brought to bear on the arguments you make.

**Mr. Ramnath:** That would be a serious problem.

**Hon. R. Dumas:** Somebody also said that if we try to change it, you would accuse us of trying to get rid of persons, of trying to steal your local government body, the one you have in Rio Claro. Any change we try to make, the Opposition may sound like the boy who cried wolf. Everything that you do, every measure you propose, is a measure for which they call forth doom; the world is going to crash. If we come with a measure that says continue with the present persons in the system, that is a problem. If we say give the councillors an opportunity to change the aldermen, that has dangers. In every turn, we have the doom being called upon the country.

If you see the thing clearly before you, you do not take a candle to look for it in the night. We are seeing the danger of proceeding in terms of putting a new set of persons in and having an election now. We are seeing the danger of loss of the work that went before; we are seeing the danger of continuous dissatisfaction, and we are seeing the dangers that have been identified. Therefore, the one activity that could bring a different result is to let us continue with those persons and accelerate the task of getting the new system put in place.

I heard the Member for Fyzabad suggesting that the people, the individuals who worked in the local government system, were so good and able that, therefore, he has given us confidence that we could depend on them to take on the task for which they were assigned. He then told us that there was enough capacity; he talked about a Dr. Ramlogan—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Sharma:** You do not know him?

**Hon. R. Dumas:**—who is able to lead the thought in terms of this direction. Mr. Speaker, if we take the capacity, if we take the action performed, if we take the expectations of our people, and we take the willingness of the persons who are in the system to serve, I am sure we would conclude, as we are concluding, that the year that we ask for is justified; the year is not an unreasonable request; the continuance is for a positive purpose, and there is absolutely no point to be gained in going to an election now, that would put persons in a system that all of us conclude is unworkable for all of us.

I therefore urge the Members on the other side to join with us in exhibiting a drive for development, in exhibiting a unity of purpose, in exhibiting the best use that this House could make of the last few hours we spent here, by ensuring that they assure us of their support, and assure the nation that they joined with us in seeking the development that would come, the sense of purpose and drive that would come from ensuring that a further year is given and that the purpose for which the local government reform is slated would, in fact, be achieved.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar** (*Siparia*): Mr. Speaker, as I join this debate, I seek through you clarification of the statements made by the hon. Prime Minister and, specifically, one of those, because if I do not get that clarification today, I might have to resort to a different measure to employ, under the Standing Orders, with respect to misleading the House. Through you, Sir, I would like the hon. Prime Minister to confirm his statements when he said that with respect to the consultations that have taken place, and three areas were identified, the dates were given by the councils, by the corporations.

I am advised that statement is inaccurate and that, indeed, the councils were sent letters with the dates and places for these consultations to take place. In response to the Chaguanas West MP, the hon. Prime Minister rose. When the hon. Member for Chaguanas West made the point that he had chosen these three, "How come Chaguanas is not mentioned? How come other areas are not mentioned?" When the hon. Prime Minister, the Member for San Fernando East responded, he rose from his seat and asked the Member to give way, and indicated that these corporations were asked to give dates, and they gave the dates and places.

I am reliably informed, certainly for Chaguanas, that was not the case. I do not know for the others, but I was reliably informed that, for Chaguanas, the dates and places were sent. So I am asking the Prime Minister if he wants to clarify that or not. I would give way. [*Mrs. Persad-Bissessar takes her seat*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Proceed, please.

**Hon. Member:** There is nothing to clarify.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Very well; that is my information.

Together with what the Member for Chaguanas West said, there are many things that we cannot believe. This is one area that we do not believe the hon. Prime Minister's words, and we would deal with them accordingly. Secondly, we have a great deal not to believe, because the hon. Prime Minister addressed the nation on April 02, 2008. On this date, the hon. Prime Minister had this to say, and I quote:

"Let us now address the Local Government system. Ladies and Gentlemen, it is now increasingly clear that the system of Local Government in Trinidad and Tobago has become quite dysfunctional, a situation which we are addressing and with urgency."

The hon. Prime Minister continued with local government issues and said, as follows, further:

"Discussions have already been initiated with the Elections and Boundaries Commission to identify new boundaries for Local Government—as far as was possible—co-terminus with those for the General Elections; and to essentially bring roughly the same size of population under the service ambit of each Regional Corporation, while at the same time expanding the reach of our municipalities consistent with expansion of our urban communities."

So far, fine.

I quote this further:

"We propose to complete this entire exercise in time for the Local Government elections to be held later this year."

This is the hon. Prime Minister addressing the nation on April 02, 2008; that you had gone through the process you were dealing with at the regional bodies to become major implementation arms of the State, with authority, resources, persons, and so on. Within this statement, the hon. Prime Minister said to the nation:

"We have received the report of the consultants and following further discussions, we have now arrived at proposed new responsibilities for Local Government which the Government will lay in Parliament as a Green Paper for public comment."

All that has been done, but the Prime Minister went on. At the time he was making the statement, he had the report of the consultants, but he told the nation:

"We propose to complete this entire exercise in time for the Local Government elections to be held later this year."

Here we are in this Parliament, not to hear the date of the local government elections, but to seek to postpone it. So what do we believe? Could we believe you today when you tell us that you want one more year? You have told us that on the last two occasions.

In 2006 you wanted one more year for reform. In 2007, you wanted one more year for reform and you gave a second reason; you said that you could not hold two elections in one year. Do you remember that, two elections in one year? *[Interruption]* One moment, please, Sir. In 2008, you have come back and are saying that you want one year, but just as recently as April, the Prime Minister told the nation that everything would be done in time for the local election later this year. I understand that to mean 2008, because this statement was made in 2008. What do we believe now? *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Manning:** May I ask the hon. Member for Siparia, if that statement is inconsistent with the possibility of a local government election in November or December? Is it inconsistent?

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** You are asking us to postpone; it may not be consistent, Sir.

**Mr. Manning:** Therefore?

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Then you must tell us that. I have asked you to clarify your statement. *[Crosstalk]* Therefore, I do not know what to believe. You are like a 24-hours; you keep changing. You know how they change colours; you keep changing your statements when it is expedient. Whenever it is expedient so to do, the statements keep being changed.

Now we are being told that is not inconsistent. Well then, my colleagues are suggesting that should be a six months if you plan to hold it within the year. We do not know what to believe today when you ask for this further year. These are two statements that I ask for clarification on.

I listened to hon. Members on the other side. I must say that I was very interested in the statement made by the hon. Member for San Fernando, the Prime Minister of the Republic, because his statements are basically policy coming

through himself, as the leader of the Cabinet, as the leader of the Government. It was a very, very interesting statement. At certain times it was quite entertaining, I must admit, for many of us on this side. It was very interesting, but it raised very crucial issues that dealt with philosophical underpinnings in terms of governance of the nation, and rightly so, coming from the Prime Minister in terms of proposals for governance.

All the learning that I have seen is that when you are talking about governance it must deal with two areas. There is the area of participatory democracy and there is the area of substantive democracy; that is what good governance would be about when it addresses both sides of this whole thing that we call democracy.

The hon. Minister of local Government, quite rightly, talked about participatory democracy and getting the councils and local government people involved in a participatory exercise. That is one level of it. On the other is substantive democracy, which has to do with the processes. These processes are, for example, elections. This is a very, very vital, essential ingredient when we come to talk about participatory democracy, when we talk about democracy as a whole. That is the underpinning, the pillar, the grounding on which democracy is based: elections.

Here we are in the Parliament for the third time, to do what some lawyers are looking at and are calling legislating for elected officers. Each time that we have postponed these elections, we have, in effect, subverted that democratic process of an election, because we are giving persons further years to stay in office, as elected representatives, but without an election. There is no election.

Hon. Member for Couva South, help me to remember the wording: Separate the trees from the wider forest. Let us take the specific as opposed to the generality. [*Interruption*] The wood from the trees and the trees from the forest—you could take the wood, the trees and the forest.

We want to zero in; we want to focus. If we want to look at that, all the things that have been said sounded good; the rhetoric was good; the wording was good; the language was excellent. I heard the hon. Prime Minister use several words, including "pellucid" today; really great language. Even with the concepts within the contributions, I do not have a problem with those.

There is no question in anybody's mind that local government is dysfunctional. I do not think there is any question about that. You did not need the MORI poll to tell you that; whether you paid them \$8 million, \$6 million or \$3

million. In fact, the hon. Prime Minister admitted that since 1974 he knew that something was wrong with the system. So we did not need MORI to come and tell us that local government was dysfunctional; everybody here knows that.

**Mr. Ramnath:** MORI got rid of Valley!

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Concerning that same MORI poll, the former Minister, the Member for Tobago East, I believe, said that the MORI poll was one of the most brilliant things the Government did. The hon. Prime Minister picked out about local government, rightly so, we are in a local government debate, but do you know what the people were most concerned about in that poll? Do you know what the number one concern of 87 percent was of the respondents in that MORI poll? It was food prices and inflation.

At the top of that list, do you know what the second area of major concern was for all the respondents, for the 3,000-plus persons that the hon. Prime Minister told us participated in that poll? The second major issue for them was the issue of crime in the country. Those were the major issues. Let us just put that on the record, because I think we all recognize those to be the issues.

I go back to that point that we all know local government is dysfunctional; therefore, poll or no poll, we know that it needs to be fixed. I come back to that point of separating the wood from the tree and the trees from the forest.

**7.00 p.m.**

We are here today not to deal with reform, that is not the issue before this Parliament, that is the excuse being given for keeping councillors without an election in a council. That is the excuse or reason that is being given. So our purpose today is not about the whole reform package, but it is tangential to that debate and, therefore, it will be dealt with. The focus today is postponing the election. That is the purpose. And I, together with what the Member for Chaguanas West said, am in total agreement. I have not heard one good reason advanced from the Government Benches as to why we must postpone local government election for another year. I have not heard any good reason, and if there is any, I am sure the Minister will tell us in her winding up.

You do not need to have reform stopped at election. Tell me why it is necessary for the reform process to stop election for a third year. Why is it necessary to subvert and prevent the citizens and electorate of this land from exercising their democratic right? I come back to the issue of procedural democracy, and I said one major pillar of that democracy has to do with election.



Why do we need to postpone election for another year because of the reform process? Go ahead and do your reform, there is absolutely nothing wrong with the reform ongoing, you could reform as you have been doing since the year 2002 when you came into office six years ago, you can continue to 2020, but do not stop the people from exercising their democratic right. [*Desk thumping*] This is what I have serious problems with and we got caught up—and if I may say so with due respect, from the debate that has come thus far—we have gone through all the arguments and I have seen so many examples of what is called fallacious reasoning. When you talk about fallacious logic, we had the red herrings. We had the a priori reasoning which I will come back to; we have had the non sequiturs coming from there. When you do logic reasoning these are the things that you throw out there that we forget, as I said, the wood from the trees and the trees from the forest. We get totally sidetracked and we go all over the world. We even went back to the days of—was it Dr. Eric Williams? We went all over, we brought in constitutional reform we almost went to the Caribbean Court of Justice all over again but we came back. So tell us why that is so vital and important—that is the procedural democracy—on the side of substantive democracy which has been raised by Members on this side repeatedly which has to do with how the system is actually operating.

If it is operating in a manner that is democratic; that is substantive democracy, the checks and balances within the system, and from what we have heard, and I am sure the hon. Minister and the Prime Minister know because we must give him that jacket as they say. The Prime Minister seems to have his finger in every micromanaging problem in the country. So I am saying that the issues raised by the Member for Fyzabad, the Member for Princes Town North and the Member for Tableland that had to do with the substantive democracy were the issues about funding and equitable distribution and so forth, but my major concern is on the issue of procedural democracy and election.

The life of the councils expired July 14, 2006, Government brought a similar amendment before this House and that same amendment we did was to provide that these councillors will sit on that council for a further year, but would not face the democratic process. It went further; the councils will now exercise authority to go on to elect aldermen for a term of 12 months and the aldermen shall elect a mayor and a deputy mayor and now they are exercising electoral functions. They, on the basis supposedly of having the votes of the people, were given the power to elect mayor and aldermen and so forth, and one of our Members raised it, that was when you took the opportunity to “lick up” Atherley and those mayors.

That is the point the Member for Princes Town was making when he said that the amendment is different. So in that year, you had some people you wanted to “lick up”. The amendment was that you will now elect again mayors and aldermen, but this amendment before the House does not have such power given to them to elect and start all over as though it were a new electoral period. I do not know why there is that difference in the amending Bill, because it says for the purposes only of elections due, the term of office and so forth which was extended for one year pursuant to subsection (1F) further extended for one year, but it does not have what the one for 2006 had, that they will go on to elect Mayors and Deputy Mayors and so forth.

Then we came back again in 2007 and the same thing happened. What the Government did was to take the vote of every citizen in Trinidad and Tobago, and cast them in favour of existing councillors, and that is what I meant by subverting the procedural democracy. It took the votes of the citizens—all who would have voted in the local government election—and by this legislation you will be doing it again, you will be casting that vote in favour of existing councillors.

The electorate out there, the burgesses want the right to fire some of those councillors because it is about accountability. You have no right of recall in our system, but because of the period set by the statute, at the end of the three-year period, you have the right of recall because you can cast your vote for or against. That is the system, and that is where the accountability in the democracy comes in, that is part of the substantive and procedural democracy; that the burgesses can say: “I don’t want you anymore. You have failed, you have not functioned, therefore, I should be able to exercise my vote and get rid of you.”

It is going to be six years now. When the law was very clear in saying you have three years, that is where the law gives a right to the citizen to recall a councillor after three years. What we are now doing is to totally devalue that right of the citizen by saying you now have to come in six years instead of three, and we are not even sure of that because it keeps changing and the goal post keeps getting moved each time they speak, and so, the citizen does not have that right of recall.

If you are saying that you are not valuating the law and you came to ask us to approve this amendment, well maybe on a strict legal standing you may be correct, but when we look at the substantive procedural democracy, it is my respectful view that you are violating the rights of citizens and it is also in my respectful view, a violation of the spirit of the Municipal Corporations Act.

So at the letter of the law you may be correct, you come to Parliament to approve what you want to do, but in the spirit of it, you are, in my respectful view,

violating the Municipal Corporations Act when you legislate to keep people in office when the law says you are to go in three years' time. Where is the accountability? One measure we had for checking these councillors or having accountability was the election which you have now taken away for the third time for three further years.

In addition, there is on the Order Paper for the longest while—and this takes us back to the Constitution which was amended to say that we must set up joint select committees of the Parliament. There are other people, but today I am dealing with the municipal corporations, that they will come to the Parliament to account, they will have accountability before the Parliament. We are in breach of this constitutional provision, we are violating the Constitution because these municipal corporations were supposed to come to account to Parliament to the joint select committees and we have failed to do so.

The Constitution which was amended by the UNC to provide greater transparency and accountability in section 55 is the—

**Mr. Imbert:** Section 66A.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Section 66A. Thank you, Sir. My friend has done well at his Masters degree in law, so I want to thank him for reminding me.

Section 66A says:

“(1) Subject to subsection (2), it is hereby declared that—

- (a) In addition to any other Joint Select Committee which Parliament is empowered to appoint under its Standing Orders, Parliament shall, within one calendar month—
  - (i) after the commencement of the Constitution (Amendment) Act, 1999;
  - (ii) of the first meeting of the House of Representatives after any General Election, or such time as the Parliament may resolve not being later than three months thereafter...”

Mr. Speaker, our first sitting was December 17, we are in July now and not a single joint select committee which Parliament was supposed to:

“appoint Joint Select Committees, to inquire into and report to both Houses of Parliament in respect of—

- (A) Government Ministries;

(B) Municipal Corporations;” has been appointed.

So there is absolutely no accountability according to the Constitution. We are in breach of that provision. They do not account to this Parliament, and they will not account to the electorate because those are the two mechanisms provided for us in the law and in the democracy, that you account to the people through election and through the Parliament and its representatives and none has been done.

So when we talk about participatory democracy and substantive democracy, we are in violation of both pillars. I want to go further on this issue because I am of the respectful view that the issues raised on the other side and the one I had raised with respect to why delay election for reform—

Mr. Speaker, I looked at the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the year 2007 under the Ministry of Local Government and I see under Development Programme 09, Head 42, Item 021, Local Government Reform Programme, and from this I see for the year 2007 the Ministry of Local Government paid \$8.931 million—that is almost \$9 million in 2007—for Local Government Reform Programme only in 2007. That is actual expenditure; it is not estimate for 2007. I do not know if that was paid to prepare the various reports that were mentioned, and the hon. Prime Minister said he would lay them in Parliament. It would be very interesting to see what they have put forward in terms of guiding us along.

So about \$9 million was spent on the reform programme and we are still nowhere near to completing it at this time in July 2008. I do not know when it began, the Minister in her opening remarks when piloting the Bill said 2004 if my memory serves me right. So if in 2007 we spent \$9 million, I do not know how much we spent in 2004, 2005 and 2006 and I was not able to get the public accounts to see the earlier years and how much was actually spent on this reform process, but we are nowhere nearer in getting that into place.

