

Leave of Absence

Friday, September 26, 2008

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, September 26, 2008

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the following Members requesting leave of absence from sittings of the House, the hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon, Member of Parliament for Point Fortin, for the period September 23, 2008 to September 30, 2008; the hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj SC, Member of Parliament for Tabaquite, from today's sitting of the House. The leave which these Members seek is granted.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with the established convention, I would ask that we waive questions for today, and for the duration of the debate.

Dr. Rafeeq: Mr. Speaker, does that mean that it will appear on the Order Paper, the sitting after the debate?

Hon. C. Imbert: I would expect so.

The following questions stood on the Order Paper:

Mayaro/Rio Claro Region

(Details of Expenditure and Services to Housing Project)

- 179 (A).** Could the Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment state:
- (a) the estimated costs attached to each housing project in the Rio Claro/Mayaro region;
 - (b) the actual expenditure to date;
 - (c) whether there have been cost overruns;
 - (d) if the answer to (c) is yes, what were the reasons for such overruns? [*Mr. W. Peters*]

Mayaro/Rio Claro Region

(Details of Sub-contractors)

- 179 (B).** Could the hon. Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment state:
- (a) the names of all contractors and sub-contractors attached to each HDC project in the Rio Claro/Mayaro region;

- (b) the services provided by each; and
- (c) the actual sums paid to them to date? [*Mr. W. Peters*]

**National Social Development Programme
(Details of)**

- 180.** With respect to the National Social Development Programme, could the Minister of Public Utilities state:
- (a) how much monies have been spent on this programme to date;
 - (b) the disbursement of funding of projects by region;
 - (c) if this programme is currently being restructured; and
 - (d) if the answer to (c) is in the affirmative, what is the restructuring process and the criteria/requisites for persons accessing this programme? [*Mr. W. Peters*]

**The Performing Arts Centre
(Approval for Construction and Expenditure)**

- 186.** With respect to the Performing Arts Centre, could the Minister of Finance state:
- (a) did the Ministry of Finance give approval in relation to the budget for the construction of the centre; and
 - (b) what was the amount approved for expenditure for the centre? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

**St. Vincent and the Grenadines
(Details of Airport Construction)**

- 187.** Could the Minister of Finance state:
- With respect to this country's provision of \$78 million to the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines for the construction of an airport in that country, could the Minister state:
- (a) what are the terms under which the funding is provided and whether the sum is to be repaid;
 - (b) whether any specific request was made for this funding, and if so, what are the details of the request;
 - (c) under what Head of Expenditure was funding sourced; and
 - (d) is the funding associated with a special fund and what is the justification for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago accessing this special fund for this purpose? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

St. Vincent and the Grenadines

(Details of Special Terms of Financing and other Benefits)

188. Could the Minister of Finance state:

With respect to this country's provision of \$78 million to the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines for the construction of an airport in that country, could the Minister state:

- (a) are any special terms attached to this financing such as preference for local contractors and suppliers of goods and services, and if not, why; and
- (b) what economic and other benefits does the Government envisage will come from this expenditure? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago

(Details of)

195. With respect to the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago, could the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs state:

- (a) the number and location of the projects where the Company is experiencing problems; and
- (b) the nature of the problems being experienced? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

Director of Sport

(Details of)

196.A. Could the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs advise whether the Director of Sport at the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, who also works for the University of Trinidad and Tobago, has been appointed a paid advisor to the Trinidad and Tobago Amateur Boxing Board?

- B. If so, could the Minister advise how was this made possible and state the terms and conditions of the Director's appointment as a paid advisor to the Trinidad and Tobago Amateur Boxing Board? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago

(Relocation of)

197.A. Could the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs advise whether there are plans to move the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago from its present location in Couva, to Port of Spain?

- B. If so, could the Minister state the proposed cost of the relocation, the proposed new location and the rental costs involved?
- C. Could the Minister also state whether any tendering procedures were instituted in deciding on the new location? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

**Local Government Report
(Status of)**

- 210.** Could the Minister of Local Government state:
- (a) whether the Government has received the consultant's report on Local Government Reform;
 - (b) if the answer to (a) is yes, why has the report not been laid in the Parliament; and
 - (c) if the answer to (a) is yes, when will the report be laid in the Parliament? [*Mr. S. Panday*]

**Special Purpose State Companies
(Details of Contracts Awarded)**

- 211.** Could the Minister of Local Government state:
- (a) the contractors who have been awarded contracts from the Government Special Purpose State Companies during 2007 and 2008;
 - (b) the date each contract was awarded;
 - (c) the nature and content of each contract; and
 - (d) the location where the work was carried out? [*Mr. S. Panday*]

**Princes Town North Constituency
(Lack of Pipelines)**

- 212.** Could the Minister of Public Utilities state:
- A. Is the Minister aware that no pipelines have yet been laid at Nohar Trace, Tableland and Dharamdass Trace, Brothers Settlement, Dyers Village and Rebecca Richmond Road off the Guaracara Tabaquite Road all in the Princes Town North Constituency?
 - B. Is the Minister aware that estimates have been submitted more than once for the laying of pipelines along those roads?

- C. Could the Minister state when water lines will be laid along the roads? [Mr. S. Panday]

**Existence of Police Service Special Unit
(Details of)**

- 213.** Could the Minister of National Security state:
- (a) whether there now exist in the Police Service a Special Unit to detect and prosecute praedial larceny;
 - (b) if so, what is the name of this Unit, the date it was established and its detection and conviction statistics; and
 - (c) if there is no special unit, what machinery exists for the detection and prosecution of praedial larceny and what are the statistics for detection and conviction of practical larceny from 2006 to present time? [Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC]

**Praedial Larceny
(Existing Law to Detect and Prevent)**

- 214.A.** Is the Minister of National Security satisfied with the existing law to detect and prevent praedial larceny?
- B. If not, could he state whether he intends to have the existing law amended, to make it more effective to detect and convict praedial larceny offences?
- C. If he so intends, could he give the particulars of the proposed amendments and the time frame for the implementation of such reforms? [Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC]

**Criminal Injuries Compensation Act
(Details of Compensation to Victims)**

- 215.A.** Could the Minister state whether any victims of crimes have received any of the statutory benefits under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Act of 1999?
- B. If so, could the Minister give details of same?
- C. If the answer is negative, could the Minister give the reasons why not? [Mr. L. R. Maharaj SC]

Questions, by leave, deferred.

**APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)**

[Second Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [September 22, 2007]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar (*Siparia*): Thank you very much, hon. Speaker. As I stand here today, in what has been hyped as an historical play off in the gender political dynamics of this country, and as I reflect upon the great hoax that was perpetrated in this honourable House on Monday, I reminded of the words of the poet, Alexander Pope:

"Of all the causes which conspire to blind man's erring judgment, and misguide the mind,

What the weak head with strongest bias rules,

Is pride, the never failing vice of fools." [*Desk thumping*]

I am also reminded of the words of the great American President, John Fitzgerald Kennedy and I quote:

"Economic growth without social progress lets the great majority of people remain in poverty, while a privileged few reap the benefits of abundance."

Budget 2009 is for the rich not for the poor; Budget 2009 is for economic hit men not for ordinary men; Budget 2009 is to satisfy the pride of fools and not for the citizenry. Frighteningly, Monday's hoax will soon be translated into fiscal measures and governing policies that will punish the 1.3 million citizens of this country for many years to come. To say that the historic speech was a repetition of the same in imaginative, ineffective, inefficient, wasteful and oppressive polices, enunciated by none other than the Prime Minister himself, in this House year on year, is an understatement.

Hon. Madam Minister, you said as you began what would turn into three hours of meaningless utterances of cut and paste of failed policies, that your Government created this budget on the basis of its Vision 2020 policy, and to paraphrase that vision you said, commits to the ideologies of caring governance and economic management which embodied the principles of democracy. But what you proceeded to enunciate was in fact the total opposite of this. This is not surprising, since you began with an untruth, the promise that you would be brief

and relevant. And while you, Madam Minister, may have premised this speech based on the advice of high paid technocrats and spin doctors, today, I will premise mine on the weight to public opinion, the vox populi, for I truly believe, vox populi, vox Dei, the voice of the people is the voice of God. And I must warn that the advice that you can buy with the millions of dollars you have at your fingertips pales in significance when compared to the desires, the needs, the hopes and the aspirations of the hundreds of thousands of people who lent and continue to lend their voices to say how their money should be spent. Indeed, as Abraham Lincoln put it:

"Public sentiment is everything. Without it nothing can fail. Without it nothing can succeed."

It is in the context of Government's ongoing deliberate ignorance of people's needs, and the indifference to their plight of living in a country overtaken by scourges of high cost of living, crime and social disorder, that the Government had a myopia to deliver their presentation under the theme "Shaping our future together", when nothing is further from the truth. So, today, I propose to restore reality to this House, as I rename the theme of that presentation as, "The Great PNM Hoax 2009: A blind man's bluff." [*Desk thumping*]

Like the rest of the country, I had very high hopes for the Minister when she made history as the first female to hold the finance portfolio. I thought that she would bring the rationality of law and the maternal instincts of a strong courageous woman to the portfolio, and to serve the interest of the people. Sadly, like the rest of the country, I am greatly disappointed after Monday's debacle. She came to this honourable House and fell into the same rut as her boss, the predecessor, enunciating pathetic policies, to reflect the PNM's belief that throwing away increasing sums of money behind issues, setting up committee after committee and initiating study after study, would solve the numerous problems confronting our country. But disappointed as I was, I must admit I was not surprised because as Arthur Newcomb put it:

"Show me the leader and I will know his men. Show me the men and I will know the leader."

What could we really have expected and hoped for when you are led by the misguided Member for San Fernando East. [*Desk thumping*] As the French always say, hon. Speaker and I quote:—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: —“When a blind man bears the standard, pity those who follow.”

And the *Bible* tells us, when the blind lead the blind, they shall all fall into a ditch. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Minister, you followed blindly, and now you will find it hard to crawl out of the political ditch into which you have fallen. But at the end of the day let us face the reality, you are merely the messenger and I will try not to shoot the messenger; instead I will concentrate my guns on the real Minister of Finance, the Member for San Fernando East. However, I cannot guarantee that you will escape unscathed from collateral damage. [*Desk thumping*] All I would say, Madam Minister, is to remember, in the future when you are placed in command, take charge. In other words, “you eh ready yet”. [*Laughter*]

It is my honour today, hon. Speaker, to lead off the Opposition's response to this budget. I do so in what I consider extremely uncomfortable circumstances, as the Government has used its parliamentary majority to deny the hon. Leader of the Opposition, Member of Parliament for Couva North, Mr. Basdeo Panday from leading off this debate. And so, I present this response in his name and in the name of every right-thinking citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. I want to assure Members of the Government that the UNC team possesses many batsmen and women, and even if you manage to sabotage one, there still remain many other formidable batmen and women capable of leading the assault against the weak pace of attack of this Government's team. [*Desk thumping*]

Before I continue, hon. Speaker, I want to thank all my colleagues for their support, their inspiration, their tireless endurance and courage in the ongoing battle we face everyday, in our quest to preserve our democracy and improve the quality of life for all.

To the diligent staff of the Opposition office, Dave, Rayden, Sarah, Sunil and Colin and, to my own constituency staff, Ursha, Lisa, Arlene and Denzil, thank you. The numerous NGOs and civil society groups, as well as many individual citizens here and abroad, who held consultations with us in the past few months, who communicated their much valued thoughts via telephone, email, text messages and memos, our gratitude goes to you because you have shaped the very foundations on which our party rests. The voice of the people committed to equality, security, liberty and to quality for all.

I would also like to record my thanks to the hard-working members of the media, the investigative journalists for their commitment to journalism; for telling

the country the true state of affairs, without whom we would not know about the corruption that pervades that Government. We would not know about the Prime Minister's obscene plans to purchase a bombardier jet. We would not know about the true state of the health care system. They reported the facts about the dangerous dengue outbreak, when the authorities tried to stifle it, all in a bid to sacrifice the lives and the livelihood of citizens for the sake of good public relations.

The combination of civil society, hon. Speaker, remains the great hope in the gloom of these end times; a huge force in the country that works together for the common good, for the preservation of democracy and the removal of the PNM's dictatorship that has so many years robbed the citizens of their just due of prosperity, safety and happiness. But it did not have to be this way. Trinidad and Tobago did not have to become the land of death and despair it is today. But something went wrong and we know what it is. It began with the unwise decision of a man, who should have known better, but instead used his path of personal vendetta on that dreadful Christmas Eve in December 2001, and it continued in 2006, when another group of misguided politicians under the guise of new politics caused the return of the old oppressive politics of the PNM.

History will tell us that the people suffered, and they continue to suffer because of these events. If this country had continued with the proper leadership it had from 1995—2001 under the Panday UNC, we would have already fulfilled our destiny of First World status with prosperous lifestyles for all. [*Desk thumping*] Because you see, leadership is the wise use of power; power is the capacity to translate intention into reality and sustain it. That is what we did in Government because we took wisdom from a great Chinese Philosopher Lao Tzu, who said:

I have three precious things which I hold fast and prize. The first is gentleness; the second is frugality; and the third is humility, which keeps me from putting myself before others. Be gentle and you can be bold; be frugal and you can be liberal; avoid putting yourself before others and you can become a leader among men.

Regrettably, this Government is lacking in all these precious things, gentleness, frugality and humility, and so they do not have the capacity to translate intention into reality and sustain it. This is evident from a track record in the six years. The grand intentions disclosed in every budget are nothing but hoaxes because they failed to translate into reality. This is evident when we do a review of the projects in the last few budgets listed in the PricewaterhouseCoopers

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memoranda each year, and from this we are seeing in fiscal 2005, 100 promised projects in that budget, only 18 completed; a percentage failure of 82 per cent.