I come back to the issue of why we need to stop the election to have the reform process take place, and here in the parent legislation, there is already an omnibus provision which empowers the Government to come at any time to add or take away from the functions of the corporations. That could have been ongoing whilst you complete the entire reform process. It would not have stopped you from holding elections. Section 252 gives us the functions of the corporations.

**7.15 p.m.**

In section 232, all the functions are listed. When you go to 232(p) it says:

“The following functions are exercisable by a Corporation...in addition to those already vested in it under this Act—

- (p) such other functions as the President may from time to time by Order prescribe.”

There is this miscellaneous provision in the parent law which allows the Government—when it speaks of “President” it is in effect the Cabinet and the Government—to come by order and prescribe such other functions as the President may from time to time by order prescribe.

It means that as you are ongoing you can bring it. You would say that it is piecemeal, but piecemeal is better in this time than taking away the right of the citizens to choose their councillors and have the councillors account to them through the elections. That is my respectful view. You have a power that while your reform is ongoing one year, two years, three years, four, five until you reach 2020, or whenever you finish it, you would still have functioning local government bodies. That is very important to point out and give us further strength in saying that we are not going to support this Bill. We cannot find it in ourselves to support it.

This Government has placed almost every institution in this country into cardiac failure. When we look at the local government bodies, by taking away the rights of the citizens to vote for their persons, you have placed it in cardiac failure. When you come to Parliament you have placed it in cardiac failure. You brought this Bill on Friday as the Member for Princes Town North said; you do not have the joint select committee set up and you do not have the monitoring mechanisms; you do not have anything in place. Out there in the country, in every regard, every system is collapsing on itself into cardiac failure. All the symptoms of cardiac failure, when we look at the Judiciary; the health sector; the education sector; the infrastructure and every sector. Now local government, we know is so dysfunctional. As I said, we will come back to that.

I have not heard one good reason why it is necessary to stop the election in order for reform because the reform could be ongoing. I see this as another example of the Government playing for time whilst citizens continue to suffer. This Government has become an extension Government. We came here last week Monday at the last moment, rapidly, quickly, whatever, because it was so urgent.

*Municipal Corporations (Amdt.) Bill*  
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

*Monday, July 07, 2008*

What was it? Accreditation. What did we come to do? Extend the time to do certain things that should have been done two or three years ago or whatever it may have been.

We extended the time for bringing the children's package. Do you know that we still have not brought the whole package? Do you know that those that were passed still have not been implemented or put in place? Extension again when it comes to dealing with the nation's children. I see another child—and our sympathies go out—battered to death. Did we not have Amy and the Monica Barnes' Report and the package of legislation?

With due respect, I was reading that the Attorney General made bold statements that not a child would be this and we would deal with child molesters. Do you know that the package is still not in place? The package has not been brought. They speak to each other in the words of one of the Members. It is a symbiotic relationship with that package. It is difficult for one to stand on its own without the others. We need the whole package, but it has not come. The ones that have already been passed have not yet been put into effect. Extension for the children.

We have given an extension for the Equal Opportunity Act because the court had ruled that the Equal Opportunity Bill be put into place. It did not happen. I heard the hon. Attorney General reported that this would be put fully in place next year. Whilst the commission was appointed, and again, symbiotic relationship, it cannot work without the tribunal. It cannot be done until next year.

While I say that I need to come back to the Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprise Limited (PSAEL). The Prime Minister said that there is no discrimination and we should not talk about discrimination. If you do not want to call it discrimination, let us call it inequitable distribution of the resources of this country. That is what is happening in every arena and this area is no exception. If the Equal Opportunity Bill was in place we could have had a form of redress. As it is, all we can do is come to Parliament and complain. You will say send it to us. I intend to send some of these matters to the respective honourable Ministers to see what would happen.

A company, the Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited was set up. It has been there for a long time. Notice the name. Do you know what has happened with this? This company has now become a company, to do what? Build drains; construct driveways and walkways and road repairs. *[Interruption]* When you are speaking, you would tell us. We are putting box drains in agricultural land. *[Interruption]* No, no, no. That is not where they are.

This was the reply to Parliament for question No. 116. When the hon. Prime Minister was speaking he said that there are 220 projects on this list. There is not one in the Penal/Debe region. The hon. Prime Minister said that I should not call it discrimination. Then the hon. Prime Minister said that they were now starting, so they did not have the capacity. That is why they could not do it in Penal/Debe. But, my good Lord! 220 and you did not have the capacity? You had the capacity to do 220 projects, but not one in Penal/Debe. Whom do we believe? Palo Seco is half an hour away from Penal/Debe. Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited—in this country we cannot afford the price of food.

We keep hearing from the other side that we need to grow more food. We agree. Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited is not involved. You are taking this agricultural company to build box drains—it is like CEPEP and URP—whilst we cannot get food. You cannot get the cows out there. The agricultural land is abandoned. Are you serious when you say that you want to deal with the problems?

I told you that the MORI polls, not ours, gave the No. 1 issue in the country, food price and inflation. Would you believe? I thought that crime would have been No. 1; they have crime at No. 2.

It is an extension government. Everything it is doing is extended and extended. Extension for the breathalyzer. Where is it? How much time we spent in Parliament? People are dying with the carnage on the roads. Where is it? Extended. Extension in building pre-schools. Every year we are promising 30, 40, 50, 60. Extension. We keep extending. Extension to build the interchange.

Mr. Speaker, you come to Port of Spain every day. I am very grateful that I do not have to. I had to be in Port of Spain early a day last week. There is the gridlock and the two and three hours that people face every day; it is not one day. The hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East always sits there and yap, yap, yap. He is always yapping and yipping that we were there for six years and did nothing. Fine! You are in government now; you do it. You have been in government for seven years. *[Interruption]* That is the problem. They are always doing it. It is an extension government. It is forever doing. The extension for the tsunami stadium; the extension for the performing arts centre which brought up all the allegations of corruption with UdeCott. They even had an extension for the Prime Minister's mansion. An extension on that is going on now.

One of the most tragic extensions was what happened in the House on Friday. I will say it in passing, the extension of the Commissioner of Police. You gave the man one year; then, he decided to resign. Because you could not get your way the

process was flawed. The process was flawed because you did not get the person you wanted, so you shut them down. You aborted the entire process. I will come back to process. This is like an extension government.

What is the reason for postponing the election? It cannot be reform because reform can be ongoing. Reform is something that we do all the time. In every ministry I am sure that you are ongoing in modernizing and reforming. That does not mean that you stop the democratic process for that to happen. I say that the Government has placed this nation into cardiac arrest, cardiac failure. The doctor will tell me cardiac arrest. If it is that the real reason is not reform because reform cannot stop elections. We will be ongoing with constitutional reform. The hon. Prime Minister admitted that constitutional reform is ongoing from since this Government went into office. That did not stop the general election. Why should the local government reform stop local government elections? If the reform process is not the reason, what are the reasons? You will tell us in your winding up.

Many of us are of the view that the stalling of elections is because the Government is afraid to face the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Why? We come back to the MORI poll. In food prices there has been an increase of 218 per cent since this Government came into office. Since they came into office inflation is 53 per cent, from then to now.

The cost of building material—in this year steel alone has gone up by 63 per cent. Transportation has gone up. A loaf of bread takes the cake at \$10. The Government appears to be afraid to face the electorate. In the MORI poll 84 per cent said that crime, law, order and vandalism are the second most important issue facing the country. Is this why the Government does not want a referendum on its performance? Is the Government afraid that the population will regard the local election as a referendum on its performance? The latest issue as a referendum on what they did with respect to the process of determining a commissioner of police in this country. Nothing is ever over. Those are the issues confronting the people of the nation.

The hon. Member spoke about what will happen with these special purpose companies. I want to talk a little about that before time runs out. We have evidence that the Government is moving to emasculate local government bodies. One way in which that is being achieved is through the special purpose companies. These companies are given funding in excess of what is being given to local government bodies. Further, these companies are duplicating the work of local government bodies.



I am told that on Dookie Street in the Penal/Debe Corporation on the same day, two different sets of people turn up to do the work. You are wasting resources. The corporation is sending their people to work because in law they are mandated so to do and at the same time, one of the special purpose companies, I believe that it was PURE, I am not sure, came to work on the same day. This is duplicating of authority. The aim is to use the special purpose companies to emasculate the local government bodies.

The special purpose companies will have their policy determined in Port of Spain. I will come back to that because it is a very serious issue that was raised by the hon. Prime Minister. They determine through their boards where, who and what they do. I told you. I will send you the information.

**7.30 p.m.**

We have seen these special purpose companies? [*Continuous interruption and crosstalk*] How do they operate, Sir? There are 11 members on the board of one of the special purpose companies. Do you know who are on the tenders committee? Eight of them from the same board are the tenders committee.

**Mr. Imbert:** That is normal. **Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** The decisions—I know it is hurting, that is why you would not let me speak. I would speak to the Speaker. The special purpose companies are being used to emasculate local government; to duplicate the work. Why? The point is that you would give it to whoever you want to. How can you justify 220 projects being done in south? [*Interruption*] That is another set. That is the SESL and it is not in Penal/Debe.

**Sen. Manning:** You said Penal/Debe.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Not PSAEL. There is none. Not the PSAEL. That is the same company that Dr. Moonilal, the Member for Oropouche East, raised with a letter a week ago. Not one, Madam? It cannot be real. The special purpose companies are designed to bypass these local government bodies. These local government bodies are the representatives of the people and they are the ones who should be making the decisions as to what are the priority areas in a particular region. That is what substantive democracy is. You have been elected by the people; they should be making those decisions. We must ask therefore, what is the total budget of these special purpose companies? Some numbers were read out by the Member for Princes Town North, in terms of what they are being given.

Do you know when you look at the public accounts of this Republic for last year, similar to what is happening this year, at the development programme of the

Ministry, because that is the money that comes to local government, the majority of the money goes into what is known as personal expenditure and recurrent expenditure. The Minister will acknowledge that. It is a serious problem, whether it is for local government or otherwise. What happens—it is a problem throughout the governance structure—is that for all the moneys that you are given, maybe one-ninth of the allocation is for actual development. The rest of it is spent on paying staff, personnel, goods and services and administrative services. I can give examples for the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation.

For example, the 2008 allocation for materials and supplies, under recurrent expenditure, is \$3.5 million. This is used for the repair and construction of box drains and roadways. An additional \$900,000 had been allocated under the development vote for building box drains, roads and bridges. A new box drain, three feet by two feet, cost \$41,000 per metre to construct. Sixty per cent of the Penal/Debe region lies in what is called the Oropouche Basin, and as such the demands for drains are far greater than in some of the other regions. You would programme the jobs to be done.

When you look at the arithmetic for the Penal/Debe region, it was programmed to do 2,720 metres of box drain. That would have been the equivalent of new drains alongside 164 houses. I think the last time I said we had 22,000 households. That entire allocation would be alongside 164 homes. The arithmetic assumes that the entire \$4.4 million of recurrent and development expenditure would be spent entirely on box drains. Even if we were to do box drains alongside 164 homes, the entire vote for box drains is done in a region that is prone to flooding. We are back in the flooding season again and the allocations are in that regard.

#### LEAVE OF ABSENCE

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, before I put the question for the extension, I had omitted, under the agenda item “Announcements by the Speaker”, to indicate that I had in fact received communication from the hon. Member for Oropouche East, (Dr. Roodal Moonilal) requesting leave of absence from today’s sitting of the House and that leave has been granted.

Also, last week the hon. Member for Chaguanas West (Mr. Jack Warner) had indicated to me that he may or may not have been here and he too was granted leave of absence.

#### MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS (AMDT.) BILL

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Before you begin your further speaking time, would you want to move the extension now?

#### PROCEDURAL MOTION

**The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House, in accordance with the Standing Orders, the relevant one, continues to sit until the conclusion of this matter and the Treasury Bonds Bill.

*Question put and agreed to.*

#### MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS (AMDT.) BILL

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Mr. Speaker, I talked about the fallacies and the a priori reasoning, which I want to come back to. The hon. Prime Minister, in his contribution, talked about judgment calls and value judgments as guiding the process for reform. He talked about six administrative areas when multiplied by two administrative districts, would give us 12 corporations. This is what he said in his statement of April 02, 2008. At that time the hon. Prime Minister also said that they were considering 12 corporations instead of 14 and, therefore, they would be removing some of the corporations.

It struck me that it seems as though the Government had made up its mind that this is what we are going to do. We are going to have 12. We are going to remove two. We are going to have these various administrative districts. Yet, the Government boasts of consultation. If it is that you have made up your mind before the consultation process, that is what is called a priori reasoning. You have closed your mind. It is a closed-mind approach. You are saying: I have already made up my mind. This is what we are going to do. On what basis did I make up my mind? I asked repeatedly: What was the basis? The basis was: That is our judgment. I said: "On what basis is your judgment made, because a reasonable person would base his judgment on issues and facts." I could not really get that answer from the hon. Prime Minister. On what basis is this judgment call being made? It is inconsistent with what is being done in other areas, for example, the whole constitution reform that the hon. Prime Minister told us about?

The Prime Minister went to lengths to describe what he thought was a brilliant strategy for constitution reform, that is to say we have all these Ministers sitting

on this committee and together with them we have five academics. The Member named the academics. That is the process for constitution reform. If that was so great, why did you not use the same process for local government reform? Why did you get a consultant? You are utilizing a different process. Again, the Prime Minister may tell me that is a judgment call. It is based on my judgment. It is inconsistent with the local government reform. It was not judgment, because you got a consultant who gave you a report and you placed it on the desk with a whole pile of reports that you have. Is your judgment based on those reports? When did you discover that?

When you were making statements about moving councils, did you have those reports in your hand? Are the reports telling you that you would now have to move and totally wipe out two of the councils? I do not know. Do those reports tell you that you must have 12, 14, 20, 100 corporations, reduce them or increase them? What is the basis for such reasoning, prior to the holding of the consultations? I have thought that the consultations would have informed the decisions that are to be made.

We talked about the a priori reasoning again, where the hon. Prime Minister is telling us that this is what his Government sees; that the Government believes in decentralization and not in devolution. That is a very, very serious issue. This is about the whole underpinning or governance in this country if the Government's philosophy is that its policy decisions are guided by the issue of decentralization and not devolution.

The hon. Prime Minister was kind enough to explain what he meant by decentralization, which he knows. It is basically—if I am to sum up what he said—that all policy-making will be done in Port of Spain and the local government bodies are going to be implementers of that policy. Something has to be wrong with that. Something is very wrong with that. That is lopsided thinking. It must be—we are talking about participatory democracy—that it must come from the ground up, not from the top down. It should never be from the top down. That has been the process years ago, on the whole argument of decentralization and devolution, where it is the Prime Minister's philosophy and what he seeks to put forward to us and convince us. That is taking us back 100 years ago. It is a retrograde step.

I would share with the hon. Speaker, as early as in 1920, there was a Wood Commission. In that Wood Commission Report, they recognized the need for representation at the sub-regional level. By 1945, there was the County Council Ordinance, which was proclaimed. That granted advisory powers on a range of

issues. That is where we were when the local government system started; that the local government bodies were simply advisory. They could make no decisions. They were not the policy makers and we have come a long way since the 1920s. We are in 2008, and you want to take us back to making these local government bodies advisory. It is a retrograde step.

We would come further down to where other studies were done. This one may be related to you. I do not wish to bring you into the debate, but there was a Sinanan Committee on Local Government in 1966. That committee, in 1966, went further and recommended the involvement of citizens in the formulation of policy in decision making at the local level. They would formulate policy at the local level. That Sinanan Committee also proposed that village councils should be given powers as well. The hon. Prime Minister mentioned these village councils. This has been around since the Sinanan Committee of 1966.

In 1971, there was the Wooding Commission, where local authorities could provide outlets for participation in grassroots politics. The preamble to our Constitution reinforces the need for greater participation in democratic decision-making.

Here we are, taking us back to when we started with local government. What happened in those days was that our local government was started similar to the Spanish Cabildo system. We had the Spanish here first. These bodies were set up, but they were never given any powers. They were just there to monitor and advise. I am reading the reform and the words of the hon. Prime Minister, in the same statement of April 02, 2008, which has been repeated. It stated that:

“In essence, we are proposing our regional bodies become major implementation arms of the state and we want to reduce these numbers of bodies from 14 to 12.”

The whole issue of decentralization—we are going backward, we are not going forward. The local government bodies would now monitor and implement the policy set in Port of Spain.

The hon. Prime Minister said that Tobago has a problem with the THA model and there is a conversation going on in Tobago about that, I would really like to hear Tobago on that issue. I cannot see Tobago agreeing with the decentralization process that the hon. Prime Minister wants to set for Trinidad; that policy would be done in Port of Spain. I can never see Tobago agreeing to go backwards, when policy decision-making was done in Port of Spain. That is what you are now proposing for the local government bodies in Trinidad; that we must go backwards and that all policy decisions are made in Port of Spain?