In fiscal 2006, 131 projects promised, 22 completed; 83.2 per cent failure. In fiscal 2007, 117 projects promised in the budget, 27 completed; 76.9 per cent failed to complete. In fiscal 2008, which is this fiscal year, the end of this year, 121 projects promised in that budget, only 12 completed with a 90 per cent failure rate at the end of the fiscal year. And so, you have failed to deliver on 90 per cent of the promised projects. That is the record of your delivery. And despite the bleating of Ministers, that projects take more than a year to complete, let us remember that many of these projects are recycled and have been repeatedly promised, but have not been started. So that excuse is a cop-out, an attempt to justify failure to implement on a year to year basis. Further, remember that an annual budget is not a public relations exercise to mouth platitudes. To use the words of a young man, Nigel, you are a NATO government, no action, talk only. [*Desk thumping*]

10.15 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at the budget fundamentals, we see that a budget is a serious accounting of revenues for the past fiscal year and the presentation of Government's policies and programmes to improve and sustain the standard of living of citizens in the coming fiscal year, so that a budget must be people centric. There must be budgeting as if people mattered; repeating broken promises are not the stuff of which budgets are made.

People centred budgeting is about designing macroeconomic frameworks and policies to take into account the voices and interests, not just of the rich, but most definitely of the vulnerable, including women, children, the disabled and poor people. This is critical in the fight against poverty. This is critical in the fight against discrimination. This is critical in the fight against crime.

The PNM hoax 2009 shows that the Prime Minister and his bunch of blind followers continue to behave like Winking, Blinking and Nod, forever sleeping on themselves, snoozing in dreamland, so that their vision of Trinidad and Tobago is totally divorced and separate from the rest of the country. It is a virtual tale of two countries: PNM country and the real country. Real country citizens, 99 per cent of the population, were looking forward to a budget that placed their needs and aspirations ahead of the fanatical ambitions of a government spending machine gone mad; they wanted a people-centred budget. Instead, we got a budget made for PNM country.

In PNM country millionaires are created overnight in special purpose companies; that is where economic hit men rule the roost; that is where big buildings must be constructed to match the egos of the arrogant few who dip into the Treasury like it is their personal bank account. So like the previous six budgets, this one, too, is doomed to fail, because the vast majority of persons in this country are not concerned about the international price of oil; they are not concerned about development of an industry that would employ a minute number of people; they are not impressed by high foreign exchange holdings; they are not impressed with the fact that Government took their taxpayer dollars to construct the Hyatt Hotel, a place where 99 per cent of the population cannot afford to visit to even buy a bottle of water.

The vast majority of this country, the population, still live in a country where half an hour of rainfall brings destructive flooding; where walking on the streets of the capital city opens you up to a stray bullet from gang wars or robberies or collateral damage; where food and housing are barely affordable and the public hospitals are the last resort of the desperate, because the doctors tell you that if you come there you have a 70 per cent chance of dying in those hospitals. But then, you do not listen to the people; the *vox populi*.

The Prime Minister labels the utterances of the people as dotishness; every week the Leader of Government Business shows contempt in this House for suggestions and solutions other than his own. How can you formulate people centred budgets? All that could be done is to formulate Prime Minister Manning centred budgets. What is a Prime Minister Manning centred budget? With these budgets the nation gets a budget within a budget; sometimes right on the eve of the next year's budget; we experienced that right here in this House last Friday. At any time the budget is not final; not that it is intended to be, but it has become like a television soap opera: Stay tuned for more and more and more to come.

So you have episode one, the major Appropriation Bill like this one, \$49.5 billion. That is the major fiscal package, but Government has found a way to spend on four fronts, and that is having a very serious and disastrous effect on the inflation rate and the economy of this country. So episode one is the major Appropriation Bill; episode two, three, and maybe even four, supplementary appropriations. The Government has continued to come with these and structured this financing to repeatedly come for more money.

If we add then another 10 per cent, we are talking about \$4.95 billion; episodes four, five and six. Contingent liabilities, what is known as off book budgeting. Government is spending massive sums through the state boards and

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state enterprises, so we need to add a third and maybe a fourth and maybe a fifth budget for this. These budgets are totally out of the book; they never come to Parliament. They are not scrutinized here and, certainly, there are questions about scrutiny at the Cabinet level, as revealed by one of the former Members of the Cabinet; so we have this third level of spending.

These contingent liabilities include things like agreements, promissory notes, guaranteed loan payments, and so on. The total amount now owing on contingent liabilities is \$17.48 billion; so off book budgeting would now also include what the Minister spoke about and termed the "P3 Model". The Minister told us that this nation would be utilizing the P3 Model for financing 13 highways and for the rapid rail project, but gave no indication as to the cost of these projects and the amounts that they would then further be going into, in terms of financing, as contingent liabilities. These are massive projects. Therefore, off book budgeting would increase substantially with further injections into the economy of the country.

Episode seven—parked budgeting, \$2.4 billion. Government has now discovered a fourth avenue to commit public funds to expenditure via an allocation for future expenditure. This was revealed last week when Government was able to use its parliamentary majority to park money from the 2007/2008 fiscal year and assign it to unnamed, undeclared expenditure under the Infrastructure Development Fund. I said then, and I repeat, that this is in violation of our Constitution, and I intend to take this matter to court for a decision. [*Desk thumping*]

What this budgeting within budget means is that this year's expenditure is far more in excess of the \$50 billion that was initially appropriated. It is far more than first meets the eye; and last year's budget was the same. This would bring, therefore, greater inflationary pressure to push us off the slippery slope into the abyss from which there is no return. There is no comfort in the Government's assertion that the UNC also did supplementary budgeting. The economy is in a totally different condition as it is so overheated now. It was never in that condition under the UNC. Secondly, the amount supplemented, and the state of the economy, was totally different at that time. What are we getting in return for these exorbitant expenditures, bearing in mind that close to \$200 billion has been spent since this Government came into office?

When the economy is operating at full capacity, as it has been for some time, the result is high inflation rates, growing interests rates; the danger for homeowners is very great. Homeowners stand to lose their homes, just like what happened in the United States, because it was that which caused the jump to the major financial

crisis there. It is in this context that with four or more budgets in an economy, as in Trinidad and Tobago, the increasing expenditure in the economy cannot meet the demand, causing major macroeconomic harm, which is irreversible under the PNM.

The Governor of the Central Bank, civil society, the experts, the international institutions have spoken, but the Government has stopped listening. This Government is "harden", as the Trini would say; this Government is own way. My "aagee" would say, "Dey worse than own way; dey *tatar*." [*Desk thumping*] We have a saying in Trinidad and Tobago, "who cyar hear would feel"; the only problem with that saying is that it is the Government who "cyar" hear, but everybody else "go have to feel." That is the danger of their actions.

Let us look, after \$200 billion under the PNM what we got. We can assess that, hon. Speaker, not just with the conventional wisdom that is out on the streets in the knowledge and minds of the population, we can measure that with empirical indicators done by international independent organizations. This Government does not understand the meaning of the word development. We have fallen in our scores and rankings on every single major global indicator. Here is the empirical evidence for only three of those which I considered to be very important; the first of these is life expectancy.

When I was in government in 2000, the life expectancy of a person was 73 years; citizens of this land under the UNC administration would expect to live up to an average of 73 years. Today, in 2008, after six years of the PNM, life expectancy has dropped to 67 years. Hon. Speaker, this is amazing. It puts a lie to the allegation that the country is developing. Despite the billions spent on health care, importing professional medics, CDAP and all these under the PNM regime, an individual can expect to live six years less under the PNM than they would have done under the UNC. That is like for every one year that the PNM is in office for six years, each citizen has lost one year on their life expectancy.

The second indicator I would use is that of best countries to live in. Under the UNC in 2000, Trinidad and Tobago ranked 49th in the world ranking of best countries to live. Today, the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) has said that the current Government has slipped this country into 59th place. We have fallen 10 points on the ranking of best countries to live in. During the same period, Barbados remained ranked at 31st; with no oil, no gas, no natural resources and, most important, no PNM. [*Desk thumping*] The Bahamas is now ranked 49th place ahead of Trinidad and Tobago. St. Kitts, which was devastated by a hurricane a few years ago, is ranked 53, again above us, and they too have no oil, no gas, no resources and no PNM. [*Desk thumping*]

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We are not moving to developed country status; we are reversing. According to these statistics we are worse off today after spending \$200 billion, and after spending \$50 billion last year, than when the UNC spent only \$13 billion in the year 2000. Money does not buy security. The *Bible* tells us that money does not buy well-being. Money does not buy comfort; these things are purchased by efficient management. It is not how much you have, but how well you manage it. The reality is that our people are unhappy; they are nervous; they are scared for their lives; they are living in poverty.

Hon. Speaker, you know that:

"The love of money is the root of all evil; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

That is the stage of Trinidad and Tobago after \$200 billion. How true it is for your Government, Mr. Prime Minister, how well you manage what you have—the reality is that our people are unhappy and they are scared.

Let us look at a third indicator: the murder rate. Under the PNM blood has flowed into the soil of this land. The murder rate has worsened. When the UNC left office in 2001, the murder rate was 12.5 per 100,000 persons. Today, the rate is 26.9, more than double—more than double. We are now ranked 10th in the world of most homicidal places. So from No. 1 as the most homicidal, we are No. 10 in a group of 131 countries. Haiti is ranked 20th, and they are so badly off in terms of their economy. When we look at Barbados, again—and I know the hon. Minister likes to quote Barbados—it ranked at 32 with a rate of 7.49; and we are 29.6. They have no oil; they have no natural resources and they have no PNM. [*Desk thumping*]

Why are we doing so badly after so much money is being spent? It is because, in my respectful view, one of the fundamental underpinnings of PNM hoax 2009, the Prime Minister and his Cabinet continue to display a complete misunderstanding of basic economics; the natural result is that their policy directions are misguided and doomed to fail from the start. This is evident in the very offhand way in which they have dismissed the possible impact of the meltdown in the US and the financial turmoil in the global system. They dismissed it offhand, "It will not affect us."

Listening to the Minister it appears that the Government has made substantial progress in establishing an International Financial Centre. I link this back to what is happening in the global financial system. This initiative that the Minister touted seemed to have missed the participation of all citizens. The Opposition has not

been consulted, but that is okay, you did not have to do that. They have not consulted the trade union movement; they have not consulted civil society; they have not consulted anyone in this society, but they are announcing an International Financial Centre.

Do you remember the FTAA headquarters? This country committed millions of dollars towards this venture. The Prime Minister virtually guaranteed that the headquarters would be housed here and spent money upon it; that idea turned out to be stillborn. We wasted millions of our dollars on it; so when we come to this IFC, we must proceed with caution. I believe that Trinidad and Tobago does have the strategic location as well as the necessary financial and trade relationships which could see this country as a major financial hub.

10.30a.m.

I have great concern though about the ability of this Government to bring this idea to fruition because you see, the Minister came here and announced these grandiose plans to establish the financial centre and listed a range of benefits, but I wonder if he heard the same things that I did. Despite the public relations spin and word play, the Minister literally confessed that nothing is in place for the financial centre because at this point, consultants have just been hired and I quote “to make recommendations on an appropriate tax, legal and regulatory framework”. But the Minister is already promising amendments to the Financial Institutions Act to be laid here before the end of the year, amendments which these very consultants are supposed to be preparing to have done. So how can you be laying them here when you are just in the process of hiring the consultants to prepare them? This is a hoax.

This Government has been promising amendments to the children’s legislation as we know for six years; there are several pieces of legislation and we are still waiting. So nothing is in place. The Trinidad and Tobago Financial Centre Management Committee has not been established and we know how long it takes this Government to establish. It took them months to establish a commission of enquiry into corruption, it took them years to establish what was mandated in statute as the Compensation for Victims of Crime Board, and you have Equal Opportunity still languishing and yet this Minister boldly promises high-quality jobs for university graduates. But up to today there are no provisions anywhere in this budget or anywhere else to ensure that our locals are trained and equipped to get these jobs of which they talk. None of the local tertiary institutions provide the kind of specialized training required and such training is not acquired overnight.

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Is the Minister creating more jobs for foreigners? Or is it, as is more likely, this Trinidad and Tobago International Financial Centre (TTIFC) is in embryonic stage and was only put into the budget to add fluff?

I am also concerned because this Government does not have a clue about macroeconomic management for development. It is unable to manage this relatively small economy, but it aspires to manage a world-class structure like the IFC. It is like we are sardines swimming in a sea of sharks.

Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, they cannot even manage a parlour, but they want to manage a supermarket. [*Desk thumping*] Let us look at some of the things we will need for the IFC:

1. An extensive network of financial firms with corporate and government client connection across the world. Do we have this? The answer is no.
2. A high level capital base specialized in quantitative finance supported by a numerate paraprofessional labour force. Do we have this? The answer is no.
3. A world-class telecom infrastructure with connectivity around the clock and around the world. Do we have this? No.
4. A state-of-the-art IT system and capability to maintain and manage the IT infrastructure of global financial firms, trading platforms and regulators. Do we have this? No.
5. A well-developed sophisticated, open financial system with proficient liquid markets in all segments: equities, bonds, commodities, currencies. Do we have this? The answer is no.
6. A system of financial regime governance that operates along global, best practice lines. Do we have this? No.
7. Appropriate physical infrastructure suitable to world standard.

Mr. Speaker, we still have flooding every time rain falls for more than five minutes. So do we have appropriate physical infrastructure? And the answer is no, we do not.

So quite frankly, these seven indicators show that we are not ready for the IFC. And this is not something where you can hire Chinese and keep them in barracks and get them to build. I am concerned because this Government appears to be novices in financial and economic management every time it opens its mouth.

The world is in financial crisis, our trading partners are in crisis, and their trading partners are in crisis, our economy continues to be based on international factors over which we have no control, and yet this Government continues to try to mislead this country into believing that we are insulated from the aftershocks of the American credit crunch.

For the information of those here, let me share some concerns we on this side have about the present financial crisis and its impact on Trinidad and Tobago. According to Jwala Rambarran, a noted economist, for the first time ever the world is witnessing a confluence of three global shocks: the initial US credit shock, coincided with the global growth shock and worsened by the inflation shock, three whammies all at the same time. This has never happened before. For the first time, three of the G7 countries: the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Japan are faced with recession and another three; Germany, France and Italy are on the verge of recession, and the Canadian economy is currently in for a hard landing.