Let us see how that cannot work. Each region would have its own peculiarities. The Prime Minister mentioned the differences and so on. For example, a culture package is put out, formulated up here in Port of Spain, would it suit the needs of the people down in Penal/Debe or Mayaro as the case may be? Would it be the same package? It cannot be. Policy decision-making must be informed by the local level. It cannot be posted down from top to bottom. It will never work and it will be taking us back from where we had reached in participatory and substantive democracy. You are taking us backwards, completely.

This whole issue of decentralization and devolution is a very, very important one. I am of the view and those of us on this side certainly do not subscribe to the decentralization model being proposed by the Government. We do not subscribe to that.

**7.45 p.m.**

We subscribe to the devolution model, similar to what is happening with the Tobago House of Assembly, because we are of the view that the ordinary citizens in this land must have an important role to play through the local government representatives in the formulation of policy and in the implementation of policy at the local level. The decentralization model does not do that. The Prime Minister himself has told us what is the decentralization model, and policy is not decentralized. Those were his words. All that is going to happen is that the policy would be implemented.

So, Port of Spain would send it down to Penal or Siparia or to whichever council and say: "This is the policy, go and implement it." That is going to be difficult. You are going to make the policy in Port of Spain for the entire country, and that has been the hallmark of PNM governance—that government is concentrated in Port of Spain and the rest of the nation south of Caroni could go to wherever. That has been the pattern and there is where we see the rural neglect in this nation—in the Penal/Debe region, in the Siparia region, in the Mayaro region and in the Couva region and so on—all the symptoms and all the signs of rural neglect.

Mr. Speaker, if you go back to that old model of policy making only in Port of Spain, which is the decentralization model—in the words of the hon. Prime Minister, that policy is not to be decentralized—we are going backwards and we are going nowhere forward. We are not going to support that model in whatever nice language it is framed. We will not support the decentralization model, but we will propose.

As remote as it may be that we would sit on the other side in government, that will happen. The UNC is determined and the UNC will continue to work for representation of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and we would do it. Every rope has an end. The

PNM will discover that day is coming sooner than they think. In every regard, the citizens of this land are suffering because of their policies, and that is why I come back to the point again. Why are they afraid to call local government elections? That would have been a barometer of their performance at this time. They are afraid!

I return now to the formula. What is the formula for reform? The hon. Prime Minister has proposed one formula for constitutional reform, but when we come to local government reform it is a different formula, and that formula appears to be—first there was a Green Paper which was converted into a White Paper and the White Paper is now being converted back into a Green Paper. I do not know that to be the process. I heard people mumbling when I asked about it. That is not the process. The process is that you go from green into white and from white you come into the Parliament to deal with it. Why are we following this model? Again, it is a judgment call on the part of the Prime Minister. This is his judgment.

Mr. Speaker, there is another formula and that is the proposed constitutional reform. There is another one. There is a Parliament. Why can we not use the representatives of the people and set up a joint select committee of the Parliament to expedite this matter and take this reform process forward? Let us do that! If it is consultation, the joint select committees can also conduct consultations. That can be done because it has been done for other matters. There are several formulas. It appears that the formula chosen by the Government is getting nowhere fast. In 2004, the Minister said that the process started, but it is getting nowhere fast. So, let this Parliament assist. Bring it before the Parliament, and let a joint select committee take the process forward, because your formula is clearly not working in the best interest of the people who now have to give up their rights to vote, because the Government is of the view that they must postpone the elections for this process to go forward.

We are into the wet season and there are very serious issues with respect to flooding, especially in my area. I remember the hon. Prime Minister going into areas—officials were taking him where the land was dried. We met the Prime Minister and blocked him and said that the officials were not taking him into the right areas, so let us go into the water. With due respect, the Prime Minister agreed, and we went into the areas covered with water, but when water was more than flour, the Prime Minister turned back. Do you know when he turned back what he did?

The Prime Minister came back and we went to another area. All the officials from the Ministry of Local Government and the Ministry of Works and Transport—a whole barrage of people and cameras and so forth—and the Prime Minister said to give them whatever they need to deal with the flooding problem. That is history now. Up to today, that help has not been forthcoming.

As we brace for another flood season, I intend to come to this House, through this Parliament, to ask the hon. Minister of Local Government to consider extending the drainage programmes. I have said that our area is 65 per cent in this Oropouche Basin and, therefore, the kinds of drainage that we need will not be the same for Port of Spain or San Juan. For our area, the flooding is especially bad because of the nature of the land. That is how local government bodies would be able to assist us.

I would also ask through this Parliament that when the issue of reform is completed that serious consideration be given to constitutional protection for local government. The only reason we can keep postponing the elections year after year is because there is no constitutional protection for the system of local government in this country. I think that is very vital if we want to ensure this participatory democracy that we have spoken about, and to give persons at the local level the kind of protection that they need. When we come to the reform exercise which would have to come to this Parliament at some point in time, and when those documents are laid, we are going to deal with that matter in due course.

I have looked at the new Green Paper, and I really do not see many changes in that from what is happening now. I am going to ask the hon. Minister to point out where there are changes. I do not see very many. I have seen two or three areas: maintenance of all public sector buildings not under the control of other state agencies; coordinate and monitor the roads authority and monitor the work of public sector agencies. Those are new.

You know, we could legislate as much as we want, and it would mean nothing, and we would be back to where we are now, last year and the year before in terms of the inefficiencies of these councils—these dysfunctional operations of these local government bodies—and we would still remain there. Do you know why? It is not about only legislation. That is why I am saying that legislative reform should not stop the elections. It is not about that. We have said this repeatedly when it came to the fight against crime that it is not only about legislation. There are so many other things that could be done without the legislation and without the reform. We must put into place the checks and balances and we must fund these corporations in a manner that would make them able to do their work.

The point is that reform cannot only be at the legislative level. I am sure the hon. Minister knows that. It has to be accompanied by a reform of the way business is now done so as to improve efficiencies and performance. We have to develop a sort of results driven system that is performance oriented. We do not really have that and it is because we have left local government on its own.



I am asking that when this reform process is completed, the legislative aspects let us look at the other aspects like the administrative aspects. Let us stop holding back funding from these bodies. I do not know why it is—as I pointed out before when I talked about the development programme of the councils—that they are so small in comparison to the recurrent expenditure. With the recurrent expenditure, you keep spending on your wages and salaries and goods and services, but the development programme is what is going to set the infrastructural works in place to benefit the people. We have to look at ways to make that more efficient.

This does not only happen with local government, but it happens with all ministries. With respect to all these grand projects that are being put in place, when we go back and look at what has actually been done and implemented, we see that out of that development programme, the majority of it has not been implemented.

So, when we come with budgets year after year—general budgets for everybody—and you take up the public accounts and look at them, you see that there is a disconnect between the promises made in the budgets each year. All the plans and programmes that are very grand—very wonderful plans and programmes—when you come at the end of the fiscal year, those programmes have not been put in place.

So, if for example we look at local government, on the development programme side, out of a budget of \$1 billion appropriated to local government, do you know what went to development programme? Mr. Speaker, only \$126.7 million. Look at the disconnect! There was only \$126.7 million for the development programme. How many roads could be fixed? How many box drains could be built? What about all the other things that local government has to deal with like drainage and so forth? Out of \$1 billion, only \$126.7 million went to the development programme, but it gets a little worse.

When we go to the allocation of the development programme, we see that almost half of the money has not been expended—\$84 million of the \$126.7 million was utilized. Why is this? I am told—the hon. Minister can look at this for more efficiency—that the length of time that it takes for the councils to get the money when it is appropriated here takes about eight months.

**Mrs. Manning:** Not this year.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Well, I am sure that you will tell us. I was told that yesterday when I spoke with the chairman of a corporation.

**Mr. Ramnath:** Be careful you do not have to withdraw what you just said.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** They may lie, I do not know, but we would have to hear what they have to say. I am being told that when this money is allocated, that is the length of time that it takes between the announcement of the budget—the applications by the corporations for funding and the actual receipt of funding so that tendering could start.

The suggestion is that there should be a process flow chart in this regard so that we could see the delays encountered through the layers of bureaucracy and the inefficiency. This puts tremendous pressure on local government bodies. The councils are telling me—the ones that I have been speaking with—that there is an inordinate delay when the budget is passed here and when they actually get the funding. That is why at the end of the fiscal year the programmes are not done, and you see out of \$126.7 million only \$84.6 million was expended.

What becomes of this money? The councils are complaining that under section 112(c) of the parent Act that the Minister has the power to approve unutilized funds, so that they do not go back into the Consolidated Fund. The allocation was already small for the development programme—I said one-ninth of the allocation—and out of that now it may not be utilized because of bottlenecks and inefficiencies in the system, but then when approval is sought—again, I think this is an area the Minister could utilize to assist the councillors.

The Borough of Chaguanas and also Penal/Debe have advised me that there are several applications for the Minister's permission to approve the unutilized funds, and they are still awaiting replies. Maybe the replies are in throughput or in the process. I do not know.

I must thank the hon. Minister for giving \$1 million more to the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation for their water trucking. I trust the Minister in good stead would look at some of these applications for unutilized funding to allow the councils to put the work through, especially for drainage because those areas, as I said, are very strong when it comes to flooding.

So, if I may summarize—hon. Minister, there is another area of concern and that is attendance at meetings. Section 253 sets up regional coordinating committees. Hon. Minister, you may want to do the following because we are advised by the councils that the officials do not come. Section 253 said that there would be regional coordinating committees in every region. These would comprise the mayor or chairman; the head of district for the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA); the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission (T&TEC); the district or regional officer responsible for roads; the district or regional officer

responsible for drainage and irrigation; the medical officer of health; the chief executive officer; the secretary; and such other officers of central or local government and other persons as the Minister may request of a council to appoint.

Our information is that these officials have not been attending the regional coordinating meetings as they should and this is putting a severe burden and strain on the local government authorities. So, hon. Minister, we would ask you to use your good office. You can check the attendance records so that you can substantiate what is being said that these officers are not attending. Now, when that happens and the work is not completed, the first person who would get the blame is the Minister. So, through your office, you need to get these people to attend these meetings and to do their work. I do not know why they do not attend. I do not know if they are understaffed or short staffed, or probably when they decide to go to the Penal/Debe area, they would stop off to have curried duck or whatever else. The distance is so long; I do not know. They may find other things to do.

**8.00 p.m.**

That is happening and we ask you to use your good office to get these people to attend the meetings, because it will improve the efficiency of the system and local government.

As I close, Mr. Speaker, I am not convinced that any good reason has been given for stopping the local government elections in order to allow the reform process to take place. The reform process is ongoing, will continue to take place, will continue in process, but the election should go on. This is the third time we are coming, we do not support it. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I am of the respectful view that the reasons given for this Bill are not the true reasons and in fact, at the bottom line of it the Government is afraid to face the electorate because of its incompetence, its mismanagement and corruption in the entire system.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Dr. Tim Gopeesingh** (*Caroni East*): Mr. Speaker, I rise to give a little contribution particularly in response to the presentation of the hon. Minister of Local Government and to what the hon. Prime Minister indicated in his statements on the whole question of the reform of local government. I would not go back into what my colleagues have indicated about the necessity, the desire by this administration to go from year to year on the issue of brinkmanship, coming on the eve of the expiration of the Act and knowing that July 08 is the expiry date for the local government extension.

*Municipal Corporations (Amdt.) Bill*  
[DR. GOPEESINGH]

*Monday, July 07, 2008*

One point I want to make from those extensions from year to year, and that is, in 2006, the Act to amend the Municipal Corporations Act, 1990, the amendment was different from what is in 2007 and what we are being asked to do in 2008. It is noteworthy to understand what was the motive of that administration then in 2006, because that Municipal Corporations Act, 1990, indicated that:

"Notwithstanding section 11(4) and (4A) and sections 12(5) and 15(1), for the purposes only of the elections due in the year 2006—

- (a) the term of office of each Councillor shall continue for twelve months from the date of the expiry of the existing term of office..."

Which was to probably June 2006.

"as though each Councillor had been elected for an additional period of one year, and"

So, that Bill in 2006 sought to extend the life of the councillors by one year, as differentiated and distinct from the life of the mayors. Subsection (b) says:

"the term of office of each Mayor, Chairman and Alderman shall expire at the end of the existing term and—"

So, by June 2006, the term of office of each Mayor, Chairman and Alderman expired. It continues:

- “(i) the Councillors shall elect new Aldermen for a term of twelve months, in accordance with section 13;
- (ii) the Councillors and Aldermen shall elect a Mayor or Chairman of the Council for a term of twelve months, in accordance with section 14.”

On that there was a clear differentiation in the 2006 amendment from the 2007 and 2008. Because the 2007 amendment did not contain the part where the term of councillors will continue and the terms of mayors and aldermen will not continue.

On one hand in 2006, there was a differentiation in the amendment Bill from 2007 and 2008. Now, what was the rationale for doing that in 2006? We proffered at that time that obviously this administration had some difficulties with functioning mayors and aldermen. *[Interruption]*

**Ms. Kangaloo:** All that has been said. You are not saying anything new.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Hold on. What has happened then, those chairmen and mayors had three years and they shifted their mayors, because the mayors,

obviously did not do the bidding and some fell out with others, but they allowed the councillors to continue. They are satisfied now that the mayors and chairmen.

On that point, it suits the PNM administration to bring legislation to deal with their own domestic issues and let the country pay for their problems. They have difficulty with their mayors and their chairmen so they come with an amendment Bill in 2006 and they deal with their mayors and my colleagues have indicated who the people were, like Mayor Atherley and a few others who were changed. I know it is the Prime Minister's friend, he may remain his friend, but there must have been a reason why the mayor was changed.

My colleagues dealt with the issue of the whole democracy at stake and the rule of law must prevail, but the whole democratic process has been really moved away.

**Ms. Kangaloo:** Deal with new issues.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** My colleague opposite is asking me to deal with new issues, which I will deal with now. Just permit me a few seconds to deal with all the issues that the hon. Minister of Local Government indicated, the question of local government reform.

When you come in 2008 and try to tell us that you are seeking local government reform and four years prior to that, the Prime Minister in his budget statements, hon. Prime Minister, through you, Mr. Speaker, in 2004—I am bringing this about to show that when you think of local government reform in 2004 and you come back four years later in 2008, and you are asking this country to buy the fact that you really want local government reform, hence the reason for postponing the election— You had four long years, hon. Prime Minister and Members of the PNM administration to deal with this question of local government reform.

**Mr. Manning:** It is happening.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** If the hon. Minister is saying that it is happening it is too slow and this is why we have difficulty. You cannot hold the country to ransom when legally Members of Parliament are elected every five years. Councillors are supposed to be elected every three years, whether they are good or bad; they would be re-elected if they are good, but you have councillors sitting for six years and that is unfair to the population. But that point was made. I want to quote the hon. Prime Minister in 2004. He said:

"During the course of the year we will undertake a comprehensive review of the system of local government to advance the process of decentralization, to improve management capability in the sector and to make more effective the delivery of goods and services to our communities."

What is so different from what the Prime Minister said in 2004 and the hon. Minister is saying today in 2008, four years later? Then it was repeated again in 2005, but he went into more detail and I quote:

"The reform initiative would be intensified in 2005 with the production of the White Paper on Local Government Reform; identification of functions to be decentralized to local government bodies;"

Mr. Speaker, in 2004 he spoke about the reform; in 2005 he said that the reform will be more intensive. So what has happened in 2006, 2007 and 2008? It is quite apparent that you all are making an excuse for a hidden agenda that you may have to try to postpone the election and you are probably not sincere about what you are doing.

In 2005, the hon. Prime Minister said:

"Review of the existing legislation by laws and regulations."

It is the same thing they are saying again in 2008, review of local government boundaries. Hon. Prime Minister, through you, Mr. Speaker, you spoke about review of local government boundaries in 2005. Are you suddenly awakening now in 2008 and saying, or is it taking three years with the issue of review of local government boundaries? Something is wrong and you have to blame yourselves for the unacceptably long delays in the pursuit of your own goals when you know what you wanted for your development status in 2020 or Vision 2020.

You may have good intentions and you promised the population, but obviously the people are not competent enough to deal with the situation.—[*Mr. Manning is leaving the Chamber*] Okay, Prime Minister—

**Hon. Member:** He is not waiting for the wife.

**Mr. Manning:** [*Inaudible*] [*Laughter*]

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** [*Inaudible*]—to sit and listen to me a little more. Well, it would seem a surprise, it is not. The whole question of the boundaries is a major problem which the Prime Minister brought up today. We have a copy of the Fifth Report of the Elections and Boundaries Commission under the Municipal Corporations Act, 1990 and the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government) Act Chapter 25:50 for the purposes of Local Government Elections. This is dated July 08, 2005. That was the last report that was laid in Parliament by the Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC) on local Government. There are certain legal constraints that the EBC has to work under. When they laid the report

of the Elections and Boundaries Commission under the Municipal Corporations Act, 1990 on July 08, 2005, it says under section 3, page XVII, subsection (2):

“Reports under subsection (1) shall be submitted by the Commission”—this is important—

“(a) in the case of its First Report after the commencement of the Act, not later than six (6) months after the date of the commencement;

(b) in the case of any subsequent report...”