Other advanced countries like New Zealand, Ireland, Spain, Portugal, together with the emerging markets of Estonia, Latvia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary are all staring recession in the face. The megamarkets of Brazil, India, China and Turkey are experiencing slow down in their pace of economic growth so the only comparative crisis of similar proportion, was the crash of the great depression.

These are the financial giants we are talking about and they are heading into trouble, these are the very markets we hope to service with this financial centre. The organizations and institutions we are seeking to attract are from these markets; Lehman Brothers and Merrill Lynch were supposed to be tenants of this financial centre, they are now casualties of this financial crisis.

Who then will populate this IFC? You will tell me the Caribbean because you have been jet-setting in the Caribbean trying to make friends, so maybe it is the Caribbean, so let us talk about the Caribbean. Several of the Caribbean islands are already in a state of quiet crisis. A public debt to GDP ratio of 50 per cent is usually considered to be a sustainable debt, by this measure, every one of our trading partners in the Caribbean was in trouble as at the end of 2007. Four of these had public debt ratios of more than 100 per cent of GDP and they were effectively in a debt crisis: St. Kitts, Jamaica, Grenada and Antigua; three other countries, Belize, Dominica and Barbados were between 90 and 95 per cent, way above the 50 per cent.

The interesting thing for us in Trinidad and Tobago is that in the last four years, these countries have borrowed from Trinidad and Tobago to finance their

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capital spending programmes. So as capital becomes more expensive on the world market, these countries will need to keep borrowing in order to stay afloat. The question is, where will they get the capital to service their debtors and pay for the goods and services we supply? Even the income from tourism that they will normally get is expected to be shrinking, adversely affected by the three global shocks I mentioned before.

Mr. Speaker, the bottom line is that these are very difficult times, the Government needs to take stock of this and plan and implement programmes to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago weathers the storm. [*Desk thumping*] You cannot hide your heads in the sand and say that we will not be affected; you said that we would not be directly affected, but it is very clear that we will be indirectly affected in the way I have described.

From the policies outlined in this budget, it is clear that Government does not even recognize the danger of the approaching tsunami that has been created by the American credit crunch. So whilst I say this, I talk about the balance of trade which is instructive in the scenario. I know that whilst the balance of visible trade still looks healthy from the Review of the Economy, our continued reliance on the energy sector is highlighted by the fact that when mineral fuels are excluded from the calculation, our country registered a negative balance of trade. So, it is in the oil sector, and we have talked about price shocks in the oil sector, and we have talked about output shocks.

Importantly, although the value of exports has more than doubled since 2001, the value of the imports has likewise doubled. Of concern is the revelation in the Review of the Economy that our trade balance with our Caricom neighbours which increased consistently from 1997, took a sudden nosedive in 2007 and that appears to be continuing in 2008.

This is clearly as a result of our exports in petroleum having collapsed by close to 50 per cent, from \$11.2 billion in the period April 2006—March 2007 to \$5.9 billion for the similar period ending March 2008. In other words, our petroleum exports have been cut by half and this is the effect. [*Interruption*]

You see, Mr. Speaker, I am being interrupted by the dotish Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Speaker: No. The Member is appealing to you not to interrupt her, and obviously you will have to withdraw that remark. Apologize. [*Interruption*] Order please! Order! I am on my legs.

You really cannot interrupt a Member while he/she is on her legs and at the same time, you cannot refer to a Member as being dotish. I expect you to do the honourable thing.

Hon. Member: “He does do dat.”

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: I am guided, hon. Speaker. I am talking about—well, I withdraw it. I am sure he will withdraw what he also said.

Mr. Speaker, I am saying that our concern is the revelation that our trade has gone in petroleum, dropped by 50 per cent. This is the effect of the failed foreign policy of this Government, because this is coming from the PetroCaribe arrangement on agreement that Caricom has now made with Venezuela. So that is another arena where we are going to have difficulty in terms of our trade with our Caricom neighbours.

Mr. Speaker, given the Government’s economic blindness, it is obvious they do not understand the basic macroeconomic environment in which Trinidad and Tobago functions. In the 2001 budget of the UNC, it was \$13 billion, today it is four times that, it has grown by a factor of 400 since 2001. Since that time, we have seen an increase in the revenue flow from two factors: high commodity prices which we have experienced and high extraction rates in oil and natural gas.

At the same time, there has been a decline in the share of agriculture, tourism and manufacturing as a percentage of GDP. Rise in Government spending has emerged as a result of increased revenue generated by multinationals engaged in the exploration and processing of oil and gas. What happens to all of this wealth is that the Government, as a commission agent, collects 27 per cent only of the market value of energy products sold on the international market. And we still do not know how much is collected from the gas, and it is not revealed anywhere in those estimates; if they are, point me to them. I have looked through it and have not found it anywhere, so that remains top secret. We should have negotiated, we were supposed to bring the regime to the Parliament but it has not come.

So from 2001—2003, the Government was able to increase spending with little adverse macroeconomic consequences because we were still climbing out of the debts of the 1980s and 1990s recession. However, by 2005 when capacity had been reached in the country, we witnessed for the first time in 25 years, a significant jump in the inflation rate from 3.9 to 6.9 per cent as a result of the continued increases in government expenditure.

During the UNC’s tenure, we were in absolute control of inflation; that rate never crossed 5.6 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, we were committed to low inflation because we understood the causes and consequences of it.

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Let us consider some of these causes. To take a complex matter and make it simple; an increase in the money supply on a year-to-year basis associated with full capacity of full employment will result in inflation. The money supply has increased significantly every year since 2005. Government has been earning more revenue from foreign exchange and less on the domestic market. Today, for example, in excess of 60 per cent of our revenue is earned from taxes denominated in foreign exchange.

When that foreign exchange is earned by Government, it is sold by the Central Bank and creates new TT currency on an annual basis which then constitutes a base stock of money known as high-powered money which finds its way into the commercial banks, and these banks as profit maximizers then lend to private citizens and businesses which leads to what is known in the macroeconomy as the multiplier effect.

Since 2005, bank credit and high-powered money have been expanding. In this context we understand that fiscal and monetary policy in our economy should not be divorced because the Governor of the Central Bank is duty-bound to purchase all the foreign exchange made available to him and convert it into Trinidad and Tobago currency. This increase in the money supply has so stimulated aggregate demand that the demand pressures in the economy continue unabated. This is standard quantity theory of money which says that there is a direct relationship between the money supply and demand, and that the cause of the increased demand is the rise in the money supply in the economy.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen this money supply rise from \$17.2 billion in 2001 under the UNC to \$37.3 billion at the end of 2007. The figure continued to rise in 2008 with the latest figure from the *Review of the Economy* showing a further \$300 million increase up to April 2008.

Mr. Speaker, this is also reflected in the fact that the currency's inactive circulation has increased by 130 per cent in the last six years and the cause of inflation, therefore, is the increase in aggregate demand generated by Government's expenditure.

10.45 a.m.

How do we control this inflation? The cure for this inflation is simple. We have a reduction in the money supply. That will cause a decrease in the aggregate demand but that is something the Government does not understand. Because it will require that all in the economy curb their expectations of future inflation so that wages do not escalate, thereby adding fuel to the inflation fire.

Unfortunately, this requires confidence that inflation will be controlled; that those in control of the expenditure are able and willing to take the steps to curb the pressures. Government has demonstrated absolute inability or unwillingness to do this. As a result, the presence of high inflation expectations in wage negotiation is neither surprising nor unexpected.

What we have in Trinidad and Tobago is tight monetary policy in conjunction with lax fiscal policy. I spoke of the firefight between the monetary policy of the Central Bank and the fiscal policy of the Government. And so, instead of the budget being a tool to stabilize the economy, the budget becomes the major instrument of macroeconomic instability. Given the size and the nature of Government's fiscal package revealed on Monday, it is clear the rise in inflation is becoming a permanent feature in Trinidad and Tobago.

How does the Government defend its pathetic mismanagement? Government keeps saying that this inflation is a worldwide problem. That is not true. Inflation in the OECS countries average 4½ per cent with some as low as 2 per cent, for example, in Grenada and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The Minister pointed out that Barbados has a relatively high inflation rate of 9 per cent. However, I want to advise that Barbados' inflation rate is high on account of the high price paid for imported fuel. In the absence of the petroleum contribution, their inflation rate is around 6 per cent.

Trinidad and Tobago has subsidized petroleum and still our inflation rate is double that of Barbados when the petroleum is taken away. It is fortunate we have a petroleum subsidy because if we did not, inflation would have gone up to 15 per cent. The petroleum subsidy then is very important in dampening the inflation rate here in Trinidad and Tobago.

When we look at worldwide again, the inflation rate in developed countries—you ask about growth rate, as the US, the UK, Germany, France—they average 3 per cent. In Norway which is an oil-producing economy, it is even less than 1 per cent per annum. So to say inflation such as ours is a worldwide phenomenon, is not true, as the statistics show.

The Government then blames the private sector as well. They say they are the ones causing the inflation. But we have long known that consumption is a stable function of income. As income increases, consumption will increase. This macroeconomic theory is as old as Freidman's permanent income hypothesis. So in order to decrease aggregate demand, we must do so from the top. Government has the ability and has the power to control one-third of the GDP. It is then incumbent on them to set the pace and in turn the private sector will follow.

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When people have income it is their right to spend that income in a manner they see fit: It is not for Government to say they are wasting their money. If we are to decrease aggregate demand from the private sector, we need to make credit more expensive to access, but the Governor of the Central Bank has been trying for the last four years to pursue tight monetary policy to induce people to curb spending. But as the Governor tightens the monetary supply, Government expands it at the same time, making the Central Bank irrelevant as a tool for stabilizing the economy. I am not surprised the Governor has been expressing deep frustration, for the Governor has done all in his power to absorb the liquidity created by this reckless Government, but with no success, because the fiscal authority is the Government and it has stopped listening.

In continuing the blame game, they blame agriculture as the cause for inflation. I have read all the major literature on inflation and this is the first time I have ever heard of this theory. It may sound new and insightful and I recommend this theory perhaps to be written in a journal form and submitted to the American Economic Review Council for publication, but when I bounced the idea off someone, I had second thoughts. I think it would be better suited for Mad Magazine. [*Desk thumping*]

The agricultural sector contributes less than half per cent of GDP. Employment in the sector has declined. There are now less than 20,000 farm families. If Government insists that agriculture is the cause of inflation, then how come more and more agriculture land is being converted for housing? And why are Caroni lands still in limbo and not in production? Because the truth is, agriculture is not the cause of inflation. What we have observed is given the increases in aggregate demand, the price of every single commodity has increased, including the services of plumbers, household assistants; every conceivable service, including the price of commodities produced in domestic agriculture.

In other words, high food prices are directly related to high costs of inputs, prompted as I have said, by the continuous injection of money by Government into an already saturated economy.

So who is the real culprit? Government says they are not at fault; it is not the Government to blame for the inflation. That is what you get, with due respect, when a bunch of financial illiterates get their hands on the Treasury. Mr. Speaker, have you and Ministers ever heard of the fiscal multiplier? The fiscal multiplier is the amount of income generated when a government spends initially in an economy and when this initial money gets in the hands of consumers who will spend it. This concept is 70 years old. I challenge the Government to prove to this

Parliament, to this country, that the fiscal multiplier of Government spending on the rest of the economy is zero. That is the only way you can justify your claim that it is not Government spending that causes inflation, but I know for certain that they can never meet this challenge.

We must recognize that it is the recklessness of Government spending which has pushed the economy beyond capacity to supply. So we are getting the same amount of goods and services as in '05 but paying so much more for it. This is the classic case of Government burning resources of the country by its misguided approach to its management.

We turn to interest rates which I heard some Members asking about. We are projecting that the only tool available to the Governor of the Central Bank to assist in controlling inflation in the face of Government's continued fiscal injections would be to increase the reserve requirement. He has already moved from 13 per cent to 15 per cent. If he has to do that, he will have to consider an increase from 15 per cent to 18 per cent as obtained in the 1990s.

This will restrict the commercial banks' lending and will prompt an increase in the interest rates. Higher interest rates will directly affect an already battered middle class in a significant way, because in 2009, not only will they face more battering from increases in everything they buy, but they could also face increases in mortgage payments. The middle class should beware, this is the type of caring Government running this country today. Homeowners can expect their mortgage rates to increase.

Given that the Central Bank has run out of options, where will interest rates settle in Trinidad and Tobago and where will the inflation rate now go? Was it not this Government in 2006 that targeted inflation to be at 6 per cent? Today it is two times that. Are they ashamed? Are they concerned? Are they worried? Or are they just blind, deaf and dumb to the country's plight?

Let us go back to inflation. Our inflation rank out of 131 countries is 101. This means that there are 100 countries that are ranked better than us with respect to inflation. This comes from out of the Trinidad and Tobago's Global Competitiveness Standing.

The control of inflation is without a doubt Government's most spectacular failure. For the past four years, as I have said, they have ignored all the warnings from their own Governor of the Central Bank, from the international financial institutions, from local economists and all others. How did they treat with the concerns of the taxpayers of this country about the fiscal injections that have

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caused us to reach where we are? They did it by passing the largest ever budget in the history of this country, \$42.2 billion and will be adding to that; this, at a time when the inflation rate was 7.9 per cent. That was last year.

By the end of the first quarter—so they passed the budget, \$42.2 billion last year; by the end of the first quarter of that fiscal year, inflation had climbed to 9.8 per cent, despite desperate attempts by the Central Bank, through its monetary policy, to curb the inflation: increasing the repo rate at the commercial banks' cash reserve requirement.

Now, a responsible Government in those circumstances, would have reviewed its policy and prioritized expenditure so as to release the pressure in the economy and the resulting inflation. But what does this Government do? This Government came back to the Parliament for an additional \$3.49 billion in May to finance expenditure which was included from the previous budget to accommodate their mega projects. It does not take a rocket scientist to predict the effect that that massive injection of liquidity would have on prices in the country. So what happened? Inflation grew to 10 per cent in May 2008. It climbed to a further 11.3 per cent by June, the highest rate of inflation we have had in 14 years.

What was most insulting was the assertion that Government was in control of rampant price increases. A report that was carried tells us that Trinidad and Tobago is managing inflation. It highlights a level of deception that this Government is willing to stoop to, because of the level of denial or that they are absolutely out of touch with reality, because that report tells us that Prime Minister Manning is quoted as saying: "We are managing successfully the worldwide problem of inflation."

Another hoax! Successfully managing inflation? And as if to prove the Prime Minister was deceiving the population and the international community, the Central Bank reported the headline inflation grew to 11.9 per cent at the end of July, despite another hike in repo rate and the cash reserve requirement. This should have prompted even the most insensitive of governments to reassess this position and its policies again to curb its measures. Not this Government.

As improbable as it may sound, as prices continue to soar, the Government, blinded by the big buildings and the mega projects, prompted by the need to impress all its international leaders who would be coming next year, exactly one week ago, Friday to today, Government came back a second time to the Parliament to approve spending of an additional \$3.9 billion.

So in all, for that financial year ending in September 2008, at a time when citizens are reeling from record prices, when everybody is warning of the need to

curb expenditure, Government chose to spend close to \$50 billion. Today we are debating Government starting its budgeted amount at 49.4 billion. As I have said, we can add the 10 per cent, and so on, with the budgets within budgets.

To put that in perspective, in five years, when the UNC was in office, for five years we spent a total of \$54 billion. You are spending it in one year. But do you know what? We were able to improve the lives of every citizen; to reduce crime; to control inflation; to improve health; to build schools; police stations; an international-class airport from which they are flying up and down; [*Desk thumping*] bridges; roads; established and equipped an effective police rapid system; an ambulance service, and so on. In one year this Government will spend over \$50 billion and every institution in this country is on the verge of collapse and every sector is in crisis. This is an assault on the Treasury, the likes of which this country has never seen and is continuing with the current budgetary provisions.

So despite staring inflation in its face, despite stating that inflation reduction is an urgent and social imperative of this Government, the Minister of Finance predicts Government's future failure by indicating simultaneously that inflation was expected to continue its current upward trend in the short term before falling to a more acceptable level.

Sadly, there is nothing in this budget to indicate the rationale for the Minister's optimism that the inflation rates will fall in the not too distant future. Government proposes to continue splurging in this fiscal year, injecting substantial additional liquidity in the system and that will continue to push the inflation up: Government wilfully and intentionally committed acts which resulted in inflationary spikes which are now confronting this country, which have resulted in substantial suffering and will cause more suffering.

As we are looking at these indicators, I want to turn now to unemployment. When we look at the critical area of labour employment industrial relations, this is another area that really was not covered by the hon. Minister of Finance, but Government has singlehandedly undermined the national work ethic and labour productivity by their myopic strategy of artificially boosting employment levels with an assortment of Government make-work programmes which are de-linked from the productive sector and which encourage massive corruption and criminal violence.

The hon. Member for Oropouche West, our shadow Minister of Labour, will deal with the CSO data about the labour force to demonstrate that the real unemployment rate is more in the vicinity of 13 per cent.

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Because when we subtract the unproductive public set of element of low wage and skill work, that is where we will get the real unemployment rate.

The failed labour strategies from the '70s have led to a tragic mismatch in the labour market with private sector employees screaming for workers while our vulnerable citizens paint stones; they hold up tarpaulins and now are being corralled into Woodford Square to scream.

11.00 a.m.

It is no secret that this regime from time immemorial has been anti-labour and anti-trade union. There is a party that had to be forced by the UNC screaming and kicking to pass the critical Occupational Safety and Health Act. It is more than four years now that this piece of legislation has not been fully implemented with the necessary human and material resources to ensure monitoring and compliance with the labour law and safety standards. What this has done is that the Government has presided over an industrial killing field where hard-working citizens have died at the work site as a result of the negligence and recklessness of their employers and the Government that failed to implement the regulations.

This Government stands guilty of corporate manslaughter caused by the failure to observe the strictest labour codes and standards. Since 2005, when OSHA was proclaimed, to August 2008, 63 workers have died in the workplace and 2,053 workplace accidents have occurred. Government has failed to undertake, in an expeditious manner, the conclusion of collective bargaining arrangements with key trade unions in critical public services. This has resulted in severe inconvenience caused by industrial disputations. Government has failed to promote a training and development framework to upgrade and re-skill workers.

The ill-conceived training programmes have failed to produce graduates that are properly trained to contribute meaningfully. In fact, under the PNM the once proud On-the-Job Training Programme has been transformed into a white collared DEWD, plagued by worker exploitation, unfair practices and horrific conditions of work.

We have seen another phenomenon. The proliferation of contract labour in the public service is a new tool that has been used as a pillar of the Government's strategy of undermining and eventually dismantling the public service. This approach is consistent with the Prime Minister's desire to control public personnel and escape that inconvenient democratic obligation which is called accountability. In that environment, our workers continue to labour in unsafe and unfair conditions.

When we look at the much touted indicator, economic growth, we will see that the country has experienced impressive growth since 2005, but it is not due to

prudent PNM management and philosophy. That in itself is an oxymoron. This country's increased extraction of natural gas, coupled with the increase in oil prices means that we are now selling increased amounts of resources at high price in a short time. What will happen obviously is that our high growth rate is due to high extraction rate and high energy prices. End of story.

We have periods of boom followed by periods of slump. This means that economic well-being premised on natural resource exploitation, especially by external operators, will be temporary. It is therefore incumbent upon Government to articulate a position where the economy will be self-sustaining over time. We have heard again and again economic diversification being touted ad nauseam, but all we have seen is declining agriculture, lowering of tourism and manufacturing in the GDP while Government's reliance on energy continues unabated.

Our manufacturing sector, once the most boring in the Caribbean, is now in crisis because of inflation and lack of competitiveness. This economy is nowhere near that of developed countries. We still sell crude oil and we simply liquefy the natural gas. There has been no transformation of the economy. We are no way near Bangladesh or India where we can export services and IT to the world; nor are we akin to China which has developed a niche in the world technology market; no way near Singapore in terms of the management of scarce resources, nor Iceland, Malta, Mauritius in terms of sustainability.

History is replete with examples of strong economies that have collapsed. We have a situation similar to the 1929 crisis in which the banks went bankrupt in the United States. Now we see investment banks collapsing with major effects worldwide. I repeat: We are living in turbulent economic times buttressed by high prices and so we are very vulnerable to economic shocks as we were in the 1970s. We need to tread cautiously now and in the future.

We do not know how prices will behave, hon. Speaker, but we do know oil production has fallen from 150,000 barrels per day to 115,000 barrels per day as contained in the *Review of the Economy*. Prudence indicates that we exercise more caution in the use of our depleting resources, but Government does not understand that word "prudence" though they tout it all the time. This Government is hell-bent on making the same mistakes and so here we are with this high economic growth. What are we doing with it?

We come to savings, which is the other indicator. The Heritage and Stabilisation Fund (HSF) is testimony to the vision of the UNC. [*Desk thumping*] It is meant to preserve so that the Government could supply a bundle of goods and services for future generations. When we speak about future generations, we are

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not speaking about some nebulous entity; we are speaking about the generation that is already here and will go into the elderly; we are speaking about a generation that is now born and a generation that is coming up and yet to be born.

The Minister tells us that to date the HSF has the value of US \$2.6 billion. In reality that figure is a drop in the ocean. It represents a mere three and a half months' expenditure at the current rate of Government spending. That is nothing to celebrate. As a matter of fact, given the global financial crisis and the exposure of this country to serious economic damage, the small size of the HSF is reason for concern, not celebration.

The price of oil is used to determine the value of the surplus income received and that is to be invested in the fund. According to law, that is calculated based on a moving average of 11 years, that is, five years back, five years in front and the current year. I am advised by economists that the price the Government has used on which to base its revenue projection is wrong and that it should be closer to US \$68. That is a difference of US \$2.

When we talk about oil revenues, US \$2 is a lot of money. Is the Government then manipulating this figure so that they could spend more and save less? You can only put in excess of the budgeted number that you place for your oil price, so if you put a higher budget oil price and it falls below that, you put no money into the HSF.

I want to reiterate the UNC's position that this Fund should contain a minimum of US \$40 billion invested in safe grade A securities. Further, rest assured that when the UNC forms the next Government, we will reach and surpass that target. [*Desk thumping*] I go further. If the UNC had remained in office, we would have reached that target already. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister compared our savings rate to that of Canada to say that theirs is lower. That is a false analogy. We cannot compare our Fund with the HSF of Canada. In the first place, our circumstances are not the same as the Canadian economy. They do not have the dependence on one sector as we do. More than that, they know their situation. They are quite happy to let their banks buy out other people's banks like ours. However, if Trinidad and Tobago would try to buy the Toronto Dominion Bank or the Bank of Montreal, we would be forbidden by the regulations in Canada. They know their business.

Savings should be a matter of priority for Government. So, instead of finding millions to spend on mansions and to jet about in private jets, the Government could have placed that money into savings in the HSF. [*Desk thumping*] Instead of

hiding money for unnamed future expenditure in the Infrastructure Development Fund, that should be placed in HSF.

The Government lacks commitment. The Minister said:

“Countries like individuals and firms must spend, save and invest in order to secure their future.”

In typical fashion, Government has focused on the expenditure side—how to use the money. The Minister forgot that one must first earn in order to spend and save. [*Desk thumping*] We have seen in this budget and in the budgets of the previous six years that the Government is addicted to spending. It does not understand the importance of financial and fiscal restraint and so I maintain that the value of the HSF is too low and that while the Government cautions citizens about the need to save, it should take its own advice. Saving is not an option; it is a necessity.

As we have said before, they will continue to demonstrate that the Government talks the talk but they cannot walk the walk. So let us consider our level of savings as against our public debt. If you are a home owner, you look at what you owe, what you have saved and what you can spend. The Minister boasted in the budget as follows:

“Today our external debt stands at 6 per cent of GDP while total public sector debt is 28 per cent of GDP down from 58.3 per cent in 2000.”

Let us put that into perspective because it is wrong. According to page 27 of the *Review of the Economy 2009*, which the hon. Minister provided for us on Monday:

“External debt is anticipated to increase from 6.4 per cent of GDP in fiscal 2006/2007 to 7.1 per cent of GDP.”

So, we are discussing in fiscal 2008 a figure that is 7.1 per cent, an increase from the previous year. That is our debt to GDP. The following percentage is nothing to crow about.

“As the denominator rises the fraction gets small.”

It simply means as the value of GDP rises, as it has been doing due to buoyant energy revenues, it is less, the value is triggered and in absolute terms it is not. In theory, the more appropriate figure to peg your public debt to, some may think is revenue, but that will suffer the same problem as if you peg it to GDP. We need a spatial comparison. This is as follows.

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In the year 2000, the total external debt was \$9.7 billion. The price of oil then was only US \$30 per barrel. Today, the external debt stands at \$10.7 billion but the oil price, an average of US \$116, total public sector debt was \$28.7 billion in 2000 and by 2008, under this Government, total public sector debt is up to \$42.5 billion, an increase of 380 per cent. That is what the Minister should be explaining.

Why, with record levels of Government revenue, the total public debt has tripled? In 2000, total revenue was \$12.2 billion; in 2000, the Government received \$52.6 billion in income. In the period of time this Government has been in office, it has received more than \$200 billion. Why then does the public debt have to rise? Why do we owe people these massive sums? The public debt now is more than three times that of the UNC government even though the revenue is so much greater.

Mr. Speaker, public debt has not fallen; it has dramatically and significantly increased. The Minister must tell us, with all the billions of revenue and every year the Government receiving more money, the debt owed by the Government is so high. This Government is putting future generations in increasing amounts of debt because of its reckless desire to spend. Today, look at what happens with per capita public debt.

So we have talked about public debt and put it in a spatial manner and now looking at it in absolute terms, it has tripled and we are looking at it now as per capita. Under the UNC, it was \$73,328. Today, under the PNM, per capita public debt is \$327,390. This Government continues spending and it is the future generation, your children, mine and their children will have to pay for this.

The Minister of Works and Transport is now on record as boasting to the Parliament one week ago that the public service debt is less than the \$15 billion in the HSF. With arms outstretched he stood in this Parliament and crowed: "So we can pay off the public debt tomorrow with the funds that we the PNM have placed in the HSF." If the Minister could pay off the public debt with the HSF, it would be a miracle.

11.15 a.m.

The public sector debt, according to the *Review of the Economy*, is \$42.5 billion. The money in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund is TT \$15 billion. So, the Minister is guilty of fabrication and of misleading this House. It shows how little he knows about finance and even basic Arithmetic. Every child knows 42 is more than 15. But we must remember the Member for Diego Martin North/East

has a penchant for arrant nonsense as he decries everything and everybody, even when the black and white print stares him in the face. His Napoleonic doings leave him to rant and rave as he seeks to overcompensate for ignorance and insecurity, because he leans on insults, since ideas evade him. Some would say the hon. Member has become the perfect symbol of the PNM's culture of emboldened stupidity, but I would not say that. I want to warn him, as he fights himself to take the place of the Rottweiler, it is only a matter of time before he too would be consigned to the political doghouse.

I turn now to one of the major issues affecting this country, food prices. Our agricultural policy cost rank is 110 out of 131. Again, way down below. The most significant effect of Government's reckless over-expenditure and mismanagement of the economy has been the effect of food prices. The tenure of the Government is marked by the growing inability of a substantial portion of our population to afford to buy food.