**Ms. Kangaloo:** Tim, you have nobody on your side.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** That is all right, the Speaker and you all are there.

"not less than two (2) nor more than three (3) years from the date of the submission of its last report."

This report was submitted on July 2005. More than three years in any subsequent report, not less than two nor more than three years from the date of submission of its last report.

So, if this Government is asking for a postponement of this local government election by another year, it means then that another report will have to come from the EBC on local government, because this is expiring by July 08, 2008. What have you all done in terms of determining what will happen to the EBC? As far as we understand it is not for the PNM administration and not for the Prime Minister to determine the boundaries for any election. It says here:

"The commission shall define and review the boundaries of the electoral districts into which an electoral area is, or is to be, divided and shall submit to the Minister reports either—

(a) showing the constituencies..."

**8:15 a.m.**

Mr. Speaker, it is not for the hon. Prime Minister to state that he wants to divide up the country into six counties or six districts and have 12 municipal corporations, reducing it from 14 to 12 and reducing the districts from seven to six. This is the job of the Elections and Boundaries Commission. How can the Prime Minister think about arrogating unto himself the responsibility of the shift of boundaries? There are well defined principles under this Act for the determination of the shift of boundaries.

So, when the Prime Minister tells the population that he wants to shift the boundaries into constituency basis or district basis, is he giving directives to the EBC? I thought the EBC was an independent institution, and I think it was Dr. Masson who indicated a few months ago that the Government cannot tell the EBC what to do. The Elections and Boundaries Commission is an independent institution, and, therefore, the Government cannot tell the EBC that it is shifting the boundaries. There are certain criteria for shifting boundaries in Trinidad and Tobago well defined in this document.

I want to refer Members of this House to this document. [*Holds up document*] I would not delay you in reading the details of it because you are educated enough that you can read it and understand that this point this afternoon, it is not for the PNM to talk about the alteration of boundaries but it is for the EBC. So, I believe the Prime Minister is not correct in saying that they want to move the boundaries according to special criteria of districts and so on.

So, when he says he wants to move it from 14 to 12, what is their agenda? My colleagues are asking, and he said it is his judgment. Even though he may have the judgment, it is not his responsibility to deal with that. Because the number of electoral districts in a regional area is determined—and they have a formula:

“There shall be in every electoral area a basic number of four electoral districts. To this basic number shall be added the number obtained by dividing the electorate of that electoral area by 15,000. But, where in any electoral area the electorate is —

- (a) less than 15,000 there shall be five electoral districts; and
- (b) more than 15,000 any residual number left after dividing the total electorate by 15,000 shall be treated as if that number were 15,000 and one electoral district shall be added in respect of such residual number.

In the division of electoral districts in regional electoral areas, natural boundaries such as major highways and rivers shall be used wherever possible.”

So where is the Prime Minister coming with the idea of defining boundaries based on the six districts?

And as a result, this Fifth Report of the EBC altered a number of regional corporations and increased the numbers of electoral districts: Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo increased from 12 to 13; Penal/Debe increased from eight to nine; Sangre Grande increased from seven to eight; Siparia from eight to nine and Tunapuna/Piarco



from 13 to 14. So, we had alterations for boundaries in 53 electoral areas, and the number of electoral districts with unaltered boundaries remained at 78, so we move to 131 electoral districts.

What is going to happen now when this election is postponed for another year? The EBC will have to go back, look at the electorate again and redefine new boundaries and new electoral districts and we will be in confusion. So this country was preparing for an election based on the recommendations of the EBC and the submission of this report for an election to be held in 2008 after you had been given two extensions. Now the country will be waiting to understand what the EBC is going to do now. How many electoral districts are they going to come forward with, because the voting population has increased to about 950,000? We may have close to 150 electoral districts and so on.

So, when the Prime Minister is telling us that he has to ask for a one-year extension based on the reform of local government which he is contemplating, he does not seem to understand or the hon. Minister of Local Government does not seem to understand the massive confusion and complications that will arise as a result of this one-year extension which you are seeking.

The EBC would have to go back and produce a new report again. That new report will have to be tabled in the House again. It will have to be debated again and the country will have to be prepared for an alteration of all the boundaries that existed under this report. So, when you ask for an extension of one year, we really might not have another election within next year again. They may come back at the end of July, 2009 and ask for another extension, because by that time, the EBC might not have completed its work, because it is voluminous, and for submission, debate and deliberations on their presentation will take some time again, and therefore, election might not be held.

So here it is we may end up in a situation where we were supposed to have elections after three years, from 2003 to somewhere around 2006; it was postponed in 2007, it was postponed in 2008 and it is going to be postponed in 2009 again. And you will have councillors sitting there for seven years, when we as Members of Parliament, by Constitution, sit there for five years. Now, the people did not elect them to sit for seven years; the people elected them to sit for three years, whether they are good or whether they are bad, and we are supposed to have an election.

So it is unpardonable, unacceptable and it is reprehensible that a government should come to the population and tell the population, it is because we want reform of the local government process that is why you all are not going to vote for your new councillors and so on. So, I wanted to make that point, Mr. Speaker.

**Hon. Member:** You “done”, now sit down.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Do not worry; we will take you to the run. I have 45 minutes plus if I am extended 30 minutes. [*Laughter*] So, you will sit and you will listen. The Government will have its way but the Opposition will have its say. You cannot tell me that what I just told you is nonsensical or without any merit.

**Hon. Member:** Look at Princes Town.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** The other point on this presentation made by the EBC is that, first of all, this whole issue of local government elections is not enshrined in this Constitution. Any government—whether it is PNM or UNC, but we know we will not do that—at any time the same way that the People's National Movement administration is asking for an extension from year to year, 2006 to 2007; 2007 to 2008; 2008 to 2009; they can come by a simple majority and say that we do not want to have any local government elections and abolish local government elections altogether.

There is nothing enshrined in this Constitution which says that you must have local government. It is not enshrined in the Constitution, so, by a simple majority this Government could emasculate the whole process of local government and throw it out through the window and no local government elections will be held at any time again, ever.

They have the capability of doing that. They have the propensity to break the laws; they have the propensity to rule against democracy, so, this whole thing about having a local government election might be fancical as far as they are concerned. We ask that if you really consider reform of local government, you bring a constitutional amendment and we will support it. Tell us when local government election is constitutionally due and it must be constitutionally held every three years. It is not here and this leaves a lot to be desired.

**Hon. Member:** Permission to give that guarantee.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Yes, we will support that, that elections must be held—and we will support you if it is a new constitutional arrangement.

The other point I want to make as far as the legality of some of these things related to local government is concerned. You cannot alter the number of electoral districts in cities and boroughs, they remain fixed, but the population changes, and that part of the law is archaic. I will show the relevance of what I am saying in contrast to what happens in non-cities and boroughs. For instance, the city of Port of Spain, the number of electoral districts is 12; San Fernando, the number of

electoral districts, nine; Borough of Arima, seven; Borough of Point Fortin, six; Borough of Chaguanas, eight; 42 electoral districts in these cities and boroughs. According to the law these electoral districts cannot change, no matter whether the population moves out of the cities or whether the population has increased as is happening in Chaguanas. The number of electoral districts remains fixed. Therefore, in your consideration of your reform of local government, hon. Minister, this is something that is noteworthy for your consideration in terms of altering the whole aspect of fixation of the number of electoral districts in cities and boroughs.

Mr. Speaker, I will give you a little idea; in Port of Spain, according to this, we had a population of about 35,000; so you have one electoral district for every 3,000 of the population; San Fernando had about 46,000 in 2005 and they had nine electoral districts, so one electoral district for every 5,000 of the population; Arima, 23,000 with seven electoral districts, one for every 3,500; Point Fortin, 15,000 and six electoral districts, one electoral district for every 2,500 citizens and Chaguanas, 52,000 with eight electoral districts at an average of 6,500.

**Dr. Rafeeq:** [*Inaudible*]

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Right, as led by my Chief Whip. [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*] But I hope that you—[*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, you would realize I have not gone back to anything my previous colleagues indicated, whatsoever. [*Interruption*] These are new points—[*Interruption*]—my colleagues are there in support of me, do not worry.

**Hon. Member:** Desperate. [*Crosstalk*] [*Laughter*]

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Mr. Speaker, I just want to—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** You know, they are becoming tired because—[*Interruption*] They came with this and they want us to just accept it and just push it down on us without any discussion from our side. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, I know it is close to the break, but I want to draw a contrast with what is existing in the non-cities and the non-boroughs. Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo has 122,000 citizens with 13 electoral districts, so that is one electoral district to 9,000 citizens; Princes Town, one to 8,000; San Juan/Laventille, one to 10,000; Tunapuna/Piarco, 142,000 citizens, 14 electoral districts for one in 10,000. [*Interruption*] So, this whole question of electoral districts and boundaries and local government reform should be taken into active consideration.

**Hon. Member:** [*Inaudible*]

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** You should have had the elections, make sure the election is held and you can continue with this process of reform even after the election is held. These are not things that have to be awaited before election. It was there in this report already. We go ahead with it and then change things as we move along. So we have areas in Trinidad and Tobago; Nariva, Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation, where there are thousands of citizens; in fact, Chaguanas. The amount of expenditure based on population should be an equitable one. You must have an adequate number of electoral districts to represent X number of citizens, so cities and boroughs, which only represent one electoral district for every 3,000 is inconsistent with one electoral district for every 10,000 in other parts of Trinidad and Tobago. So this needs to be changed as an additional point.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, we will break for dinner now and we will resume at 9.00 p.m. and on the resumption I would crave your indulgence to listen to the hon. Member for Caroni East. He is, after all a specialist medical practitioner. [*Laughter*]

**8.30 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**9.00 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before we took the break, I was making the point about the inequity in the representation of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, in terms of per citizen population and the number of councillors, and showed the difference between one councillor serving approximately 3,000 in cities and so on, whereas in the rural areas, one councillor has to serve over 10,000 citizens. This is unfair and, therefore, something has to be done as far as that is concerned. In addition to that, the whole question of funding in local government, we have to take a serious note of that.

If we have a budget of \$40 billion and local government gets approximately \$1.5 billion, when there are so many services to be undertaken by local government throughout Trinidad and Tobago, that 4 per cent of funding to local government is totally inadequate. So is the hon. Minister of Local Government going to make a statement today, in terms of local government reform, whether there will be reform in the allocation of funding for local government bodies whatsoever? If we continue the way that we are going still, with 4 per cent funding, and corporations are being starved for funding—and as a result, the

MORI poll is no surprise because why they find that the people are dissatisfied with so many things, is because they do not have the funding to do the things that they want to do in the corporation. So we need a statement from the Government in terms of what type of funding they are looking towards for the reform for the local government which they are undertaking at the moment.

I want to draw an analogy. Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Corporation has many more citizens than Barbados, but yet still they get \$60 million for running their corporation per year, almost the same thing with Chaguanas and so on. When you have to undertake about 26 services under the local government, including markets, abattoirs, environmental control, drainage, small roads, cemeteries, pavements, et cetera, that could never be adequate. So it is not surprising, therefore, that in the MORI poll, the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Minister of Local Government indicated that there was more than 70 per cent dissatisfaction with the whole process of local government because they are starved of funds, and no matter what good intentions the chairmen or the CEOs may have, they cannot cope with it.

Mr. Speaker, to illustrate what I am talking about, it is important for hon. Members to appreciate—my colleague, the Member of Parliament for Siparia made a statement on the question of the joint select committee of Parliament appointed to enquire into and report on municipal corporations and service commissions. That committee, even after one year, has been not started. There is supposed to be a committee looking after municipal corporations, a joint select committee of Parliament, and despite the fact that it is on the Order Paper; and despite the fact that it has been debated in the Senate and passed, this administration is reluctant to bring it; or for what reason they are not bringing it to this House, for passage, so that we can revert back to the three committees which we are supposed to have, one of which will look into municipal corporations.

Mr. Speaker, even with that committee, I was a member of that committee and during the two years, we were only able to do two corporations: the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation and the San Fernando City Corporation. Meetings were held at the corporation's offices in San Fernando at Town Hall and in Tunapuna. If we have 14 or 12, as the Prime Minister wants to bring it down to—12 corporations—the meetings of this joint select committee were very instructive; the recommendations and the findings were very instructive and it did not need a MORI poll to tell the country, for them to spend that amount of money to say that things were not right in local government. I will just read one or two little extractions from one of the reports of the joint select committee to illustrate the difficulties which the hon. Minister of Local Government—The hon. Minister

of Local Government, when she was Minister of Education, when a report is presented to Parliament, they have three months in which to respond. And I must give the hon. Minister her credit, because when she was Minister of Education, she responded to the problems and situations as far as what the joint select committee found on education. I think this was one of the voluminous reports on education. This one was a joint select committee and the hon. Minister ensured that she responded within the three month time frame that was under the Standing Orders.

I am sorry to say that the hon. Minister of Local Government at that time, my own good friend, Sen. Dumas, did not respond to some of the recommendations that were made. So when I speak about the negative situations existing in the regional corporations, what was it that the hon. Minister of Education and the Prime Minister spoke about in terms of the consultation on the five reports that emanated from the consultant from Jamaica? What was in those reports, and what was there in the hon. Minister's reform of local government package that is going to touch on a number of these issues which were found by the joint select committee?

I would just read one: Emergency at the Municipality. This was the second report to Parliament:

More than this general inability to provide service delivery, the committee was shocked and extremely disappointed at what appeared to be animosity and wide disagreements existing between the senior administrative staff, the Chief Executive Officer, in particular on one hand, and the elected representatives, the corporation chairman in particular, on the other hand. On hearing evidence and witnesses, the committee felt that it was an eye-opening but very sad experience to see such a state of affairs existing within an organization designed to service and help citizens.

Those were comments made on the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation.

So a committee was telling Parliament that. We do not need a MORI poll. The hon. Minister of Local Government had a responsibility to respond to that within the three months time frame, but did not. I just crave your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, for a bit. It went on to say:

It seems that many sections of the legal instrument, the Municipal Corporations Act 21 of 1990, have either been completely ignored or breached by officers of the corporation, and even by those authorities responsible for staffing supervision and discipline of the corporation workers.

The committee is of the view that the level of irresponsibility and inefficiency existing at the corporation is shocking and very regrettable.

The joint select committee of Parliament found that:

The committee is inclined to think that a state of lawlessness exists at several sections of the municipality and the committee shudders to think that a similar situation may exist at other municipal bodies across the country.

Mr. Speaker, what is there in the local government reform agenda that this Government is using to postpone the election and asking for an extension that will cure this situation? What is there in this that will prevent this recurring? What is there in their reform agenda? I want to proffer that there is nothing inside there that will stop this, and unless something drastic happens, the rot will still continue.

The question of funding that I alluded to earlier on, throughout the discussions of the committee which heard the evidence from representatives of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, that the main challenge affecting the work of the corporation was the lack of sufficient funding from the Ministry of Local Government to the regional corporations—shortage of funds.

Corporation has been experiencing severe problems in meeting cost for the provision of required services.

Not only the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, but the fourth report for the San Fernando City Corporation outlined almost the same difficulties:

- the human resource capacity was weak;
- finance and funding constraints;
- operations of the councils—inefficiencies within the committee system of the San Fernando City Corporation.

How is the postponement of this for another year going to affect this?

- public health and the environment;
- building and land development in San Fernando—challenges faced by the corporation;
- disaster-preparation capacity;
- the poor relationship between the administrative and political officers at the San Fernando City Corporation;

- the San Fernando Municipal Police Department shortage;
- the inconsistencies between the Municipal Corporations Act, No. 21 of 1990 and the Public Service Regulations;
- implications for the corporations.

Mr. Speaker, there are so many wide-ranging problems existing now and they may feel that because the MORI poll told them this—it was there for them to analyze and investigate since 2006 and to be able to deal with, but they are now coming in 2008 to tell us that “we want reform of the local government so that we can put our house in order and, therefore, we ask for a postponement of the election for another year ago.” This is totally untenable and unsatisfactory. You had two years to deal with these, and I am sure at the end of this year when you get the extension, you will still not be able to deal with these problems as mentioned here a while ago. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, it is important that I raise these concerns because I am sure there are so much more to speak about. It is all in the report from the joint select committee of Parliament and these were only two of the 14 corporations that were investigated, and they spoke about the public health inspector. Before we broke, you said that they must listen because I am a specialist medical person, but I would not even go into that, but just to indicate one situation. Despite the astronomic growth in business places, especially food outlets in recent years, the corporation still has only one public health inspector. There is no medical officer of health in the corporation. How could you aspire for developed status 2020, hon. Minister, when you will not be able to touch this by any means, despite your desire to continue with the reform of the local government?