In the last 12 months to August 2008, food price grew by a massive 25 per cent. The available information advises that in the 12 months ending July 2008, the price of bread and cereals—we may want to remember that cereals include rice and flour—leapt by a massive 60.3 per cent; the cost of meat by 11.1 per cent; all oils and fats by 27.2 per cent and the price of fruit grew by 49.5 per cent, with vegetables by 23.1 per cent. The cost of packaged rice has increased in one year by 81.9 per cent. A 10-kilo bag of rice last year cost us \$59, today it costs us \$110. Poor people are soon not going to be able to buy flour, because this has risen by 88.3 per cent in the last 12 months. Citizens are being forced to pay more for fresh fruits. Pawpaw jumped, 64.1 per cent; ripe bananas, 46.3 per cent; and oranges, 41.2 per cent. Given the recent floods as well, caused by the Government's mismanagement and misspending, and the continued and misdirected fiscal policy, food prices are going to keep increasing. It is the destitute, the poor and the battered middle-class who must face these high prices with a rapidly falling buying power.

Since 2001, under the PNM, the cost of food has increased by over 240 per cent and is still increasing. The usual promise in this budget rehashed the boastful declaration of two megafarms in production, which blissfully ignored the facts that the Prime Minister—not one, not two and not even three, but 17 megafarms last year—addressed the National Food Consultation. How many of them are on stream? We were told that two are on stream. Some people said that they went there yesterday and nothing was happening. The Prime Minister, at that time when he promised the 17 farms, named the locations, the precise size of the acreage and the specific crop to be cultivated. Where are those farms today?

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The hon. Minister also visited in her speech the issue of praedial larceny, just like her predecessor the hon. Prime Minister in 2006/2007. Now, without an explanation as to why the Government failed to keep its previous commitments to establish a regime for this, the Minister fell into the habit of promising an expansionary approach to this problem.

Mr. Speaker, you would be amazed to learn that if you pick up the *Draft Estimates of Expenditure*, the one that gives the positions that are on the establishment for each ministry, and go to page 111, Head: 22, Ministry of National Security, there is a list under the heading: Praedial Larceny Squad. There is a total of 47 officers, comprising three estate sergeants at salary range 31C; five estate corporals, range 24C; and 39 estate corporals at 21C. What does this reveal? On the same page, there are the same 47 officers on the establishment for fiscal 2008. When you check the estimates, what squad has been in those books since 2002? There was a squad with the establishment. These posts exist. Why was there a need for bureaucracies and procedures to establish this larceny squad? If the Government was serious about protecting farmers and crops, all that was required was an administrative action and that was never done; take a decision to fill the posts that have been in the establishment every year. To come to this House with the same promise year after year, knowing there was the squad in the establishment/books, in my view, is a hoax, hypocritical and deceptive. It means the Government never intended to have this squad in place and so was misleading the farmers all along. The Government continues to be insincere about the development of the agricultural sector.

I want to refer you to the 2009 budget memoranda by the same PricewaterhouseCoopers. They identified 16 sector-specific promises made in the last budget. Only two have been completed; that is at 12½ per cent completion. That means that 14 remain incomplete, 87½ not done in the agricultural sector, and we come year after year. We have to grow the agricultural sector. We are seeing it there. The projects continue not to be done.

Having failed to put the relevant physical and economic infrastructure in place to boost agricultural production, the Government's spin doctors began blaming the middlemen and the food vendors for the rising cost of food. The Government spent a lot of money collecting and publishing prices at various locations in Trinidad. People from Siparia may get a "vaps" and decide they would go to Macoya, so they could save 5 cents on a pound of eddoes. The people from Macoya would go to Siparia to buy green fig to save 2 cents on a pound. How ludicrous!

In a direct attempt to compete with food importers, the Government then tried another attack. They accused the middlemen/food importers; they said that they were profiteering. The Government instructed the NFM to import and sell cheap food. They went into that business. By August this year, NFM was forced to discontinue its cheap food initiative. According to media reports, NFM was operating at a loss of \$42 million; in local language; in “Trini” parlance: “Dey bus”. With all the resources and the Treasury behind it, the Government could not find cheaper food than the local importers. The Government, as usual, was willing to blame everybody else for their incompetence.

I recall the Minister of Legal Affairs, not the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, telling us to eat blue food. Unfortunately, saying that we eat what we produce misses the fact that we are not producing. We import milk. Why can we not produce locally? There used to be a thriving dairy industry supplying Nestlé. However, low prices and low Government incentives have reduced the dairy farmer numbers. Why can we not produce cheese?

I am told that there was goat cheese being produced as a specialty somewhere in Couva South. Why can we not have the various types of peas and beans in the domestic market? We currently import ground provisions; the same blue food they are saying that we must eat from the islands? They have the same soil type as we do. We can harvest, transport, ship and sell wholesale. They could do all of that competitively and we cannot. What is the reason for the failure of Trinidad and Tobago to produce food? The reason is clear, it is the lack of incentive to produce. It is an incentive that the Government needs to provide. Instead, Government’s failure and policy on agriculture differs very sharply from its stated policy.

In the *Trinidad Guardian*, we see the fishermen—a bleak future for them—fear their way of life would be gone, because a large number of them, where they operate, felt that the waters would become devoid of fish as a result of the development of the proposed water taxis and the clearing of lands for Essar Steel. The fishing industry is not alone affected.

The rice farmers would tell you whilst the price of rice almost doubled in the last year alone, we have not been able to produce rice. By the way, that is a very good product, I am told, for large scale for the megafarms because of the way it can be done, versus doing the small vegetables and small crops. Rice would make a good crop for megafarms.

How does this Government operate? You want to grow agriculture, but what do you do? You sent in the HDC and the LSA, with armed policemen and bulldozers, to bulldoze people’s crops. Where is the mercy in that? That is this

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Government's thrust. Again, its actions do not keep in sync with the policy to grow agriculture. The Government is guilty of converting thousands of acres of agricultural lands to fulfil its housing thrust. We need to balance. We are not saying do not build houses, but we need to eat. What is the point you are sitting in a house and you have nothing to eat; you cannot buy food to eat?

Tied in when we speak about agriculture and food prices, is the whole issue of the Caroni hoax. The Government continues to victimize the former employees. After taking four years, ignoring a mandate from the court, the Government has provided plots with little or no infrastructure and very few of them—our shadow Minister of Agriculture, the Member for Caroni, will deal with those issues. I cannot let this time pass without condemning the Government for the way that they have dealt with Caroni (1975) Limited and the workers of Caroni (1975) Limited.

I come to another issue that is very close to my heart. We all know that Monday's budget presentation was an historic and significant one, because for the first time we had a female Minister of Finance delivering that budget. There is a Chinese proverb: Women hold up half the sky. For over 650,000 women who make up 49.8 per cent of our population, there is a special sense of inspiration and hope. They felt that the Minister was not only going to deliver a budget speech, but they expected her to highlight the unique concerns of her fellow sisterhood and to offer innovative solutions to their concerns. I did so too. I waited for over three hours to hear the Minister's proposal for improving gender equity and fostering the upliftment of women. Like hundreds and thousands of women in our country, we became disappointed, as not a single mention was made of the issue of gender and, even worse, not one single time or one single moment in that 23,970 word speech was the word "woman" mentioned. Instead, when I looked at the implications of this budget, I do believe it is an anti-woman budget. It is an anti-middle class budget. It is a budget which threatens female heads of households and their families and it is a budget that destabilizes the independence and safety of professional women.

From our analysis of the impact of the increasing rate of inflation in the economy, now close to 12 per cent—I believe the Central Bank would put out their latest report today, as we speak; it may well be that rate has gone higher. This is coupled with the expected rate of increase in the cost of borrowing from the bank, possibly to 14 per cent. That will affect the cost of mortgages and the higher compounded cost for purchasing cars and gasoline. Those are the measures in the budget; more for cars and more for gas. The inflationary pressures would

push the mortgage rates up and so the overall cost of living would increase as a result of those measures in the budget. That would convert disastrous consequences for the working poor; the working class; the female-headed households; and the young female professionals who are seeking independence in housing and transport, as well as the established middle class. This would take us to a decline of the middle class, impoverishment of the working class and destitution of the poor. Among all these groups, do you know who suffers most? Women suffer the most in these vulnerable groups. The statistics are very clear for us.

I would like to provide an example of why we need gender-based budgeting in Trinidad and Tobago. We can take the example of HIV/AIDS, we can look at the statistics that tell us about the segmentation in the labour market, or we can take the statistics that tell us that women are still receiving less than men in the workforce for the same kind of work. We need to look at gender-based budgeting and provide for gender equity. I am not talking about the woman walking in front of the man or the man walking in front of the woman. I am talking about men and women in this country walking side by side. That is what I am talking about. That is what gender budgeting is about. It is not for one to rise and for the other to fall.

11.30 a.m.

You know, when God was creating Eve he did not take a part of Adam's head to make Eve, because she would have felt that she is the boss and she is brighter than Adam. He did not take a part from the foot, because then she would have felt inferior, but what did he do? He took a rib from the side so that they could stand side by side together. That is what we stand committed to. [*Desk thumping*]

So, we talk about gender based budgeting, and the development agenda in the world has clearly gone the way of gender based budgeting. Over 50 countries have undertaken gender budgeting initiatives of some kind. Commonwealth countries with similar systems as ours have sought to implement gender response to budgets like Australia, Barbados, Belize, Botswana, Canada, Fiji, India, Kenya, Malawi, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, St. Kitts and Nevis, Tanzania, Uganda, the United Kingdom, Zambia and Zimbabwe. These are all the Commonwealth jurisdictions, and right here in the Caribbean we have Barbados, Belize and St. Kitts and Nevis. They have taken these initiatives. I do not intend to go into greater detail. My colleague, the Member for Oropouche West, who is the shadow minister for gender affairs will deal with this matter effectively in further detail.

So many countries have done it. I have said Barbados, Belize and so on and, therefore, it is notable that both Barbados and St. Kitts and Nevis have ranked

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higher than Trinidad and Tobago in the UNDP's Gender Development and Human Development Indices in the last year. So, Barbados ranked No. 31 in the world; the Bahamas ranked No. 49 and St. Kitts and Nevis ranked No. 54. What has happened to us? Trinidad and Tobago has dropped from pride of place, high up at ranking No. 49 in the year 2000 under the UNC to No. 59 under the PNM.

Mr. Speaker, it is noted that one way to pinpoint policies to reduce gender disparities is through gender budgeting. This involves a systematic examination of budget programmes and policies for the impact on women. This effort to mainstream gender analysis into the government's policies has gained prominence, as I said, in recent years. What it does is that it is not intended to analyze only projects that target females or to produce separate women's budget, but it is rather intended to examine the gender effects of government programmes and policies. It is time that we in Trinidad and Tobago employ gender budgeting into this budget exercise. Mr. Speaker, I thought that we were well poised to do so on Monday with this budget but, unfortunately, that opportunity has been squandered. I trust we would not let that happen again.

Our labour force participation rate for Trinidad and Tobago was 58.3 per cent with higher participation rates for men. The average male participation was at 67.8 per cent compared with only 49.1 per cent to females. Given the better performance of girls in the educational system, it may well be that the segmentation of the labour market is a factor in the possible withdrawal from or non-participation on the part of some women. So, when we look at that gapping of more girls in the educational system that also would come into gender budgeting, because we need to take affirmative action to help our boys since they are failing more in the system. They are also dropping out of the system. That should also be an aspect in gender based budgeting.

Policies for poverty reduction and the enhancement of household income also need to focus on the participation of women in the labour market and their training, and this is clearly stated in the Government's own document, the Analysis of the Survey of Living Conditions 2005, so that we can address some of these problems.

We also see that poor women were 58.8 per cent of the poor people in this country. So, there are more women than men who are classified as poor from the statistics. I am saying this would have been a good opportunity for us to deal with some of these matters.

I know that when we were in office, the UNC undertook various initiatives under the then Minister of Gender Affairs, Dr. Daphne Phillips, with respect to

assisting in gender development. Some of the things we did during that period were: we attempted to address the varying needs of women—Mr. Speaker, you may recall that Dr. Daphne Phillips was the first black woman to act as Prime Minister in this country under the UNC. She had that distinction. [*Desk thumping*]

We created the women's leadership and enhancement institute—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: She acted for one day.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: I am sure that there are many Members on the other side who would be happy to get one day acting. Dr. Daphne Phillips did not act for one day. She acted for more than that, and we were very proud of her. [*Desk thumping*—a men's programme; a vibrant domestic violence unit; new programmes and staffing dedicated to addressing this issue; a woman's second chance programme which allowed poor women to obtain skills and jobs; a series of community counselling centres where women, men and young people were able to access counselling free of charge; we provided telephone counselling 24/7 through the institution of a domestic violence hotline. Mr. Speaker, do you know that most of these programmes have been closed down today and the few remaining ones were drastically scaled down?

We also actively assisted homes for battered women and we created new ones with the very limited resources we had, with oil at \$9 a barrel and a budget of only \$13 billion. We set up some very special centres. We did so in the Four Roads Diego Martin Police Station where you had victims of violence, and they were able to work closely with the community police. These facilities have been abandoned and the community policing has vanished. That worked very well with domestic violence issues. I do not see anything in this budget—as I said, my colleague will go further into the details. When one goes to the actual draft estimates, one sees the miniscule amount for gender matters. Indeed, when one goes to the development programme, there is not a single cent allocated to the gender aspect of the ministry. I am sure that the Minister is going to tell us why no money has been allocated for the gender aspect of the ministry. I saw in one of the estimates moneys allocated for a building, but I did not see anything else allocated for gender.

As we are talking about women, we need to talk about children in this country. When we look at the children in Trinidad and Tobago, we see alarming declines in their health and safety status, again in comparison to our Caribbean neighbours. In terms of the mortality ranking for the under five age group where higher numbers indicate better placement, our mortality rates have been steadily

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worsening over the past several years. Remember, I said that our life expectancy rate had become worse because it is only 69 versus 73. In the same way now, we are seeing the infant mortality rate for the under five age group also worsening.

So, whereas in the year 2002 we were ranked very high up—in 2003, 125; in 1999, 141; 1998, 143; 1997, 112; in 2007 which is the latest report, we have gone down to 75; from a rank in 1999 of 141, we have dropped to 75. I said that in every major indicator in the world this country has performed worse than it did under the UNC. These figures speak for themselves about the way our infants fared under the UNC.

Mr. Speaker, in the year 2007, under this administration, we have ranked the lowest relative to the 10 Caricom states in the infant mortality index; that is the infant deaths per 100,000. The same way with respect to the murders per 100,000 we were worse off, is the same way with infant deaths per 100,000.

In Cuba they ranked No. 157. That is very good. I think there is where the Prime Minister got medical treatment for his heart and so forth. If you look at Barbados, they have ranked No. 138; the Bahamas, No. 130; Dominica, No. 128; St. Kitts and Nevis, No. 116; St. Vincent, No. 113; Grenada, No. 113; Dominican Republic, No. 192; and Jamaica, No. 88. Everybody else is better than us. We are down at No. 75 with 38 infant deaths per 100,000. You know, you would not think that Jamaica and Barbados are better than us. They have no oil, no gas, no resources and no PNM. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: That is the secret of their success.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Of all these countries, Trinidad and Tobago is the worst place to live; not just for us but also for infants in the Caribbean. According to the Ministry of Social Development there is a national plan of action, and the following reasons were given for the alarming state of affairs of our young children:

- a gap of 10 per cent in immunization coverage;
- no report has been undertaken on perinatal mortality in Trinidad and Tobago;
- poor identification of high risk problems in the perinatal period; and
- gaps in terms of stillbirths and prevention of neonatal deaths.

This is the Government's own document. This is a very poor reflection of the health services available to mothers and young infants in this country. We come back now to gender based budgeting. Even, if you did not do gender based budgeting, please have mercy on these mothers and children.

In that same national action plan it says that this country's relatively high rate of birth rate could be the result of the following factors; inconsistent monitoring; failure to establish growth monitoring; and not enough progress in breast feeding practices. While we have so much money as compared to the Caribbean, they are doing so much better for their children and this Government dares to say that it cares!

The entire population was made painfully aware that this administration took seven years to bring to this Parliament the package of children legislation and to date they are not in effect. For seven years, the children of this country have been abused, brutalized, murdered, raped and battered. Honourable Prime Minister, I say have mercy. The Government is clueless and it does not care about the terrible abuse and deaths of our young children. I can call some of those names, but today I would not do that because of the trauma it creates each time for parents.

There is one with the Justice Barnes report, Amy Annamunthodo. There was great noise and a great hue and cry. The Justice Barnes Commission was set up and to date we have not seen that report. We do not know what the recommendations are to assist other children who, from the records, would be in that kind of situation. Where is it? Why are you hiding the report? We need to know the problems that touch and concern the children of this country. Where is it? Our children are our future and they are in the worst hands possible under this Government.

According to the Minister of Finance, in her budget speech, the Minister spoke about a strong education system as being vital for the attainment of Vision 2020. It appears that the Government is of the view that a sound education system is only at the tertiary level and it does not start from the pre-school, through the primary and secondary schools, because they have no relative attention or resources committed in these sectors. All the emphasis now is on tertiary education and nothing is wrong with that.

The result is about balancing and priorities. That is what it is about. It is about balancing. So the result is precisely those children who need critical early assistance in moving ahead at the primary and secondary levels, they have been left to languish and they would eventually fall out, so they would never reach that tertiary level. They are the ones who do not experience education as the strongest catalyst for national development as the Minister insists. Those children who go forward into tertiary level are the ones who would have gone, in any case, through the traditional means and the ones most likely to benefit, because the others are falling through the cracks in the system.

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As we are talking about education, on my way to the Parliament, I was called by someone from the Waterloo High School—I am not going to give the name, because I do not want the person to be penalized, because there is this new movement that persons in the public sector should not talk because there are regulations. They are not supposed to talk to people—and said that they want to thank Mr. Panday, the UNC and myself for building the Waterloo High School. [*Desk thumping*] I remember when we turned the sod for that school—Mr. Panday, myself and officials from the ministry—there were those on the other side who said that we were building schools in canefields. Well, today, that canfield school has produced five scholarships. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I also want to congratulate the two girls—we talk about the women—who have received the President Medal. [*Desk thumping*] Again, the women are trailblazing—the girls—as we move forward. We need to bring our boys up to this standard because, as I said, the boys are falling through the cracks, and we have to help them as well. Mr. Speaker, the thousands of children that we are seeing today, do you know that they have dropped out of schools? Do you know why? They may have problems at home like money problems or other problems.

11.45 a.m.

The Education Act—and I plead through you, hon. Speaker—still has compulsory education up to the age of 12 years, but this Government came to this Parliament and changed the law to put the working age at 16 years. So, between 12 years and 16 years—I am not saying those children should be working, they should not be working, they should be in school, but those who do not want to go to school, we should change the law to ensure that the mandatory school age is up to 16 years. [*Desk thumping*] You know what is happening? Whilst those children are dropping out of the system—and the statistics are there, it is very clear.

The statistics have been out about the high numbers of our children who are missing from the education sector in that age grouping. When they are not in school what are we doing with them? They are not working, we are growing criminals and gangs. So I ask through you, you will say that I did not do it, well I learnt, because we did not change the law for the 16 years; it was done here as a Parliament, we did it together. I am saying if that was wrong then, it is still wrong now; change the age and make it 16 years as compulsory school age.

When we look at what is happening in the schools, we see that the primary school children are scoring less than 30 per cent at the S.E.A. The Minister of Education is reported to have said that the percentage of students scoring below

30 per cent for 2006 was 10.3 per cent, while in 2007 it was 13.5 per cent. So there has been increase and that is great, but we see the percentages are still high at this time with this level of development, we need to help these students more. We see the percentage of students scoring less than 60 per cent nationally for 2006, 42.4 per cent; 2007, 47.7 per cent an increase again, so we are getting there.

The number of students who are performing worse are already increasing in the survey of living conditions again. When we look at socio-economic status and education, it is stated that as much as 30.6 per cent of the population sampled had not passed any exam above the primary level. Look, 30.6 per cent of that population had not passed a single exam beyond the primary level and we are talking about going to developed nation status, 2020 vision. That does not augur well for the competitiveness of this country, in the scenario where oil and gas could not sustain the current level of foreign exchange earning. That is a terrible scenario.

While the Government is spending huge sums of money at the top of the system, that is all right, what is happening with the levels, they are declining without attention, without resources, without adequate schools, without adequate supply of teachers, without attention to the numerous needs of the very poor. These are left to become more vulnerable, to fall into violence and juvenile delinquency.

Mr. Speaker, there was a study that was done on youth violence in schools, which was conducted by the Unit of Social Problem Analysis and Policy Development of the University of the West Indies. In that study, research has concluded that the stressful social experiences of the majority of students in the school system: poverty, deprivation, physical, emotional and sexual abuse in the home and school what is labelled the poverty complex, drives their concern to gain more comfort in their lives.

The junior secondary schools have become a location for the coming together of many students with similar experiences. They join and create gangs, as we said, as a major domain for achieving their goals, but because the gang is associated with violence, it also contributes to the wars. Gender differences contribute to the ways by which girls and boys achieve similar goals through overt sexual activity or overt violence. The junior secondary schools, as an accumulation point to students with similar experiences, through connections with the wider community, have become places for the nurturing of violence and the moulding of criminal personalities. That is what the study found.

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The authors made several recommendations for change and sent a copy of the final report to the Minister of Education. I understand that this report has not been acknowledged. Serious institutional and systemic mechanisms need to be put in place in these schools, but there is a major emphasis only on tertiary education. For those who receive free education at tertiary level—we have another statistic that is very frightening.

This is “Migration and Remittances Fact” book of the World Bank of 2007, which gives us the emigration rate of tertiary educated: Trinidad and Tobago stands at 78.4 per cent human capital flight. We have experienced in this country before capital flight, we now have the human resource flight. We are getting a migration of 78.4 per cent from the World Bank document.

Therefore, we are spending the money in the sector, yes. Are we keeping them here? Are we growing them? And if we are not keeping them, why? It is because, as I said, our life expectancy has dropped, the murder rate has increased and in terms of best countries to live, we have dropped. All these reasons why that is happening.

So, the vast majority of those whose education is paid for out of the public purse will leave the country because of the lack of jobs and opportunities, because of the fear of crime and kidnapping. For those who remain, many face unemployment or underemployment.

Recently, the Minister announced further provisions for free tertiary education at post graduate level for all students attaining the First Class Honours at the under graduate level. Regrettably, the Minister did not state in what areas of study Government would offer these scholarships; it might be in any area or all areas. If it is that we want to go to 2020 status of developed nation status and so on, we have to upgrade our human resource, not in any old direction, but in a direction that would service the community. This would further deplete our resources as the majority of these highly educated super professionals would join in that 78.4 per cent too, leave the country as well.

Let us look at some of the impacts of the fiscal package presented here on Monday. I would do so by going firstly to the battered middle class. The disastrous effect of this fiscal mess that the Government has put us into will be felt by the most vulnerable, but also by the battered middle class. So, the poor will be affected, but this budget—I mentioned before, anti-middle class budget—is going to impact very heavily on those persons.

From the fiscal package, we can predict that the middle class will find it increasingly difficult to finance mortgage payments, cars loans, furniture and durable payments. We are predicting sharp increases in the interest rates, which will adversely affect expenditure on this group, so, even increases in incomes would be dissipated by high interest charges.

We predict increases in the reserve ratio and interest rates because of this inflationary budget and so on. The Central Bank will have to sell more bonds to attract the liquidity at more attractive rates, and this will now set the level for the mortgage rates. This is most unfortunate, because there are many individuals who contracted 30-year mortgages and so on; when they sign the mortgage they do not read the fine print, so very few will have fixed mortgage rates. In the fine print you have that the bank can increase your mortgage rate, so in the kind of circumstance now and in this inflationary situation being created by the Government, we are going to see the middle class in difficulty in affording their mortgage rates; we are going to see them having difficulty in terms of keeping up their standards of living and in terms of living costs. More of the disposable income of the middle class would be spent on keeping them in the same place and therefore reduce the amount of money they would have wanted to save to provide for retirement.

The Government has also targeted this middle class by the increased tax on vehicles. This is such a strange thing, the Government's inefficiency and incompetence in building up the road infrastructure in this country is the people have to pay for it by paying a higher tax on their cars. You are penalizing the population because of your inefficiency. [*Desk thumping*] And you are saying too much traffic gridlock on the road. Why? Do you really honestly believe by taxing that less cars will be on the road?

When the young students are going to UWI to study and they are going home in the nights, on the weekends, you want them to go down and take a maxi-taxi at that hour of the night to be raped, battered and murdered? Those vehicles are used by the middle class; do not tell us that premium gas will not affect people. The majority of the cars are using premium gas, that is my information.

What is happening here, you are penalizing them for inefficiency, and the motivation appears to be the high fuel subsidy cost. The fact is that the fuel subsidy has increased as a direct result of Government's failure to adequately develop the infrastructure over the several years. [*Desk thumping*] The increased cost of premium gas sends a mixed message when that is coupled with the promotion of the use of LNG, as they are both environmentally friendly fuel as compared to diesel and the lesser super gasoline and so on.

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I find it very intriguing the Government pretends to be penalizing what they feel are luxury car owners, when we all know the preferred vehicle of choice of the wealthy ones are the SUVs and they do not use premium, they are using diesel. So the middle class is the one that is going to take the greatest battering, and whilst we are doing this, the majority of the middle class use premium and that middle class is going to become further battered.

Today, I call on the Minister to withdraw fiscal measures and to remove that additional increase in the price of gasoline. [*Desk thumping*] Remove it. Remove it. I am very surprised that each year the policy was for a continuation of increasing the figure exempted from personal income tax. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Each year you give a bigger ceiling of the personal allowance and those persons would not be paying income tax. Given the battering this middle class is going to take, I was a little surprised that the personal allowance remains at the \$60,000 and has not been increased. Again, I will ask the Minister to look at that in terms of assisting that middle class, which is a very large class in the society. I say they would suffer from this budget, but the poor and most vulnerable are also going to suffer from the fiscal measures.

We know food inflation has averaged 22 per cent over the past five years. This means a bundle of food has not only doubled but increased by a cumulative 150 per cent over the past five years. We know that we import a great deal of food and we know the local production is very low. The Government tells us that the inflation rate is on account of importing inflation and so on. I have already asked why Barbados's food inflation rate is 5 per cent, when ours is averaging 22 per cent over the five-year period.

Mr. Speaker, the Government does not care that this inflation rate is an account of its spending, as I have said before, and it is creating serious problems for the poor. Let us use the Government's figures, the poverty line in 2005—as the Minister of Social Development told this House, and when you read the report you will see it in there—is \$660. We know this is insufficient; we know that since 2005 the food inflation rate has increased by 20 per cent per annum. And if you take in 2005, \$660 to buy a basket of food, what is happening three or four years later when the food inflation rate is flying so high?

Using the food inflation rate, I have conservatively calculated that the new poverty line today, not the 2005 poverty line of \$660, which even then was suspicious. If we were to take it at today's prices, using the Government's

statistics, then in 2008 the poverty line would be about \$1,300 at today's prices. If you have a family of four, the poverty line is \$1,300 a month, yes; you are the only bread earner—

Mr. Manning: What basis—

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Based on the food inflation; based on the inflation rate I calculated it from the inflation rate. So, if it was \$5 then, inflation has taken it up by factor X, it moves on to that; that is where we are now—and you have mother, father and two children, you think you could live on \$1,300, Mr. Speaker? That total income for a family of four should be \$5,200 for the four people.

The question is, has Government determined how many four-person family households earn less than this \$5,200 per month? The number of people living in poverty has escalated. This is the effect of inflation. Inflation has a redistributive effect, it makes the poor impoverished and the profit makers wealthy and we are seeing that in Trinidad and Tobago today.

I am not surprised then that there is a sector of society which is not concerned about poverty. It is likely that as much as a quarter of the population, in my view, in 2008 are living on the poverty line or below it, not 17 per cent, at today's prices. Old age pensioners have been given a paltry increase to \$1,950. We all know that many of the pensioners in this country are not alone in the house, and that \$1,950 is just close to the poverty line we just indicated, they may have children, grandchildren, some of them have many young mothers not working there with them; \$1,950 cannot sustain them. That is our culture in this country.