This is a simple, straightforward situation. You just have to employ more staff; make sure that there are public health inspectors on; make sure that the medical officers of health are there; and make sure the city engineers are there. You would not be able to cure any situation if you do not employ the right staff and the amount of people that you have there. Look at staffing problem for just one of the corporations “was also aggravated by the reduction of staff from 1,900 in 1992 to approximately 1,400.”

So you have a big Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation with 26 services to be run and you reduce the staff from 1,900 to 1,400 and you expect the corporation to be run efficiently and effectively. Nothing in their reform, even though they try to address it; it needs implementation of the basic things that have



to be done to make these areas successful. The lack of sufficient staff; employee attitude and morale; low employment morale with very unhealthy work practices; and we can go on and on. This book is filled and replete with negatives in just one of the corporations and here is the other one on the San Fernando City Corporation.

For a few minutes more, I want to deal with one or two little problems. The hon. Minister said that they are undertaking consultations. They have gone through two, three or four major consultations already. In 2004, there was a consultant who said that he was undertaking a number of consultations from as early as 2004, and they spoke to over 1,000 people—that was stated in 2004.

**9.15 p.m.**

Today the Minister said that they wanted more consultation, based on the Green Paper that they have for local government reform. To compound the issue, in terms of consultation, the hon. Prime Minister just indicated that he had five voluminous reports from the consultant from Jamaica on the way forward for local government. If I am not mistaken, he also indicated that consultation would now take place on those reports.

On the one hand, local government is conducting their consultation, which was done already, which formed the basis of the draft White Paper and then came back to a Green Paper, but the hon. Prime Minister spoke about consultation based on the consultant from Jamaica, his five volumes and recommendations. Where are we going to go? Are we going in circles, consultation, upon consultation, upon consultation and not going anywhere? [*Interruption*]

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

**Mr. Sharma:** Mr. Speaker, an excellent contribution requires an extension.

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** The speaking time of the distinguished gynaecologist from Caroni East is extended by 30 minutes. [*Laughter*]

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** I know you want to hear me.

**Hon. Members:** No we do not!

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** I am sure the Speaker is listening in his own way. Just a few other points; I am not going to delay you for long, because I know that some of you want to do other things, but it is important for us to make these points. Please bear with us; let me just give you a few things.

Under the 26 services which have to be undertaken by corporations, I just want to touch on a few of them for a short while. The first is the recreational facilities. In every one of the corporations there are numerous playing fields and recreation grounds. The Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West, Mr. Warner's, abounds mine in Caroni East. All of us with constituencies have a number of recreational facilities. We have to depend on the regional corporations to fix the grounds, grass the grounds, and look after pavilions; in so many instances, these things are dilapidated.

If we want to improve sporting facilities, if we want to improve sports in Trinidad and Tobago, in the same way that the Prime Minister said there was going to be one body—I cannot remember what body he spoke about, one enterprise that he said was going to deal with something—could we not ask this Government to consider, through the Ministry of Local Government, or give it to the Sports Council of Trinidad and Tobago, the sports body looking after all the playing fields in Trinidad and Tobago, so they would have a defined set of operational criteria and inspection for all the sporting facilities throughout Trinidad and Tobago?

The hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs is here. A number of community centres are dilapidated throughout Trinidad and Tobago. I know you are making an effort to improve some of them now, but it is going to be a long and tedious task. There should be some method of organizing so that these things are looked at in a coherent and complete manner, so that the people of Trinidad and Tobago would benefit, and not leave it to the regional corporations, which do not have money to deal with these things. Whether you give the recreational facilities to the sports company or some body takes over all in Trinidad and Tobago, is something that needs to be considered.

The environment—the hon. Minister alluded to the fact that the Solid Waste Management Company Limited (SWMCOL) was doing a lot of work. It pains me a little when they talk about SWMCOL, because it seems to be a runaway horse. When we talk about transparency and accountability, SWMCOL is responsible for CEPEP, which is \$1.2 billion in expenditure over the period of time. The Solid Waste Management Company Limited is audited by a single private auditor;

everybody knows who he is. That is the person in Chaguanas who rented a building for the Government; the Government did not occupy it, and he received \$4 million over a period of time.

**Hon. Member:** Who is he?

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** It is not right for me to call anybody's name.

Mr. Speaker, SWMCOL is going ahead like a runaway horse. The Minister spoke about solid waste management. What could they tell this country about solid waste management? I raised a question on the Guanapo dump site. We have the Beetham facility down there. For a long period of time they were supposed to be doing some work on the whole aspect of the waste disposal system at the Beetham. There are one or two other sites in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Environmental Management Authority (EMA) is allowing that to go ahead without doing anything, and SWMCOL has not been able to produce anything substantial to deal with these situations. The whole of the Western peninsula sea is polluted with bacterial contamination as a result of the Beetham, and persons bathe down in Chaguaramas; they do not know what they are exposing themselves to with the filth that is in the water. It is something that is not right, and has to be dealt with. How is local government going to deal with this, if you continue to associate yourself with SWMCOL and it is not working properly and is not accountable to anybody? They are not accountable to the State; that is totally unsatisfactory.

Where is the Green Fund? If the Green Fund was set up to look after the environment, the money in that fund has not even been spent. What is happening to that? Would you want your own Cabinet people to direct that the Green Fund be appropriated to local government, so that the whole environment would be taken care of? Mr. Speaker, CEPEP is supposed to be doing that, but there is a lot to be desired still in terms of the efficiency of that programme. We are not seeing the desired outcome, particularly for larger issues. We still see rural areas— I was telling my colleagues one time at tea time that when you move from South Trinidad, Cedros, through Point Fortin, Fyzabad, Barrackpore, Penal and so on, you see the substandard living, and it pains you. Mr. Speaker, you grew up in San Fernando, I grew up in Fyzabad, and some of my colleagues grew up in Cedros. My colleague from St. Joseph grew up in Cedros.

I even showed my driver one night, when I had gone to a meeting in Barrackpore. I said, "Look at these houses as we move through from Barrackpore and as we come up to North Trinidad", as soon as we reached close to the

Chaguanas area you began to see an increased development process. But the people in rural areas suffer from amenities; it is as a result of the negligence in the local government scenario, because they do not have the funding to improve the development in rural communities. How is that reform going to assist these people in the rural communities? It is not going to do anything substantial.

Insect vector control—we spoke about that in terms of the aedes aegypti. The insect vector control does not have the sprayers; they do not have the people involved; they do not have the chemicals to do the spraying, and the country is riddled with aedes aegypti. A number of persons have got this disease, the hemorrhagic dengue fever. It is by virtue of hard work on some of these patients and the knowledge that anytime somebody has a fever he or she has to think about dengue fever as well, that has allowed persons' lives to be saved.

I want to talk a little about the cremation sites. My colleague, Mr. Sharma, also spoke about it.

**Hon. Member:** If he spoke about it, why are you going to speak about it?

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** If you do not want to hear, please allow me to speak about it. You are not involved. You do not understand the pain and suffering. I must speak about it; you must listen to me. You do not understand the pain and suffering. [*Crosstalk*]

I am from the Hindu faith, but I am all-encompassing in my religious beliefs. Let me ask something of this Government. There is no cremation site in Trinidad and Tobago that allows the dignity and honour that is supposed to be given to somebody who is going to be cremated. The Hindus have a process whereby the bodies are moved from place to place seven times. If it is raining, the dead body is subjected to the rain. [*Interrupted*] You would rent a tent for seven different areas? That is to tell you how you do not understand your culture; you have no respect for your culture in Trinidad and Tobago.

The cremation site at Mosquito Creek is crumbling into the sea; there are no roads to go into it. You have the one in Caroni; you do not even have a water system; the people have to take the ashes and walk across mud to put the ashes into the river. What sort of dignity is this Government giving the people? Local government is responsible for it, and local government is starved from the funding.

In the five areas of Trinidad and Tobago, this Government should ensure that there are cremation sites: in the North-west, North-east, Central, South-west and

South-east; ensure that there are cremation sites which are adequate and completely put out in terms of a beautiful and serene type of atmosphere, where dignity is afforded to the persons who die and are carried for cremation.

I will not live long again, and I expect that at my cremation the dignity in which I lived and with what I gave my country for the period of time I served my thousands of patients, that would be afforded me when I die. But under the present situation, no dignity is allowed, not even a private centre where 400 or 500 persons could get together at an enclosed area to have a little rite. I have said enough of that.

Look at water. You talk about development status and developed 2020 status, and persons have to be putting out barrels at the sides of the roads begging for some water in a country where you have developed status. The hon. Minister quarrelled that she gave \$1 million or \$4 million for truck borne water. In today's age we should be talking about truck borne water? In the city of Arima, persons are not even getting water for the entire week. What is happening? And you are talking about local government and postponing local government? Local government is not going to do anything for these people anymore, under your administration, because you do not have the commitment and you do not have the capacity to do anything that is substantial to help the people of Trinidad and Tobago; only pure "ol' talk" on a daily basis.

Parks and recreation—You pass through the East-West Corridor—we drive on the bus route because we happen to be parliamentarians and have a pass—and we would see the Aranguez Savannah and the Eddie Hart grounds, well lit. We want that to be throughout Trinidad and Tobago; not only in the cities and the East-West Corridor. We want it in Central Trinidad. In Mr. Warner's Chaguanas West area, he has to do it on his own. [*Desk thumping*] We want it in South Trinidad; in South-east, South-west, in Mayaro, all over. It must not be for one people alone; it must be for everybody. If you are doing it, do it for everybody.

**Hon. Members:** Which people?

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** What is even worse, the lights are on up to 10 o'clock or 11 o'clock in the night, but who is playing sports? The people are afraid to come out in the night, because they are afraid of the murder situation, the criminal situation. So unless you do not get that criminal situation going, people have to stay enclosed in their homes barricaded. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Aah, it is getting to you now; you are responding. It is getting to you now; it is getting to you now. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** It is getting late, and the hon. Member could say, "Physician heal yourself", but he would not say that.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** These are the things that touch me. I came from poverty; my mother sold chickens, eggs and milk for me to be educated, like so many of you. Many of you have come from that as well. If we have reached a situation where we could do something for the people, by heaven's sake, do it for the people. What is the use of you being a Member of Parliament, people come to your offices and you cannot do a thing for them. You only have to write letters and fool yourself, and beg your colleagues on the other side to do something for your people, not for you; you are all right; you do not need to be in this. You do not need to be a parliamentarian, but you have a commitment to help the people. God has given you something. God has brought something so you could go back and help your people.

If I were not in politics, I would buy a caravan and go through the country of Trinidad and Tobago and attend to all the patients free, and do operations free. [*Desk thumping*] I do not need to be in Parliament. I do not need to be in Parliament, but I have a commitment to help in education and in health. If I cannot do that, while I am alive, I would not have served my useful purpose.

### **9.30 p.m.**

I could not sit in a university corner doing academic work all the time and become a professor and the people of Trinidad and Tobago are suffering and you cannot change the health care situation. It is the same thing with the hon. Minister of Local Government, she has been given a responsibility, I know she is a very nice person, she means well, but she must make sure that she implements the programmes she sets about to. Do not come back here year after year asking for the postponement of local government election, you all are afraid to go to the people and you are using it as an excuse.

Mr. Speaker, when we go on trips throughout our constituencies particularly in Central Trinidad, the people complain about the drains in front of their homes. I was going through St. Joseph at one time and the whole of Aranguez was filled with drains that were clogged for months and years. You go through Caroni East and our constituencies, the first thing the people tell you is that the drains in front of their homes are clogged; they have dirt drains et cetera.

The Longdenville Main Road does not have a pavement; Chin Chin Road does not have a pavement. What is happening? We have spent \$250 billion and you are emasculating the Ministry of Local Government by giving it \$1.4 billion per year and you feel you can do something for the people. So do not come with this tomfoolery that you are doing something for the people and trying to postpone election upon election using all sorts of disguises.

If we say we have so much money—it does not matter what Members of Parliament get because Members of Parliament on this side can make do with little, it does not matter, but the councillors need something and they are the first line of elected representatives who meet the people and many times they have to spend their own money to do something for them. Members of Parliament have to spend their own money for people, I am sure you all give out a lot of your money because you want to help your people, so what affects us, affects you, but salaries for councillors should be increased. Not this little thing of \$2,000 or \$3,000 which they take home by the end of the day. What can that do for them? If there are 131 electoral districts and 131 councillors have to be there, what will it cost the Government to increase their salaries and remuneration that will give them the impetus, drive and the stimulation to do more than they are doing?

So in closing, there are lots of issues one needs to take into consideration. The first I mentioned is the constitutionality of the local government that must be enshrined in the Constitution and not allow it to the whims and fancies of any government, and a date must be fixed for local government election on a timely basis.

The question of funding per citizen in Trinidad and Tobago in the allocation of moneys for regional corporations has to be taken into consideration and the issue of this new report has to come from the Elections and Boundaries Commission, it is not the PNM Government or the Prime Minister who has to set boundaries. Do not interfere with the independence of the Elections and Boundaries Commission.

The other issue is the aspect of services; we want to see some marked improvement in the delivery of services for all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. No matter what administrative or legal reform you take, make sure you deliver to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Minister of Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Hazel Manning):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all Members on both sides of the House for contributing to this really important debate in extending the life of the local government bodies.

I want to put my response in context of Vision 2020. When we speak about developed country status, we speak about achieving high standards and a high quality of life, and when we speak of municipal services in the context of developed country status, we are speaking to ensure the support of this honourable House that there is in place decentralized service of high quality.

With that in mind, I want us to discuss the reform agenda. When we talk about reform, we are talking about a continuous development of a system and the reform in this particular local government system began sometime now. It is ongoing, reform and development is long, sometimes painful; it takes place over a long time; it does not happen in a short time and, therefore, it is something we need to understand.

The Member for Princes Town North argued that there was nothing new under the sun, he said it was the same argument we used in 2003, 2006 and 2007. He spoke about the functions of section 232 and the Municipal Act, No. 29 of 1965 as being the same. He is asking us to do business in the same way of 1965, 43 years ago, and not understanding that we want to do business differently.

Mr. Speaker, the world has changed and when we speak of reform, we are saying that we are doing business in a different way, slowly but surely getting to the cutting edge of technology doing what the rest of the world is doing. We are not 46 years down the road as he is suggesting, going through a legislation that is very descriptive in its approach while we are talking about enabling. The hon. Member for Princes Town North said that the last Green Paper is not even as comprehensive as the one we have now. He claimed that we forgot all the details of financing, structure, taxation, et cetera and spoke of the new Green Paper as being not worthy. He does not understand.

Mr. Speaker, in the new Green Paper we are talking about the roles and responsibilities of the local government body. The consultants as we were shown, presented the new reports from the consulting firm of Hamilton, and coming out of that, we looked at the roles and responsibilities of local government and thought that we needed to get them right and, therefore, that is what we have in the new Green Paper. We have a new approach that is influenced by the millennium development goals that is influenced by Vision 2020, by stakeholders we have listened to and are still listening to, and an approach influenced by the research done in the region, the Caribbean and Trinidad and Tobago at UWI and other local institutions.

Mr. Speaker, never did I give the impression that what I was presenting was totally different, that I dismissed all that happened before and I am here with something totally new. I traced the history from 2003, 2006 and 2007, and I did



not make up something that was totally disconnected. I traced the same research, and using an updated literature, I married the research and traced the arguments talking about the new focal points looking at the development of the head office, municipal management, social services, economic development, environmental development and that of a resilient community and, therefore, having put the roles and responsibilities of the new Green Paper on the table, we began consultations. We are asking people and we still are. We have 14 regional corporations and we are going to all and we are asking if they agree with the proposal on the table: What are your ideas? How can you help us to ensure that a more efficient system is put in place?

The Member for Princes Town North then spoke about the Act detailing some of the clauses and called for the implementation of the same old Act that is 46 years old. At this point, our legal team is now debating whether the Act is too descriptive, too detailed actually going through every item, or whether the Act should give a bit more freedom and become more enabling. He spoke about financing and the fact that the local government is choked for funding.

Mr. Speaker, I totally disagree with that argument and I want to give a clear sense of the moneys spent during their time and during this time.

**Hon. Member:** Are you sure you have the correct amount this time?

**Sen. The Hon. H. Manning:** Chaguanas Borough Council in 2001 got \$1.9 million; today Chaguanas Borough Council got approximately \$7 million. Couva got \$1.3 million in 2001, today Couva got \$9.6 million; Princes Town in their time got \$1.2 million, today Princes Town got \$8 million and that is just an example of what is happening while they are saying that we are not giving their regions money.