There are many households headed by grandmothers. How many of those do we have? Have we done a feasibility to know how many there are? So, many pensioners support single mothers, sometimes it is the only source of income, and it is in this context that the nominal increase in the pensions will be wiped out by the inflation itself and then with respect to the numbers of persons in the home. This paltry increase amounts to \$10 per day. And I am told you cannot buy a chicken roti with that. I am told that you cannot buy one chicken roti for that \$10 now because chicken is \$18 and a beef roti ranges between \$22 and \$32. So again, I repeat the UNC's call and commitment that pensions be increased to \$3,000. [*Desk thumping*]

12.00 noon.

In these inflationary times with an over \$50 billion budget, you give your pensioners a pittance of \$10 per day. The number of people living in poverty in

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the midst of plenty is rising, it means that the Government which claims to be nurturing a caring society, is not concerned. Government indicate that people are not poor because they are giving them all these other non-monetary benefits. You are giving them smart card and so on, but even when you take those, it does not bring them up to the poverty line. The Government is making, as I said, the middle class poor, the poor destitute and the destitute will be totally wiped out. And all of this is happening when money is being squandered.

The Government promises every year a minimum wage of \$10, even that will not take you outside of the poverty line if you have a family to take care of. It is \$9 not \$10 and the promise has been made repeatedly. When I looked at the review of one of the books in last year's budget, it is not there and this year in the Social Sector Investment Programme, we see where the Government will go to \$10. Well, I hope that when the hon. Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development gets up to speak, he would announce that it has gone to \$14 minimum wage an hour; we look forward to that.

Mr. Speaker, in all the plenty here, many things are happening and we are looking now at squandermania and corruption. Since its inception, the Opposition UNC has been condemning operations of CEPEP as a corrupt tool. We saw the Auditor General's report and it confirmed that it was a corrupt tool. It was being used as a political machine. We saw that happened right here a Friday or two ago, when the Member for Oropouche East again dealt with this when he talked about people who were mandated to sign the roster in the maxi-taxi or in the bus, otherwise they would not get paid.

Mr. Speaker, when the hon. Minister of Finance came to this House and announced that CEPEP will be now managed by a special purpose company established for that purpose, I became seriously concerned because there is nothing worst or more corrupt than the operation of CEPEP under SWMCOL than are the mechanisms for the special purpose companies. [*Desk thumping*] Nothing! There is no accountability to the nation for expenditure under these companies. They have been formed by Government and the Government has told us that it is to bypass bureaucracy. What is the bureaucracy? The bureaucracy is the accountability and the regulations of the Central Tenders Board. This means that every Government Minister who has such a board under his portfolio, every director is suspect because their spending is entirely off budget, off accountability and off transparency.

We have heard allegations in this House from the Member for Tabaquite and we have heard it outside of this House about UDeCott. I am not going back there

because other Members will deal with that. I raise it for this point, the serious concerns in this country about the way these special purpose companies are being used as cash cows to be milked by friends and family of the PNM. [*Desk thumping*] No accountability to this House. Now they are saying that they are going to put CEPEP in there. Well, Lord, heaven help us.

I looked at the board of directors of some of these special purpose companies and what I found is true to PNM form, so I was not surprised that some of these companies spend billions and they read like PNM party groups, staffed by persons qualified only because of party association, but the chief one of these of course, is Hart to Hart himself. Mr. Speaker, I have here a picture [*Picture Displayed*] of Mr. Hart—spending all this money through these companies that do not account to us—in the front bench of the PNM’s convention. Hart to Hart! Mr. Speaker, other examples include, the Director of the Education Facilities Management Company, Lennox Sirjuesingh. Remember him? He is the failed PNM general election candidate for Cumuto/Manzanilla, sitting on the education facilities company. He lost to the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Moonilal: Oh yes, I remember.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: The director of the Palo Seco Agricultural Company Limited, Farad Khan, do you remember him? Also a failed PNM candidate for Pointe-a-Pierre and he also sits on the Petrotrin board as a director. Then there is the Self-Help Commission, Director, Esau Mohammed and I am advised he was a PNM candidate for St. Augustine. Then there is Clifford Campbell, who sits on the Self-Help Commission and I am advised that he is or was the PNM chairman for the constituency of Mayaro.

So when you go through these—I did not get time to do all of them; these are just one or two of them and you are seeing it reads like PNM party groups sitting on—these are the special purpose companies and so we raise serious concerns about the proposal of the Government, to place the CEPEP in the hands of a special purpose company. My colleague, the Member for Caroni East, Dr. Gopeesingh, will deal more with the special purpose companies during the debate as he shadows that area. [*Desk thumping*]

I come now to the propaganda vote. Mr. Speaker, every year you would recall that I have been taking the recurrent estimates of expenditure and painstakingly go through every line of expenditure, and in the very fine print that this is, I have discovered what I have termed, the propaganda vote. This vote is made up of expenditure on promotions, publicity, hosting, overseas travel and entertainment.

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That has become obscenely high because this Government has spent hundreds of millions on hype to convince the population that it is working. Of course, incidentally, the population is not convinced that they are working. That is the conventional wisdom, but they do keep trying through the public relations.

Recently, we have seen the spin doctors at work first-hand with the silly, obvious and blatant untruth by a senior Government Minister, that the illegal march and meeting at Woodford Square when the Parliament was sitting, to say it was spontaneous. Mr. Speaker, you would also recall the short-lived insistence that there was no dengue outbreak. Under this Government, public relations has become propaganda release—PR is propaganda release.

In 2001—and I always go back to that because then you said, what did you do when I am talking about others—the last year the UNC was in office, we spent a total of \$14.2 million, which was the highest during our six years in office on promotions, publicity, hosting, overseas travel and entertainment. That is to start on this propaganda vote.

Mr. Speaker, do you know how much this Government intends to spend in this fiscal year? We spent \$14 million; they intend to spend not \$14 million, they intend to spend not even \$140 million. In this fiscal 2009, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago will spend \$309 million in their PR. When we were there it was just over \$14 million.

The Government started off 2002 spending on an average of \$48,900 per day on this PR. This past fiscal year, the Government would have spent a whopping \$741,230 per day. It gets worse. Projected for 2009, this free-spending Government intends to spend \$847,260 per day on PR. As a matter of fact, this Minister of Finance together with the real Minister of Finance, they have consigned the elderly to live on \$62 per day—you must remember that; sixty-two dollars per day, but they are spending on PR \$847,260 per day to look good. How is that shaping our future together? We have seen the Ministry of Finance where the Minister has increased her own allocation by 32 per cent from last year to this year. How is that shaping our future together?

Mr. Speaker, in total, since the PNM came into office from 2002 to the present, Mr. Manning and his colleagues have spent a massive \$1.3 billion on PR. From 2002, in a country where heart patients and pregnant women have to lie on the floor because there are no beds in the hospital; where children die because their parents cannot afford to pay for specialist treatment abroad, the Ministry of National Security increased its expenditure on PR by 1,980 per cent from a total of

\$971 million in their first year to a proposed \$20 million. It is clear that as crime worsened, the Government has been spending more and more on spin to cover it up.

In the Ministry of Health, the UNC spent \$439,000 on overseas travel and entertainment in 2001. The Minister of Health is projected to spend \$19 million next year on his PR vote, and out of that \$19 million, \$17 million is only for print and media promotions. Again, the worse it gets, the more they have to spend to make it look good, but we know the truth. We live it everyday and we see it everyday. These figures tell us where the priority is for this Government, but let us take a look at those persons whom some refer to as “the royal couple”.

In the 2002 financial year when the Prime Minister served as Minister of Finance and his wife served as Minister of Education, they accounted for \$6.2 million in that propaganda vote. As the country suffered, the influence of spending and propaganda grew significantly. By 2007, from that first year when they came into office, together they had spent a whopping \$33.8 million in propaganda. We know the Prime Minister shed the Ministry of Finance during fiscal 2008, so that would have taken up some of the expenditure and it fell to \$24.2 million. But apparently in 2009, they are expected to spend \$36.9 million to maintain their jet-setting lifestyle. The sum of \$36.9 million projected for PR. But there is something curious, it seems as though the Prime Minister must be planning for a very big party because the allocation for entertainment grew from an estimated \$1.5 million in fiscal 2008 to \$11.1 million. From \$1.5 million in these estimates, now raised to \$11.1 million next year. This will allow the Prime Minister to host a million-dollar party at the mansion every single month, while regular citizens cannot afford to buy food and the elderly have to live on \$69 a day.

Mr. Speaker, I can go on and show how Government has wasted \$1.3 billion of taxpayers' dollars in self-promotion, entertainment; and how this country has been taken for a ride by the hon. Prime Minister and his colleagues. Sadly, our ride was not on a private jet. This Government has spent a total of \$221 million in overseas travel since they came into office. Last year alone, they spent \$33.9 million. In the last year, I am advised, the hon. Prime Minister and his Government have made at least 10 trips on a private jet. That cost the taxpayers TT \$18,000 per hour. But you want to tax people's car, tax the gas, because they have to stay in the gridlock in the traffic. You are saying too many cars on the road, but jet-setting at \$18,000 per hour. Estimates for these trips will take you to \$4 million.

The Government speaks of prudent financial responsibility and I really have to ask the question, was it prudent financial responsibility when in February of

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this year the Prime Minister and his colleagues private jetted off to Jamaica, not for a meeting, not for a seminar, but for a dinner under the stars of the Mona Campus of the University of the West Indies at the expense of taxpayers? The Prime Minister did not go for a meeting, he was not there to conduct official government business, but was there to enjoy the champagne and the caviar and flew back home in the wee hours; not on a commercial airliner, but on a private jet. That excursion to Jamaica for that dinner and to come back cost this country TT \$200,000. That is my information and you gave the pensioners \$69. You gave them an increase of \$10 and you taxed the middle class on their cars and the gas. This money could have bought 42 beds for the nation's hospital; instead they chose to wine and dine, while our citizens are dying without beds on the floors of the hospital.

Last year, I talked about the wild expenditure of the Prime Minister and his Cabinet and you will recall that I awarded the Prime Minister his very own smart card. I think some people started calling it the "smart man card".

12.15 p.m.

This year I am certain that you would agree with me that these very frequent excursions on private jets qualify the hon. Prime Minister for yet another card. I want to give the hon. Prime Minister a frequent flyer card, and this is a premium member frequent flyer card. [*Mrs. Persad-Bissessar shows card*] [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*]

Dr. Moonilal: We have something for you.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: We will be very happy to give this to you.

Recently we saw the Prime Minister playing what we would call in local parlance "big shot", sending the private jet to pick up a Prime Minister to bring him here; sending it off to Grenada to bring the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister and his Government have clearly shown that they subscribe to the view: Keep them poor, keep them ignorant, keep them in fear.

They boast about the two international conferences next year: the Summit of the Americas and the Commonwealth Heads of Government. That is a very big item of expenditure, you know, and a case of great pride for the Prime Minister and his Government. Mr. Speaker, how much will this cost the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago? Again, you see why parliamentary democracy has developed by giving Parliament the power of the purse. Before the power of the purse, which is the power to spend, resided in the kings, but with the development of democracy the power of the purse came to the Parliament. It is only the Parliament that could

authorize expenditure. We have seen this Government finding ways and means, as I said before, to avoid that parliamentary scrutiny. Fortunately for some matters, they must come for parliamentary scrutiny; that is how once a year we could get these estimates, check them and see what is happening.

From the Draft Estimates of Expenditure, under the Office of the Prime Minister, we would see that there is an allocation of \$500 million for a secretariat for these two conferences. I would be very happy to know what the breakdown for a secretariat is; we do not know. Mr. Speaker, \$500 million for fiscal 2009. For fiscal 2008 I believe that it was \$11 million allocated and spent, and for fiscal 2007, several millions. So what is this about?

I am advised that the Government has again contracted the assistance of a Canadian, another Canadian, heart to heart again. This is a group to assist in the preparation of the Summit of the Americas. I asked the question, "How was this group contracted?" Was the contract advertised and tendered for or was this another heart to heart connection, a love thing? At what cost were they contracted?

Now we see the Government putting up hotels all over the place at great costs, as if they are playing with monopoly money; but it is not monopoly money, it is our money. What are we to do with all these hotels after these two conferences? Who wants to come here? The billions you are spending in creating hotel space, what would you do with these white elephants after? The Travel and Tourism Index has been established by the World Economic Forum. This tells us that on a scale of 1—130, one being the highest for tourism in the world, Trinidad and Tobago was ranked, do you know where? It was ranked 129th, second to last.

Hon. Members: Ooh!

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: As a matter of fact, the sustainability of the travel and tourism industry indicator ranks this country at a frightening 110 behind Guyana, who is 88, and Jamaica who is 60. We are similarly ranked with, would you believe, war torn Serbia, Moldova and Mongolia. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Moonilal: "Yuh put we with Mongolia?"

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Safety and security is a critical factor in determining competitors of the country's travel and tourism industry; once more no surprise. Safety and security—do you know where we are ranked? We are ranked 107 out of 130, so that means there are 23 countries after us; we are worse off than all these others before us, 106 countries. In every sub index under this Head, Trinidad and Tobago's ranking reveals a serious problem.

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In terms of the business cost of terrorism, we rank 113th in 2008, below Cambodia, below Mozambique. In terms of reliability of our police service, our rank was even worse, 122 out of 131. We are behind places like even Guyana. The overall rank for this pillar shows a deterioration; from 75 in 2007—we have gone down in 2008, do you know to where? We have gone down to 92. Why is this happening? Why is this happening? The other countries in the Caribbean are doing better than us. They have no oil; they have no gas; they have no natural resources, and I finally say, as usual, they have no PNM. That is the answer; the PNM.