Mr. Speaker, for the record, I want to tell you that what he is saying is not the reality. He spoke about discrimination and about the fact that we were not developing certain areas. He spoke about Sancho Road, let me tell you what the people there said to us. They said they have a representative they do not see, who does not help them, who has not paved the road, who has not put in drains or pavements and I want to say that as long as there are Sancho Roads in this country I am going to fix them if I can. [*Desk thumping*]

The representatives on that side do not do it, so I will keep fixing them because I do not discriminate, and to ensure that there is no discrimination, the ministry has established a Regional Planning Unit whose mandate is to develop regional plans for each region and, therefore, we have gone into each region asking them to highlight their uniqueness and I want to give you an example.

The north-eastern region has begun development of going through the area identifying what the potential of the region is all about and has drafted an ecotourism plan, one that is mandated to ensure that the area becomes more economically viable. So in the area of Princes Town North we are going to identify projects and develop a regional plan as we have already started where Fairfield Estate is going to be developed and many of the other areas.

**9.45 p.m.**

We would identify and prioritize projects in the area and begin to repair the roads which have been represented by a particular representative for a number of years and the people are complaining that the work is not being done. We will fix every road in this country. *[Laughter]*

Right now the chief executive officers in all the regional corporations have been asked to work together with their councils to do a list of projects and submit them to the ministry as quickly as they could so that we could develop the plan for fiscal year 2009.

The Member for Fyzabad talked about a collection of property rates and taxes. I want to explain the thinking at this point in time. We have had it from a number of people who have been talking to us and a Cabinet sub-committee. They are saying that if we concentrate on the collection of property rates and taxes, regions would not be able to get enough money to do their development, for example, the north-eastern region, as against maybe, the Couva region.

The suggestion put forward by the Cabinet sub-committee was that funding should become available based on the regional development plans. We have been encouraging regions to put in place development plans. Right now, the ministry is about to hire planning consultants to work with every region to develop and cost the plans. The central government would provide funding for those plans and the heavy dependence on property rates and taxes would be then, a thing of the past.

The Member for Fyzabad also spoke about the need to build markets.

**Dr. Rafeeq:** Madam Minister, can I ask a question, please? Thank you for giving way. Some of the municipalities collect their rates and taxes. Are they allowed to keep that or do they send it to the Consolidated Fund? Is it that the disbursement from the ministry is decreased by that amount of rates and taxes that they collect? If that is so, then, there is no incentive for them to collect the rates and taxes.

**Sen. The Hon. H. Manning:** My response to that is at this point in time the Ministry of Finance is doing its review. As soon as they are finished they would be able to tell us about the new system. At this point in time we are doing regional development and regional planning while the Ministry of Finance would be coming with another approach.

I was talking about markets. The Member for Fyzabad asked us to ensure that markets in this country were well appointed. We have identified three markets that will be developed, starting hopefully, in September 2009. We have approval for a special purpose company to start looking at the development of the market in Marabella. The other market is in Sangre Grande and the third market is San Juan. The Central Tenders Board is evaluating consultants or contractors to start construction. If the councils can get their programmes together and submit to us, we would do as quickly as we could to implement them. We keep asking the councils to submit their proposals. No proposal is kept back because it belongs to the Opposition's area.

**Mr. Sharma:** Minister, will you consider similar proposals from Members of Parliament?

**Sen. The Hon. H. Manning:** Yes. As a matter of fact, we have asked the chief executive officer of each regional corporation to speak to their councillors. I hope that you are speaking to your councillors. If they talk to the councillors, I am sure that they would get the same story that you would want to tell us. You can tell it twice.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** We go to statutory meetings.

**Sen. The Hon. H. Manning:** It is not a problem. You are supposed to. They are open for the public.

The Member for Fyzabad spoke about bridges. We have discovered that there are approximately 969 bridges in this country. We have phased the development of bridges. It is before Cabinet and hopefully, Cabinet will approve soon, Phase 2 of the Bridges Programme. We are ensuring that all bridges across the country will be developed. We are not choosing bridges depending on which area they fall.

As for disaster preparedness, we have approval from Cabinet and soon you would see the advertisements where we are putting structures for each regional corporation to put in place a disaster preparedness unit. The units will be working assiduously in the region and there would be permanent structures. The units will ensure that areas that do not have the potential for serious challenges would be managed long before the flood starts. We would work together with the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management (ODPM) to put the structures in place.

The Member for Chaguanas West asked why we are extending the life of municipal bodies. We do have an answer. The answer is that as we reform we have a number of projects to put in place. One project the Member for Caroni East spent much time talking about was boundaries. We have to ensure that a new enabling law is put in place. We have to ensure that new management and financial systems are put in place and are working expeditiously. *[Interruption]* If you notice, as I go through the systems, we have started. For the new laws we have a committee in place and they have been working. In a short while it should be finalized. We have started looking at the GIS system to ensure that all plots are identified and the boundaries would be placed on an electronic platform.

The Ministry of Finance is busy putting in place a new tax programme for property taxes to ensure that we can get the system working more efficiently and effectively. I am sure that long before the end of this year, many of these important programmes and projects would be up and running.

The Member for Siparia seemed to have joined with the Member for Chaguanas West to make that same point about why we are doing what we are doing. I ask Members on the other side: Why did the UNC extend the life of the regional corporation in December 1975? *[Interruption]* You still did it. Look at section 11(4) (b). You were not speaking then to reform. There was no promise of a new boundary, enabling legislation or promise of efficient and effective systems. You postponed it for nine months and there was no explanation. I am a little concerned about their constant asking of the question when they could not give an explanation for what they did.

The Member for Caroni East—*[Interruption]* I am no lawyer but my legal advisor, the goodly Attorney General sitting next to me, spoke to me about section 9. I got a sense that the Member for Caroni East did not understand what he was trying to explain. Section 9 states:

“...every municipality shall include all the lands, houses and buildings within the boundaries set forth...in the Order made under section 5(2).”

Section 5(2) says:

“The President may,...apply the provision of this Act to any town, district or place for the purpose of incorporating the electors thereof.”

It means simply that we have to bring to Parliament the request to change the boundaries. He spent an hour and a half trying to explain that to us and I do not think that he got to the point.

I am sure that as we journey forward to developed country status, we need to put standards and proper systems in place. Yes, Chaguanas West, we need to get it right. We need to look like what those developed countries look like and act like those developed countries. We need to ensure that our systems are efficient and not flawed. We need to ensure that the quality of our lives and the standard of living are good. Why should we not? I ask those on the other side to journey with us because we will get there. It will be slow and tedious, but we will get there.

I thank you all for participating in this debate. I know that you will join with us to make Trinidad and Tobago a better place of which we can all be proud.

Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

*Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.*

*House in committee.*

*Clauses 1 and 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Question put and agreed to, That the Bill be reported to the House.*

*House resumed.*

*Bill reported, without amendment, read the third time and passed.*

**10.00 p.m.**

#### **TREASURY BONDS BILL**

[Second Day]

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [July 04, 2008]:*

**Mr. Speaker:** On the last occasion, the hon. Minister of Finance was on her legs. She had used up 12 minutes of original time.

**Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira:** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

*Question proposed.*

**Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar (Siparia):** Mr. Speaker, we are at 10.00 p.m. and my colleagues have asked me to summarize our points in this debate, bearing in mind that on Friday, we will be doing the Motion on the Development Loans Act and, therefore, many of the points that may be raised today in this debate are points that would be raised with respect to the Development Loans Act.

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I want to place on record some of our points and the others, we would continue on Friday, when we deal with the development loans. The issue is a larger issue. If we take both of them together, there is a larger issue as to why we need to deal with liquidity management. Those issues, as I have said, we would deal with in more depth on the following sitting of this House.

The first point I would like to make is that this Bill represents yet another example of Government creating a brand new borrowing instrument. Let us not get carried away with liquidity management. As I have said, we would deal with the whole issue of liquidity in the system in depth on Friday. Our concern is that the Government is creating a brand new borrowing instrument. When we read section 3(1), it states:

“The Minister, on behalf of the Government, on written advice from the Central Bank, may raise money by the issue of bonds.”

Let us not fool ourselves. What this means is that the Government would be engaging in borrowing. That is where we are going. This is an instrument to allow the Government to create a brand new borrowing instrument.

This Government, in its previous incarnation in 1995, by Act No. 14 of 1995, which was the Treasury Notes Act at that time, created a brand new borrowing instrument. If you read the *Hansard* of the debate on the Bill to enact the Treasury Notes Act on July 1995, which was assented to, in that year, which was the last year of the PNM in that incarnation in office, the record in the words of the then Minister of Finance, Wendell Mottley is like déjà vu. The words were repeated in this debate on the last occasion, which is that we need an instrument to deal with liquidity management. That was one of the reasons given for creating the Treasury Notes Act and giving the Government the instrument to borrow under that Act.

I am repeating myself to make the point that in that debate, the same reasons being given by the hon. Minister for creating the Treasury Bonds instrument was the reasoning given in 1995 by the then hon. Minister of Finance, Wendell Mottley. At that time the Minister explained the reasoning for the Treasury Notes Act, which was that it wanted a medium term instrument, because the Treasury Bills Act was enforced. The Treasury Bills Act was under Chap. 71:40 of the laws. You could have borrowed bills under this section and it was only for a fixed period of time, \$1,000 million for not later than one year. Under the Treasury Bills Act, borrowings could be undertaken by the Government, but those would have to be repaid within one year.

When the then Minister of Finance came, he said: "Listen, we have development loans which take us in the longer term. When we make borrowings under the Development Loans Act, that takes us up to 10 years for payments. When we make borrowings under the Treasury Bills Act, that takes us only up to one year. We have to repay these things within one year." He came and said: "Look, we need a medium term instrument for the control of liquidity and so I am proposing to this Parliament the Treasury Notes Act where we can now borrow for these things and they have to be paid within five years." We have an instrument that allows us to borrow for repayment in five years. We have on the statute books Treasury Bills, which allows us to borrow for repayment in one year, and under the Development Loans Act we can borrow and pay back for up to 10 years, I believe; I am not sure but it is a longer period for repayment. You have created this brand new instrument for borrowing. That is the problem with the Treasury Notes Act. Therefore, why it is that you cannot utilize the existing law of the Treasury Notes Act, which allows you to borrow for up to five years? What is wrong with that? Why can we not use it?

You say that you want to soak up liquidity, have you already borrowed to the maximum of that? I do not know; I am asking. I did not have sufficient time to check the public accounts. Have we already borrowed to the maximum? That maximum has been increased on several occasions. I think by now you can borrow in excess of \$1,000 million. By 2003, section 3 of the Treasury Notes Act was amended so that the Government could borrow TT \$1,000 million. That is \$1 billion. Have you borrowed the \$1 billion and, therefore, exceeded the limit under the Treasury Notes Act? I think that is very important for us to know, because you are creating this further borrowing instrument.

Further, have you used up all the moneys that you could borrow under the Treasury Bills Act. This one is another couple of billions. I do not know if it is \$5 billion. At the rate you have been amending, it may well be more than that. You have these two, you can borrow and use it for open market operations, which is what the Minister was saying; the new Bill we are dealing with is for open market operations to soak up liquidity. Why are we not using these two or three? Is it that we have borrowed to the max of them, or we have maxed out the limit? I know for a fact that we maxed out on the development loans, because the Minister has admitted that in a previous statement in the Parliament dealing with RBTT shares and the transfer to the Canadian company. There are two existing statutes, which would allow the Minister to borrow under one of them for at least \$1 billion and under the other for, I am not sure of the exact amount, but it was at one time fixed.

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In 1995, it was \$2 billion. I believe that has now been increased. Why do we not use those? Have we exceeded those limits? If we have exceeded those limits and we go to the Development Loans Act, that limit is a very high limit. We have maxed out on that as well.

What has been happening and has already happened with this brand new borrowing instrument is that the Government is taking this country and the future generations into the valley of debt. That is where we are going. When you borrow, it is death. When you go into that valley of debt, we are in effect going down the valley of death, because these are the things that are creating the situation in the country. You are taking up the moneys that should be spent on housing, food and clothing and you are borrowing because you have to pay back. How much are you spending? How much would you spend when you create this new instrument and you borrow these millions or billions? How much are you going to spend to service the debt? How much, out of our moneys would be spent to service the debt?

Firstly, why can we not use the existing laws to borrow? Have we maxed out on those? Secondly, I have a very serious problem. I have not discussed it with my colleagues, but personally I would not support this Bill in its present form because this Bill gives the Minister a blank cheque. Nowhere in this Bill is a ceiling fixed as to the amount that the Minister is being given the authority to borrow.

Mr. Speaker, if you check Volume 21 of the *Laws of Trinidad and Tobago*, which gives us all the legal instruments and statutes under which the Government can borrow, including Treasury Bills, Treasury Notes, development loans, foreign investment orders, General Loan and Stock Act and several others, all these are in here, every single one has a ceiling. Every one says that the Minister is being authorized by the Act to borrow. For example, section 3 of the Treasury Notes Act states:

“...the Minister on...advice of the Governor of the Bank may borrow money in Trinidad and Tobago—

(a) in such sum or sums not exceeding in the aggregate...”

At this point in time it is \$1,000 million. I am of the view that has been increased by the Government. Up to 2003 it did not exceed \$1,000 million. When you go to the Treasury Bills, it is the same; there is a maximum. Why, in this Bill, are we giving a blank cheque? I totally disagree with that. In every one, if you go under the development loans, there is a maximum.



I do not believe that this Parliament should give such authority to the Minister to mortgage the future of our country in this regard by a blank cheque. We must put a ceiling in section 3. At the moment, the Bill gives us section 3.

“The Minister, on behalf of the Government and on the written advice of the...Bank, may raise money by the issue of Bonds for the purpose of managing liquidity in Trinidad...”

It does not say in the aggregate of how much. I think it is vital that it is done. Why is it?

I am coming now to the second issue, which has do with the public debt. We have to understand that when this money is borrowed, blank cheques at the moment—I do not know how many billions are going to be borrowed. When this is done, the repayment of the interest on the principal comes out of the Exchequer Account, which is the Consolidated Fund. The Minister has advised and the Bill so provides that when the bonds are issued and you borrow these moneys, they are going to be placed in the Exchequer Account in a blocked account. But there is a very strange provision which says in clause 4(2):

“No moneys placed into the blocked account referred to in subsection a(1) may be withdrawn or otherwise dealt with except for the purpose of paying the principal sum under section 7.”

Why are we using these moneys only for the repayment of the principal sum? Why are we not also using it with the payment of interest? If it is only to be used for the payment of principal, then the interest has to come out of the rest to the Consolidated Fund, it has to come out of the revenues of Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, that is money which could have been utilized to build hospitals, buy beds, build schools, fix roads and all the other services that we need. I am asking the Minister to reconsider clause 4(2) and to have that the moneys may be withdrawn or dealt with except for the purpose of paying the principal sum and/or interest. I think we should do both. It should not only be the principal. I do not know if that is an oversight or that is the intention. If it is, the Minister would kindly explain to us. That is the third issue with respect to the wording of the Bill.

This is borrowing. It is taking us further into debt. It is taking the nation into debt. For this reason, the liquidity management, which we would deal with in depth on another occasion—just for this one—we have to remember when we are looking at the public debt of Trinidad and Tobago, the published public debt does not include several other debts. Firstly, it does not include borrowings of an

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overdraft from the Central Bank. We do not know at the moment what the Central Bank lends the Government. That would be an obligation on the part of the Government to pay.

Secondly, the published public debt does not include sums owed to creditors for goods and services. If the Government owes \$1 billion to creditors for goods and services, that is not included in the published public debt.

By the way, my understanding is that many contractors out there are owed in the tune of billions of dollars for contracted works done. Those are debts that are outstanding for which we do not know the exact amount.

The third category that the published public debt does not include is what is known as off balance sheet indebtedness. This has been increasing year upon year, as I would show in a moment when we come to the debt of the nation, off balance sheet indebtedness.

**10.15 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, these are called contingent liabilities. These do not come to the Parliament. There is no scrutiny, transparency, accountability and no monitoring on the part of the Parliament when they are dealing with off balance sheet funding of projects. If we put all these things together, the public debt is going to be far more massive than you would ever find in the public accounts of the country.

I am raising these issues because I want to turn now to the published public debt. I am saying that this published public debt is not the full extent of indebtedness because of these three other areas that were left out. Let us look at the public debt.

As at the end of fiscal 2007, as revealed in the public accounts, Volume II financial year 2007, the debt of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is \$21.4 billion. As I said, it does not include those three other areas of indebtedness.

When we look at this—I refer to this and the Auditor General's report—what we find is that when compared with the 2006 figures, our public debt increased in 2007 by 14.9 per cent. That is at the end of fiscal 2007. By the time we give the Minister this instrument which is *carte blanche*—it is a blank cheque—we do not know what the public debt is going to be at the end of fiscal 2008, which is a month or two months away. We see that the public debt increased last year by 14.9 per cent as above the previous year 2006.

In 2007, 53 per cent of our revenue, when compared with 2006, came from borrowings. Do you know what this means? When you are calculating the revenue of the nation—our revenues come from several areas, and one of them is

borrowing. When you borrow you have to pay back—that is not real revenue; it is not real money—with interest. When we are calculating our revenue and it goes into the Consolidated Fund in the Exchequer Account—that is what is being spent for the development of the nation—for 2007, 53 per cent of the revenue was borrowings. *[Interruption]* It is here in the public accounts.

The reverse of that would be 47 per cent of revenue from other sources. That is a frightening thing. *[Interruption]* Would the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East—it is late. Mr. Speaker, I am speaking to you, but the Member is disturbing me.

**Mr. Warner:** He is a pest.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Let us just get it over with and go. If you want to speak, you have 75 minutes. It is late and we are all tired. I am speaking the truth. I am quoting from the public accounts of 2007 and the Auditor General's Report for 2007. When we compare fiscal year 2007, 53 per cent of revenues as compared to 49 per cent of our revenues came from borrowings. I saw it. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, I would refer to the public accounts 2007 and the Auditor General's Report at pages 78 and 88 and XIV. The public accounts of 2007 at page XVI and public accounts, 2007 at page XVII. You are going to find the numbers that I am speaking about there. We have 53 per cent of revenue as compared to 49 per cent in the previous year.

The percentage of borrowings to revenue increased from 0.55 per cent in 2006, but in 2007 it increased to 5 per cent. Mr. Speaker, 53 per cent of all revenue is debt—the public accounts 2007, on page XV. This is money that we have borrowed and we have to pay it back. I am making the point about the public debt. This is what we are owing at the moment as at fiscal 2007. The Minister could tell us how much money has been repaid since fiscal 2007 to now, but at that point in time it was \$21.4 billion.

In that year, we borrowed \$2 billion, and off book budgeting was \$29.9 billion. So, when you take off book budgeting together with the public published debt, we are talking about a total public debt of \$51.3 billion in 2007. In 2007 the revenue was only \$40.4 billion. So the percentage of public debt to total revenue was 53 per cent. There is where the numbers came from. The public debt was \$21.4 billion; we borrowed \$2 billion in the published debt and off book budgeting of \$29.9 billion, it gives us a total \$51.36 billion. The total revenue is only \$40.4 billion, so, in effect it is 53 per cent which means more than half of our revenues in 2007 came from money borrowed which you have to pay.

Further, we have to talk about how much it is costing us to service this debt. I would like the hon. Minister to tell us under these borrowings, how much is the proposal to borrow and how much it is going to cost us to service these new borrowings.

Charges on account of the public debt: In the Auditor General's Report of 2007 at page 90, in 2007 the Government borrowed \$2 billion. Do you know how much money we paid to service the total of the public debt? We paid \$4.28 billion. Last year, it cost us \$4.28 billion to service all this money which was borrowed by the Government. How much more is it going to cost us in fiscal 2008 after these borrowings are executed?

So, we are paying back more than we are borrowing. So, they have borrowed \$2 billion in 2007 on the published borrowing, but you are paying back \$4.28 billion. Do you know what you could have done with \$4.28 billion—schools, hospitals, roads and the Parliament building could have been completed. We could have had this building completed right here and not somewhere in Diego Martin or wherever else they want to move it, but right here in the seat of democracy.

The amount paid back, \$4.28 billion, represents 10.3 per cent of all expenditure for 2007. It represents 11.12 per cent of total revenue. So, the money that we are using just to pay back to service these debts represents all the expenditure for last year. It was 10.3 per cent of total expenditure. It was 11 per cent of total revenue. We are collecting money, borrowing money and paying back more than we are borrowing.

Mr. Speaker, the issues are as follows: Firstly, why can we not use the existing instruments? Have they been maxed out or not? Can we use Treasury Notes or Treasury Bills? Why can we not use those? I may respectfully suggest—I am going to talk a little more on that on Friday—that this bond issue under the development loans that has been put out—the bonds would be issued under the authority of the Development Loans Act—I am going to ask the Minister to consider that. We are going to deal with that next week. This is the first Government issue, and they are saying that this is to control liquidity for liquidity management, but the Development Loans Act is not about liquidity management.

Section 3 of that Act says that the moneys borrowed on the bonds issued under the Act is for development. I have never seen a definition, either in the normal dictionary or in the legal dictionary or the economic dictionary where “development” equals inflation control or liquidity control. It is my view that this is an illegal bond issue predicated to us that the purpose being liquidity

management. Minister, we are going to deal a little more with that matter. You may look at it and tell me that I am wrong, but I would be very happy to be wrong. On Friday, we are going to take a look at that Development Loans Act because that would be the issue on that day. So, why are we not using the existing Treasury Notes and Treasury Bills?

Secondly, why are you not putting a ceiling as to the amounts as with every other law? When we do a budget in this House, we approve estimates of expenditure. It is not *carte blanche*. We estimate whether it is \$41 billion or \$50 billion. We do not even in the budget give the Minister of Finance approval for a total blank cheque. There are supplementation and variations of appropriation and so forth. There is a fixed amount. Why are we giving a blank cheque? Why? This is nowhere in the law. It is totally against the precedent in Trinidad and Tobago, and totally against what obtains in other countries. You cannot have a blank cheque. The Parliament cannot authorize you to borrow money *ad nauseam*, you cannot borrow without a limit. There must be a fixed limit. That is the second issue.

The third issue deals with clause 4(2) of the Bill, where you are saying that the money can only be used from the blocked account to repay the principal. I am asking whether this is deliberate or an oversight and whether it should not also be for the repayment of interest where necessary.

The final point has to do with—I was only emphasizing how indebted we are in a time of plenty—how much of our money per year in terms of revenues comes from borrowings, and how much is the total public debt. I want to agree with the hon. Minister of Finance who said some time ago in this House that they have brought down the public debt as a percentage of GDP. Whilst that may be true, the amount of the public debt remains the same. It is basically from 2000—2003. You said that since you came in you have brought down the public debt—I cannot remember whether it is 28 per cent or 53 per cent.

If the GDP is big like this, obviously, the percentage of the debt is going to be smaller as compared to GDP. We must look at the debt as compared to revenue. That is what is incoming and that is the debt we have to pay. I think it would not give us a true picture of our indebtedness if we take it as a percentage of GDP, because that keeps increasing with inflation and everything else. The numbers go up big. So, if you look at it as a percentage of revenue, which is the more frightening aspect of it, I am saying that it is 53 per cent of the revenue.

When the Minister said that and we look at the public debt—I think in 2003 it was about \$20 billion, and now we are \$20-plus billion. So, the actual amount,

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which is the published debt—as opposed to plus the off book debt—the numbers are \$20 billion to \$21 billion. So, with those words, I am not prepared to support this Bill without a ceiling being included in it, and I would so advise Members on this side.

I thank you very much for the time. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. Minister.

**Mr. Sharma:** What about us?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Mr. Speaker, I was willing to contribute to this debate. I did prepare, but bearing the time, I would not make my contribution. [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Speaker:** That is very honourable of you.

**The Minister of Finance (Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira):** Mr. Speaker, through you, I want to thank the hon. Member for Caroni East for not contributing this evening. [*Desk thumping*] In winding up the debate on this Bill, before we actually look at the Treasury Bonds Bill, I want to make a few comments, because I think we have to put this within—I think the hon. Member for Siparia, in a way, attempted to do so—a macroeconomic context or framework. When we look at the objective or the genesis of this Bill, it really speaks to the management of our economy, because it is really a response to one of our macroeconomic indicators.

Mr. Speaker, before we consider those macroeconomic indicators, and the specific one which this Bill proposes to address, it is important not to consider it in a vacuum. It is important, therefore, to put it within a context. In doing so, we on this side are extremely proud of the prudent and responsible management of the economy. [*Interruption*] Yes we are. [*Desk thumping*] Member for Caroni East, we have the figures to support this.

**10.30 p.m.**

When we look at our foreign exchange reserves, there are approximately US \$7 billion and to put it in context, it represents about 10 months of import cover. When we look at the international benchmarks of three months one could well appreciate what 10 months of import cover means. It does not only stop at our foreign exchange reserves, but also the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. Why we are particularly proud of that fund is this, that in April 2007 we passed legislation to deal with this Fund. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira:** And according to this Fund, once the surplus revenues from oil exceeds the estimate of our budget, 60 per cent is required to be put into this Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. As I have said on many other occasions and we are proud again to say it, we have never put 60 per cent. The minimum we have ever put is 80 per cent, and in fact, in some occasions we have put as much as 100 per cent. So, today the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund has approximately TT \$13 billion.

It does not only stop at the foreign reserves, not only at the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, but our unemployment rate of which we are also extremely proud. At end of the last quarter of 2007 it stood at approximately 4.5, 4.6 and it averages around 5 per cent, which at international levels is considered full employment.

Mr. Speaker, I want to speak about debt management, because we heard the hon. Member for Siparia speak about debt and the debt position of Trinidad and Tobago. I was happy that she spoke about it, because again, it gives us an opportunity to show how well we are managing our debt. Certainly, if we want to speak about prudent management, responsible management, you must talk about the way that you manage your debt.

When we look at our public sector debt in 2002, it represented 58.3 per cent of GDP.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** What is the amount?

**Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira:** Today it represents as a percentage, 28.3 per cent. Our external debt as a percentage of GDP is 5.7 per cent. Now, if I tell you that and I look at Trinidad and Tobago, perhaps one does not have a full appreciation, but I want to make some comparisons.

In fact, I just returned from the COVAP meeting in Antigua and Barbuda. At that meeting the issue of middle income countries—Jamaica being one of them—speaking of their indebtedness, and to give you an indication of Trinidad and Tobago's position, vis-à-vis even Barbados, which is always held up—I have all respect for Barbados, but it is held up as a good model, a good management of the economy—these are the figures coming out of the percentage of debt to GDP from these countries: St. Kitts/Nevis, 180.4 per cent of their GDP; Jamaica—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** But their GDP is small.

**Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira:** If you say St. Kitts, I will give you Jamaica then, let me hear what you have to say about Jamaica—127.4 per cent of GDP; Grenada, 115.1 per cent; Antigua and Barbuda, 108.4 per cent; Dominica, 97.6 per cent;

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Belize, 90.2 per cent; Barbados, 88.4 per cent. That is what their debt is to their GDP. So, if we say 28.3 per cent and we are proud of it, we are justifiably proud of that. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, it goes beyond just watching our debt as a percentage of GDP. We look at growth because that was a good indicator of where your economy is going. One of the things that one recognizes today is that for the developed or centre countries—as we call them: Europe, United States—growth has slowed almost to a halt. In the United States, it is 0.5 per cent; in Europe, it is about approximately 1.8 per cent. In fact, global growth is about 4 per cent and the countries responsible for bringing growth to a respectable level are not the centre countries, it is not the developed countries, it is countries like Trinidad and Tobago, what we call emerging and developing economies.

When we look at the statistics for Trinidad and Tobago, again, we are justifiably proud. Over the last two years, the average of our growth is approximately 9 per cent and in 2008, we expect it to be about 6 per cent. When one looks at what is going on internationally, even China's growth has slowed down to 8 per cent. When you look at what is happening in the United States, 0.5 per cent; Europe, 1.8 per cent, that level of growth in that context is more than respectable. Our growth is not only limited, as one wants to think, to the energy sector, it is also in the non-energy sector.

As this Bill is dealing more with the financial aspect of our economy, I want to say in the financial services sector, it has grown over the last two years, I think it was last year, it contributes 14.5 per cent to our GDP. The non-energy sector, the manufacturing sector has grown on an average of 8 per cent over the last few years, so there is no question that Trinidad and Tobago, all of these indicators that I spoke of, speak to a country that is managing its economy responsibly and prudently. I do not want to belabour the point that it is no happenstance, but I do think it is noteworthy because oftentimes, in fact, on Sunday I was in—

**Mr. Warner:** Church.

**Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira:** Perhaps that is where I was. In any event, the statement was made that Trinidad and Tobago is a country full of oil and gas and the impression one gets is that, you know, it is just by chance that Trinidad and Tobago is a wealthy country. It is true that we are blessed in the sense that we have all those natural resources but there are many countries with natural resources that can rival Trinidad and Tobago.



So, the question is, it is how you use those natural resources and how you develop them. Without going into too much detail, we know today that Trinidad and Tobago's economy is a gas-based economy, not an oil-based economy. I heard the other side, when you were debating the other Bill on the Municipal laws, talking about you are always doing something, you are always in the process of. I want to tell you what we did because today, the reason we have the growth that we have and we have the foreign exchange reserves that we have, and Trinidad and Tobago is in the place that it is, is because of those deliberate policies of former PNM administrations, starting with Eric Williams, with monetizing the natural gas.

In the 1990's—[*Interruption*] you do not want, but you see that is why you are enjoying the LNG. Further, the decision to manage the float of our currency, opening our borders to globalization, all of those were decisions of a visionary successive PNM administration and today we reap those benefits and there is no question about that. I have spoken about all the positive aspects of the economy, but there is no question—[*Interruption*] Member for Chaguanas West, I am sorry if you, for a moment were rendered deaf. I understand why you would not want to hear those good words, but it is the fact.

We are aware, therefore, however, there is one issue. As a prudent, responsible Government we have the issue of inflation. There is no question about it, that inflationary pressures are being exercised on our economy and we are feeling those pressures. What I want to say and I think it is important, because I have sat here many times and listened in particular—and I mean no offence, Member for Siparia—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira:**—many, many, many times, up to even last week Friday—to give the impression that these problems are problems that are peculiar to Trinidad and Tobago; [*Crosstalk*] that somehow, the rest of the world is immune to the effects of inflation and we in Trinidad and Tobago are experiencing inflation that the other countries are not experiencing. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira:** Perception is reality and I have a quotation which I will get to very shortly, that will support what I am saying. I know the other side says that I have a penchant for *The Economist*; I do. But I want to turn you to one of their most recent publications on May 24—30, 2008. Do you know what is on

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the headline? I want you to see it because it just speaks to the point that we are making on this side. Yes, we are dealing with inflation but it is not a problem for Trinidad and Tobago; it is not a problem for the Caribbean; it is not a problem for the United States; it is not a problem for Europe; it is not a problem for Asia; it is a problem for the entire world. The headline is "Inflation is back...but not where you think". When we read from the article, it speaks on this:

“Even though America is close to recession and growth in other developed economies has slowed, inflation is rising. In countries such as China, India, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia, even the often dodgy official statistics show prices have risen by 8—10% over the past year; in Russia, the rate is over 14%; in Argentina the true figure is 23% and in Venezuela it is 29%. If you measure the numbers correctly, two-thirds”—I want emphasize it—“two-thirds of the world's population will probably suffer double-digit rates of inflation this summer.”

This is two-thirds of the world and double-digit inflation. You know what is the difference between Trinidad and Tobago—*[Interruption]* and I will speak to that. And to reinforce the point there is another article:

"FT.com,

Fed cannot ignore global inflation."

And they are talking about inflation and in this paragraph it says:

"The result is that Asian countries have been notably slow to tighten monetary policy in response to the rapid rise in commodity prices. To take three examples: headline inflation in Indonesia is now 10.4 per cent, while interest rates remain at 8.5 per cent; inflation of 9.6 per cent in the Philippines is more than 4 percentage points above basis rates; and while inflation in India has reached 11 per cent, policy rates have only just risen to 8.5 per cent."

So, the point I am making is this, the issue of inflation is a global issue. Do you know what is the difference? Because I heard the Member for Siparia saying, *[Interruption]* “but in Trinidad”, but I will tell you the difference and that is why that article was an interesting article. What it said is that the whole world is experiencing inflation, the difference is that in the centre countries—that is Europe and the United States—they are experiencing no growth and inflation which may lead to, as the hon. Member for Siparia was whispering across on the other side, stagflation. The difference between those countries and emerging developing countries like Trinidad and Tobago, China, India and Latin America,

is that we are experiencing growth and inflation, but all the countries are experiencing inflation. That is the point I am trying to make and there are causes for that. [*Crosstalk*]

One of causes, as we are all aware of, is food prices. I want to quote from the Member of Parliament for Siparia when she spoke on the last occasion, I believe on Friday, with regard to the food prices.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira:** In any event, at 2.45 p.m. this is what the Member of Parliament for Siparia had to say:

"That is the blame game."

Speaking about us, this side, the PNM Government.

"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."

You see when you read something like that, you have to have difficulty when you listen to the Member for Siparia making statements that, I am going to say, are irresponsible, because I know that she knows better than that. The whole world knows better and you cannot pick up a newspaper; you cannot read an article; no one can be unaware that food and fuel are the major causes of headline inflation. The whole world knows that.

**Hon. Member:** She is in Mars.

**Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira:** Yes, she cannot be on this earth, because she said we are in Mars; we are on this earth; and on this earth, there is inflation. The last statistics coming out from the Food and Agricultural Organization that is an internationally well-respected organization, said:

**10.45 p.m.**

"Food security has become a pressing issue which has elicited global concern. Substantial and rapid increases in food prices have reflected greater uncertainty and volatility in the commodity market. The resulting negative repercussions on the foreign exchange earnings and incomes on many vulnerable countries have affected adversely human development in these countries."

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On April 2008, the Report of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations noted that world food prices rose by 45 per cent in the preceding nine months, and that there were serious shortages of rice, wheat and maize.

So, it is out there for all to know that it is not a Trinidad and Tobago problem. Yes, I like *The Economist*, so there was an article, I referred to it already; “The Silent Tsunami”.

**Mr. Sharma:** Leave some for Friday.

**Hon. K. Nunez-Testeira:** What it said was this:

“A wave of food price inflation is moving through the world, leaving riots and shaken governments in its wake. For the first time in 30 years food protests are erupting in many places at once. Bangladesh is in turmoil, even China is worried.”

So the point I am making is this, and just for absolute clarification—

**Mr. Sharma:** I beg to move.

**Hon. K. Nunez-Testeira:**—the issue of food prices is not a problem peculiar to Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Sharma:** Leave some for Friday.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Hon. K. Nunez-Testeira:** So, when we look at that issue of food prices, we understand that that has played a very real role in the inflation that Trinidad and Tobago is experiencing. But when we speak of inflation and we speak of it in the context of Trinidad and Tobago—you know a friend of mine said to me and you may think I am saying this totally out of context—you do not throw stones at an empty mango tree. So, I may be getting stoned but I take it as a great compliment to me, [*Crosstalk*] so, I want to thank you, Member for—[*Crosstalk*] I am full of mangoes and very juicy ones, it appears.

**Hon. Member:** “Ah.” [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. K. Nunez-Testeira:** And they clap. Thank you, thank you.

**Mr. Sharma:** We throw stones.

**Hon. K. Nunez-Testeira:** So we understand that inflation is everywhere, but in the context of Trinidad and Tobago what are the factors that are pushing our inflation? Well, we know that if we separate core inflation from headline inflation, it is the food inflation, which we know, and I am not going to go through all the reasons with which we are familiar.

What we do know is that Trinidad and Tobago has some problems or issues peculiar that are relevant to its brand of inflation, and on the demand side which is what I want to focus on, it is liquidity overhang.

**Mr. Speaker:** Yes, hon. Members, I know it is getting late, but I am interested in what the Minister is saying. I am sure if all of you, or most of you who are speaking would keep quiet, you can be also interested in it. So, please continue.

**Mr. Sharma:** [*Inaudible*] you are coming back Friday.

**Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your kind intervention. We know, therefore, that in the context of Trinidad and Tobago what is driving our inflation, is really liquidity; a liquidity overhang, and in a simple way we could say, too much money chasing too few goods.

We know if we separate, as I indicated the headline for the core inflation, we are dealing with food prices which we know is a global phenomenon. But taking the food prices issue out of it and we look at the liquidity that is really the challenge for our inflation, inflationary pressure that we are experiencing it is basically three things: the consumerism, which is really borne out of an economy that is doing very well and people being less than discriminating about the way they spend their money. Bank credit expansion—we know for instance, over the last few years it has been increasing on an average of about 23 per cent. So we have the bank credit expansion. Finally, there is public and private expenditure. That combination, in effect, is what is fuelling the inflationary pressures that we are experiencing.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Would the hon. Minister give way, please? Minister, why can you not use Treasury Notes and Treasury Bills under the existing law? Why do we need this new instrument? I am sorry I did not get that reason.

**Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira:** But, Member for Siparia, I was not aware that I had completed my contribution.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Well, I am asking you.

**Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira:** I did not interrupt you when you made your contribution.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** But you gave way. [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira:** No, I gave way because I thought you were going to ask me something to get clarification on something I said, but I did not know that you were now directing me in the way that I should proceed with my debate. I did not know that I was getting direction from the Member. I did not direct you in

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the way that you proceeded, so I would like if you would allow me to—  
[*Crosstalk*] I have learnt my lesson from that.

So, Mr. Speaker, before I get distracted, as I was indicating, so how do we then, as a responsible and prudent Government, manage this liquidity with which we are dealing? On the liquidity side, we do so by open market operations. This is where the role of the Central Bank becomes particularly critical. What has the Central Bank done in the context of dealing with liquidity overhang with too much money, the money in the system? One of the mechanisms that the Central Bank has initiated is raising the repo rate, which really is the interbank rate or the overnight rate at which banks borrow from the Central Bank, so it is like a policy rate, and the rate is 8.25 per cent. That is the repo rate.

Another measure that the Central Bank has taken in order to dampen the liquidity by open market operations, is reserve requirements. They have raised the reserve requirement for commercial banks from 11 per cent to 13 per cent.

But, finally, the other measure and a very effective measure is by the issuance of bonds. We ask ourselves, why bonds? I have heard the other side talk about borrowing and using, and that is the mischief of using words. Because, yes, the language of the Bill speaks about borrowing money and to raise bonds, but the purpose and the clear purpose, and it is stated in clause 3 of the Bill, it is to be used as a liquidity management tool. It is not used for debt financing; we are not raising bonds to take the money raised and invest it and put it back in the system.

We recognize on this side that the issue that we are dealing with is inflation. We recognize that the inflation is being driven by liquidity, too much money in the system. So what do you do? You pull the money out of the system. How do you pull the money out of the system? We have not invented that, we are not reinventing the wheel. This is an established and recognized mechanism for dealing with liquidity, simply, issuing a bond for liquidity management. So, when we look at the reasons, as I indicated, why the bond? Well, we know there is a high level of liquidity in the system; we know that the bond rate is attractive, because contrary to what the Member for Siparia said on the last occasion—I do not know if the Member was being serious—“8.25 per cent and inflation is 10 per cent, who is going to buy those bonds?”

Well, we know today that is not so. In fact, on every occasion—and the last occasion of the \$1.2 billion, it was over-subscribed by over \$776 million, but it is every occasion. There has not been an occasion when the Central Bank has issued bonds and those bonds have not been over-subscribed. On the last occasion, as I indicated, on April 27, 2000, the amount offered was \$650 million; it was over-

subscribed. The amount applied for was \$1,144,730,000; July 02, which was the last occasion, it was \$1.2 billion, and the amount applied for was \$1,976,000,000; over \$776 million over-subscribed.

So, I want to allay the fears of the Member for Siparia and Members on the other side about who will buy the bond. Well, you see, they like to quote us: "Facts are stubborn things, they will not go away." And those are the facts. The facts are that every time we have issued bonds, the bonds have been over-subscribed. So, Mr. Speaker, why bonds? Because bonds are an attractive investment vehicle. We know what has happened with the sub prime mortgage crisis; we know what is happening in the financial services sector. Investors are looking for safe havens; investors are looking for putting their money and investing their money in places where they are sure to get back a good return; their money is safe. When it comes to Government bonds, there is no question about it, because I am sure the Member for Siparia knows that Standard and Poor's have given our bonds, on the last rating, an A-minus rating. That is an investment grade rating.

So, there is no question that our bond issues are attractive, they are well respected, and the proof of the pudding is always in the eating. So, we issue the bonds [*Mr. Bharath stands*] and we have gotten a very good response for the bonds, so I want to put that idea to rest.

**Mr. Bharath:** Minister?

**Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira:** We are in fact the regional bond placement. [*Interruption*] Both the sovereign and others come to Trinidad and Tobago.

**Mr. Speaker:** If you need to get the Minister's attention you must do better than that. [*Laughter*]

[*Minister Nunez-Tesheira sits*]

**Mr. Bharath:** Would you mind giving way? Thank you. Minister, are you suggesting that government bonds are safer in some way than Treasury Notes and Bills?

**Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira:** Mr. Speaker, I really have to blame myself for giving way again, because, clearly, this time I should have learnt from the first occasion. [*Interruption*] The point is whether you have Treasury Bills, and they have different tenors. The institutional investor, the man in the street also, but the institutional investor, is looking for investments that have a longer tenor and these bonds give the institutional investors, the pension scheme, investment vehicles

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that have a longer term period, five and a half to 10 years, so it allows diversification. You have different tenors of these Bills and these Notes. This bond gives you a longer period of time and it allows for diversification.

What I do not understand in the question is, if it is the investor finds it an attractive investment and it is giving an opportunity to diversify their portfolio, what does it matter if you have bills, notes or bonds? The fact of the matter is you are allowing the diversification; you are allowing persons to invest in bonds of different tenors, and the most important point, it is not being done for borrowing purposes and it is not being done to increase the debt; it is done as a liquidity management tool. The reason I say that, is when the bonds are issued, what is done with that money? The Bill speaks to that. It is put into a blocked account; it is sterilized. It is put in a blocked account, it does not reenter the system until the bond has matured.

One of the reasons that the tenor of the bond has to be longer is because we are dealing with a liquidity issue. That liquidity issue and inflation issue is not going to go away in six months. We do not anticipate that. It is a global issue. Therefore, to make the bonds of a short tenor means that it will reach its maturity date at an earlier stage, which means that the very thing that you are trying to avoid is going to happen. The money is going to reenter the system and frustrate and thwart the very thing that you are trying to achieve. This is a way of locking money out of the system, pulling it out of the system for an extended period of time in order to dampen the liquidity in the system.

I want to make it very clear, because I heard the Member for Siparia give the impression that Government is indebted and Government is borrowing. Yes, bonds are used for debt financing, but it is very clear, both in my statement and presentation on Friday, that the purpose of this bond is not to finance debt. The purpose of this bond is to use it as a true and tried mechanism. We did it before RBTT, we did it before RBC; true and tried mechanism [*Interruption*] to dampen liquidity in the system, and that is an initiative of the Central Bank.

I want to say, though, how attractive our bonds are, because you heard the other side give the impression, well, 8.2, who is going to invest in it? Well, I have read out some statistics that show that for India, for example—and I have *The Economist* and they give you a list of 10-year government bonds. For India, their coupon rate, the interest rate is about 8.73 per cent, but their inflation rate is 11 per cent. But when you look at the coupon rate for other countries you understand now why a lot of investors would want to invest in our bonds. For example, United States, their coupon rate is 4.5 per cent; Japan, 1.79 per cent; China, 4.5



per cent; Britain, 5.15 per cent; Canada, 3.89 per cent. What I am saying, at the end of the day, these are 10-year government bonds and they are much lower and half the coupon rate of our bonds. That is why our bonds are so over-subscribed; that is why our bonds, every time the Central Bank issues bonds, you have no end of persons who want to buy those bonds.

**11.00 p.m.**

I just want to say, Mr. Speaker, we are going to be talking about the Development Loans Act, so I shall leave that for that debate, but I want to make it very clear, because the mischief, unintentional or otherwise, is to give the national public the impression that the Government is borrowing money, and we want to put ourselves in debt. What we are doing, is pulling liquidity out of the system. What is the alternative? The alternative is to leave the money in the system and for the bank—credit expand—to make more money and more money. And what will happen? The very inflation that you are trying to curb; the very inflation that you are trying to dampen; the very inflation you are trying to attack; you are going to worsen that situation. That is clear and that is basic economic sense.

So to come in this House to give the impression that we are borrowing for borrowing sake, I made it very clear, both in my debate contribution today and in presentation on Friday, and the actual wording of the Bill, that it is clear that its objective and purpose is to deal with liquidity, and therefore, there is no ceiling. But to say that there is no control is not to speak to the Bill. The Bill is clear. It says that the only purpose for which those bonds can be issued, it must be for the purposes of liquidity management, and therefore, those bonds that are issued and moneys that come from the issuance of bonds, must be put into a blocked account. Once put into a blocked account, when they reach maturity, the principal is a charge on the Consolidated Fund and the interest is to be paid and is also a charge on the Consolidated Fund. That money will not enter back into the system, and not at least, for five and half to 10 years.

Mr. Speaker, I think as the other side has said, we are all tired. I hope I have attempted to speak generally to the Bill. I could just go very briefly. I have done this already, but it is a short Bill with only 11 sections, so I just want to mention, in closing, to clarify the objectives of the Bill. It says very clearly at clause 3(1):

“The Minister, on behalf of the Government and on the written advice of the Central Bank, may raise money by the issue of Bonds”—and these are the words—“for the purpose of managing liquidity in Trinidad and Tobago.”

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It goes on at clause 4(1):

“All moneys raised by the issue of Bonds shall be paid into a blocked account, in the Exchequer Account and shall form part of the Consolidated Fund.”

Clause 4(2) says:

“No moneys paid into the blocked account referred to in subsection (1) may be withdrawn or otherwise dealt with except for the purpose of paying the principal sum under section 7.”

It just has other provisions there, and really it just speaks generally to that, and it speaks to finally that the Minister shall report to Parliament, semi-annually on the issuance of the bond. So that while it does not have a—I will give you an example of perhaps the wisdom of it. Right now the Development Loans Act, the ceiling is \$13 billion. We issued \$1.2 billion. If \$1.2 billion is hardly adequate to deal with the kind of liquidity we have in the system, the kind of demand, but we could not issue more than \$1.2 billion because we have reached the ceiling.

This mechanism here with the Central Bank—and I do not think anybody questions the integrity of the Central Bank. I do not think we are impugning the integrity of the Central Bank or the objective or the purpose of the Central Bank. [Crosstalk] No right-thinking citizen of Trinidad and Tobago will impugn the integrity of the Central Bank, and given its objective and its role, the Central Bank is given authority only to issue these bonds for one, and one purpose only, to manage liquidity and to put moneys raised by those issuance of those bonds in a blocked account.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think the language of the Bill is very clear and at this point, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

*Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.*

*House in committee.*

*Clauses 1 and 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clause 3.*

*Question proposed, That clause 3 stand part of the Bill.*

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Thank you. Mr. Chairman. I would like to move that clause 3(1) be amended to include a provision to set a ceiling as to the amounts,

similar to what is done in Treasury Notes, Treasury Bills, development loans and in all the others. If there is any precedent elsewhere, I would be grateful if the hon. Minister will tell us where that is. There is no precedent in our law and I do not think I will find it anywhere else, except maybe in countries that we do not want to be associated with, where you give a total blank cheque. I am asking for an amendment to be made to 3(1), to put a ceiling to the amounts. Here you have the majority and I understand you will have some difficulty, but [*Inaudible*] to support clause 3, Sir, as it stands.

*Question put.*

**Mr. Sharma:** Mr. Chairman, before you move it, the Government owes us an explanation, because when we move for an amendment, there must be an explanation. You cannot say no; blank it. That is not the practice of the House.

**Mr. Chairman:** Again, like the last time, I think you are little late. When you want to do these things, you must do it before I put it.

*Question agreed to.*

*Clause 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clauses 4 to 9 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clauses 10 and 11.*

*Question proposed, That clauses 10 and 11 stand part of the Bill.*

**Mr. Sharma:** Mr. Chairman, for your observations and for Members' attention—

**Mr. Chairman:** Which clause are you on?

**Mr. Sharma:** Clauses 9 and 11.

**Mr. Chairman:** No, we are dealing with 10 and 11.

**Mr. Sharma:** Yes, the point is that we want to make a contribution and we are totally ignored. It is either we are participating in the exercise or not. Everything just went through without our participation.

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes, if you want to make a contribution hon. Member, I call the clauses, if you have a contribution to make on any particular clause, there is a standard way of doing it. Now, do you want to make a contribution before I put the vote on clauses 10 and 11?

**Mr. Sharma:** You ruled me out on clause 3 and I was making the point on 3(1), that the practice, we are seeking the interest of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Mr. Chairman:** No, I am not asking you to make a speech. Do you have a contribution on clauses 10 and 11?

**Mr. Sharma:** Mr. Chairman—

**Mr. Chairman:** Do you have a contribution? No. Do you want to revisit clause 3?

**Mr. Sharma:** Yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes. Okay, we will revisit clause 3.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clauses 10 and 11 ordered to stand part of the Bill*

**Mr. Chairman:** Hon. Members the question is, we need to revisit clause 3, are you in favour of revisiting clause 3?

*Clause 3 recommitted.*

*Question again proposed, That clause 3 stand part of the Bill.*

**Mr. Chairman:** Let us hear you on clause 3, hon. Member.

**Mr. Sharma:** Mr. Chairman, there is a concern because the many years that we have been in the House, we have never seen this particular approach, where there is an open cheque so to speak, and we are asking the Government to reconsider or to give us the advice they have—they have the experts—so we can have an appreciation. So we can tell our constituents tomorrow when we are asked, what transpired.

**Mr. Chairman:** Well, with due respect, hon. Member, I think that was ably put by the hon. Member for Siparia and the Government did not agree with it.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Question put and agreed to, That the Bill, be reported to the House.*

*House resumed.*

*Bill reported, without amendment, read the third time and passed.*

*Adjournment*

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**ADJOURNMENT**

**The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move this House do now adjourn to Friday, July 11, 2008 at 1.30 p.m., on which day we will do Motion No. 1, which is a Motion to increase the ceiling of borrowing under the Development Loans Act.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 11.13 p.m.*