I come, finally, to one of the major areas of concern in this country—crime. I talked a moment ago about the reliability of the police service, the cost of tourism, and so on, in these indices. Homicide officers are predicting that there will be a per capita rate of 38 per cent by the end of the year, and over 500 murders, if the current rate is not slowed. There were 23 murders in Port of Spain this year. In an editorial dated November 02, on the *Magnum*, the online newspaper of the PNM's official website stated:

"Crime is no longer reserved for the battlefields of the turf hungry drug lords...We haven't talked about rapes, child abuse and petty crimes including theft yet."

The *Guardian* reported that boys as young as 13 years were now heading some of the most notorious gangs in Laventille and Morvant; 13 years. I talked earlier about the mandatory school age being 12 years. Diffusing the 66-odd gangs requires changing the culture of funding these criminal empires through the so-called welfare programmes, crashing their criminal economies, using technologies and resources available to cut off the supply of guns and drugs, to arrest and prosecute the lynchpins in the criminal network.

Money is not the obstacle. Since they have been in office, the Government has spent \$14.7 billion on crime. Moneys are spent, and we still have no gunboats and armed helicopters; promise after promise in the budget. There is no close-circuit television/video surveillance in our urban centres. The \$100 million radar system keeps breaking down, curiously, in the areas where everyone knows where the guns and drugs are. They break down in those areas.

Mr. Speaker, \$82 million Mastrofski Transformation Team comprised 18 persons with doctorates in criminology, all these other disciplines, psychology, political science and so on. Mr. Speaker, \$82 million, what has become of that? The Minister of National Security said on the issue that his Ministry was not starved

for resources to implement any of his programmes, yet almost every call for help to every police station gets the response, "The police have no vehicle."

The unfulfilled promises, lack of performance, and general fear of the Minister of National Security contributed immensely to shattering public confidence in the police service. Some bad apples have also caused damage, but political manipulation of the office of the Commissioner finished the job. We see a public relations approach to crime fighting. Like his predecessor and the Minister, the Commissioner of Police now engages in public relations blitzes, attending crime scenes, touring stations, staging road blocks, whatever; a PR approach to crime fighting.

Two months into the job, the new Acting Commissioner has lost all credibility, thanks to the Government. The *Newsday* editorial summed it up as this:

"Mr. Philbert missed the chance to demonstrate that he was formed from a different mold from his predecessor. The rally held by the ruling PNM put the acting CoP in an invidious position.

But even admitting that instructing his officers to stop the rally might have been bad tactics, Commissioner Philbert could still have demonstrated zero tolerance by investigating the organisers of the rally."

It is now clear knowledge to everyone that was an illegal rally, not having obtained the permission of the police. Has anything happened? Who were the organizers? Nothing has happened; one law for them and one law for everybody else. They can break the law.

The deception in the budget presentation 2008—the hon. Prime Minister told us last year in the budget about a turnaround in crime. An election campaign was coming, so a turnaround in crime. That was gross deception as it was then, as it is now. Nothing in this country is safe. The looters we saw were actually going into food trucks. My hon. colleague from Princes Town North who has researched this matter on the crime situation will be provided all the details, and will present on crime on behalf of the Opposition. I just say, in passing, that this Government has failed on every limb, in every aspect, with respect to the fight against crime. [*Desk thumping*]

We come to the Judiciary, because when you talk about the administration of justice that is also very helpful in the fight against crime. We see that over the past seven years alarms have been raised over the failure of this administration to administer properly the criminal justice system. We have seen the overcrowding and the overburdening of the court system. We have heard Chief Justice, Ivor

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Archie, talk about the burnout, because of the current superhuman effort to eliminate the backlog of cases facing the courts.

I have raised this in the Parliament before. We have seen that the backlog of cases in the Magistrates' Courts, which is the backbone of the administration of justice, continues to climb. We have reached to 471,000 cases pending, with 43 magistrates only. We need to increase the number of magistrates. We see the same problem in the High Court with the Judiciary; we need to increase those numbers. Justice delayed is justice denied. How could you possibly have 471,000 cases being heard by 43 magistrates in one year? It is madness. There is no justice in this country in a system like that. What have we done?

Instead of taking the money to give to the Judiciary, it is not happening. Let us look at the financial disbursements to the Judiciary. The Judiciary asked in 2005/2006 for moneys, and the moneys allocated were far below what they asked for; ramshackle courts; not enough courts; not enough judges; not enough magistrates. We see the figures here.

When we come to page 55 of the 2005/2006 Judiciary Report:

"Funds allocated to the Judiciary during financial 2005/2006 represented 0.86 per cent of the total amount appropriated to 30 ministries and departments."

Mr. Speaker, 0.8 per cent, but we are spending money on pie in the sky, on jet rides, and on propaganda, \$1.3 billion. The Judiciary requested \$152 million in 2006/2007; not much in comparison to the megabucks that this Government is shelling out everywhere. Do you know what they got? They got \$38.7 million. They requested in 2007/2008, \$470 million, that was last year; the revised estimate, \$50 million.

Hon. Members: Ooh!

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: This is all coupled up with witness protection programmes. What happened when cases are adjourned and put off and put off? Witnesses disappear, they die, they go abroad, you cannot find witnesses, cases are thrown out; justice nowhere here in our country. The system is crumbling; we see the evidence; we see the new trend. We see witness executions. In the last 12 months, 20 murder accused have walked free, because they are executing witnesses with impunity, or because persons are too afraid to come to court to testify. They do not have the confidence that the system could protect them.

Even when they refuse to testify, they are still executed, as in the case of Gabriel Charles of Point Fortin. He sent his mother to court to tell the magistrate

that he feared he would be killed. Do you know what happened? Charles was killed as he sat under a mango tree next to his home the next day. Let me cite another case, Balraj Harripersad, a father of 10. He witnessed his brother's murder; he helped the police and two men were arrested. The star witness in the preliminary enquiry never got the chance to testify; he was executed next to his Hindu murti.

Justice Mark Mohammed, addressing the court system, had this to say after a murder trial collapsed following testimonies from two state witnesses:

"The incident reveals that the criminal justice system presently faces very serious challenges, more serious than at any other time in the country's history...The very fabric of our society is being eroded as a consequence. Viewed objectively, there can be no greater importance on the national agenda."

Witnesses are not the only part of the legal system under attack; now we are seeing justices of the peace being under attack. So far this year two have been killed, and if this trend continues, it is just a matter of time before judges, magistrates, lawyers and other officers of the court would be executed in order to terminate court proceedings.

The Government's solution, the DPP tells us, is a proposed introduction of the Evidence (Amdt.) Act to allow statements of witnesses to be used in court, if the witness refuses to testify. This goes against the enshrined right to face and cross-examine your accuser. That is a basic right of the individual, so that answer is not the answer.

12.30 p.m.

We are not living in Iran or China, but you must face your accuser if you are a witness, do not send a piece of paper. What is happening with that, as with everything else, is when the Government cannot handle a problem, it tries to take away liberties and freedoms, and of course, your taxpayers dollars as well. You cannot deal with the traffic; you cannot deal with the roads, tax the cars, and tax the gas.

So here it is witnesses are getting wiped out, they are afraid to come to court and how do we deal with that? Not by providing protection and security for them, we are going to deal with that by taking away their rights by compelling them to come to court because if they do not, they will be penalized. But then they come to court and they are killed.

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Mr. Speaker, we must put the legislation in place, and there are a number of pieces of legislation we have talked about ad nauseam that we call for immediate implementation; the Justice Protection Act, the DNA Act, the Proceeds of Crime legislation. The increase in the figure promised in this Parliament for compensation for victims of crime, introduction of a Bill to establish a Gun and Kidnapping Court, Criminal Injuries Compensation Act, helping the protective services to increase their level of compensation. So there are a host of things that we can do in the justice system to deal with the administration of justice.

I just want to make this final point because the Member for Princes Town and the Member for Oropouche who are both lawyers in this House will take up other issues in the justice system and deal with them in detail.

In terms of all the legislation we are seeing with respect to the justice system we must remember this is an imperative. The war against crime is not just providing the guns and the equipment for the police, that is not all that is needed. The war against crime has to have a strong justice system, in fact, the war against crime has to go on three fronts; first is the preventive, that is where you grow your human base. You deal with an educated society, you teach, you educate and give them enough money so that they can live in comfort.

Then you have the detection; that is where the police come in to actually go out and catch them. But after you catch them, you have to convict them, you have to find them guilty and send them to jail but you know the statistics. One in 1,000 murderers will actually end up convicted by a court in this country.

There is lack of witness protection programmes, lack of so many other structures, 471,000 cases being put off for 10 to 15 years, by that time witnesses migrate or they gone. Mr. Speaker, all these scandalous states of affairs we must remember that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. [*Desk thumping*] So we must deal with these issues.

I come now to another area of great concern on corruption I mentioned before about putting the special purpose company for CEPEP. Let us talk a little about this corruption. In this House somebody stood up and said the corruption index had fallen, if my memory serves me correctly. Mr. Speaker, it was a .2 per cent. What is more important is where it was under the UNC to where it is now and again on the Corruption Perception Index, Trinidad and Tobago is at its worst position since the PNM came into office as compared to the UNC.

In dealing with corruption, I am going to leave that because I know my colleagues, the Member for St. Augustine and the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla,

will lead on those issues. I just want to zero in on one thing which I find is very disturbing.

We have said before that there appears to be one law for the PNM and one law for the rest of the country and so we will remember just en passant that when the Mayor of Chaguanas was battered and the PNM Member of Parliament said he was just giving him a little tap on the hand even though he was found guilty. I want to come to the Integrity Commission today.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West was a Director of BWIA and he did not file the integrity documents in 2003. His name is featured most prominently on the legal notice which the law provides if you do not file.

Hon. Member: What is his name?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Neil Parsanlal. BWIA West Indies, declaration of income, assets and liabilities not filed for income year 2003. So his name is very prominently mentioned on that list, and I am sure he is taking steps to do what he can to comply.

There are some others here who did not comply; Mr. Gerard Ferreira, UDeCott again did not file their declarations but that is also published here as according to law along with a host of other names. Mr. Harry Ragoonanan, he is a contractor and a close friend of the PNM; Mr. Malcolm Jones from Petrotrin did not file; Mr. Ray Brathwaite, the person from Solid Waste did not file; Mr. George Hadeed who acted President of the Senate did not file; Mr. Hugh Eastman did not file. These are some of the names I have seen of people we know in public life and associated with the ruling party.

They did not file, and of course, there was no court case and nothing over the years. It is not that they made a mistake or anything, they did not file and no charges were brought against them. So there is one law for them and one for us.

The second point I want to make is that their names were published according to law in the *Gazette* and what is disturbing, is that there are two very important names missing from this list and I want to know why these names are not on this list as they should be according to law. If you have not filed, your name should appear and be published. So for 2003 this notice would have been published, and on August 31, 2008 it is now being published.

Mr. Speaker, I have a written answer to a question that was presented to this House on Friday, February 06, 2004 that required a list of all the Directors of state

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enterprises. I did not bring it today but it is in the *Hansard*. In going through this list I came upon two very prominent familiar names. These two persons were listed as Directors of the Tourism Industrial Development Company Limited.

On Tuesday I called the Registrar of Statements of registrable interests for the year 2003—2006 to be inspected and it was found that these two very prominent persons have never filed declarations and their names have never been published as happened to the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air. There was one treatment for him and another for his colleagues. I am saying that these two prominent persons never filed declarations with the Integrity Commission for the time that they served as Directors of Tidco as required by law. Their names were excluded from the published list. Why does it appear that the law does not apply to them, but for everybody else?

Mr. Speaker, those two Members are the Member for Laventille East/Morvant and what is worse is that the other offending lady is someone who is considered a trailblazer and a pioneer in this Parliament, a role model for other women and so that is why I do not understand. The hon. Minister of Finance, the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, who made history, did not file declarations with the Integrity Commission.

Mr. Speaker, that is part of the problem, but it is compounded by the fact that the names of these persons were not published by the Integrity Commission and why. It is selecting who to publish and which not to publish. Why? I am absolutely stunned that this Government who sits there and pontificates piously upon moral and spiritual values will come to talk about us on this side about integrity. I want to know why if you did not file, why was there no action taken against you in the course of the law and thereafter, why were the names not published. I think those questions need some answers.

Mr. Speaker, we have talked about all these issues, there are two other issues I wish to raise in the remaining time that I have and they have to do with infrastructure and business competitiveness. When we look at the many discussions of competitors, they remain focused on macroeconomic, political, legal and social circumstances and these are the things that underpin a successful economy, progress in areas that are necessary but not sufficient.

A sound and stable context improves the opportunity to create wealth, but that in itself does not create the wealth. So you have the opportunity, you have the framework, you have the environment, as it were, you have the fertile soil. It is then for you and your policies and programmes to create the wealth. Wealth is actually created by the productivity with which a nation can utilize human, capital

and natural resources to produce goods and services. Productivity ultimately depends on the microeconomic capability of the economy, the sophistication of companies, both local and subsidiaries, the quality of the national business environment and externalities arising from the presence of clusters of supporting industries.

Mr. Speaker, if we take the view that prosperity is determined by productivity in an economy, higher or increased productivity must be our goal; not just exports per se, and so, whether firms operate in the country as domestic or foreign owned that should be of importance. The productivity of local industries; the local utilities, the clothing, the health are matters for competitiveness because it influences the wages in a large part of the country and has a major influence in the cost of living and the cost of doing business in the country.

Mr. Speaker, today we are currently in the midst of a battle as a result of decreasing productivity whereby, although the Government boasts of full employment, or low unemployment, hundreds of millions of dollars are being channeled into unproductive jobs. You know we should give consideration—and the UNC was doing that in our last year in office.

If we want to have a cash transfer to those in need, do not use a pretence scheme of make-work programmes. Let us set out a proper Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) and let us make fresh transfers directly to those in need, similar to what is done in the developed countries. [*Desk thumping*] Some people call it the dole, some call it the unemployment benefit. Let us not pretend that these make-work programmes are really to help these people, because you create a dependency from which they can never rise out. But if you have a proper structured programme for unemployment benefits in this country, then you could train and help people because they will have to go to the labour exchange repeatedly until a job is found for them.

With the CEPEP, the URP and the YAPA and all the acronyms in the world—they could be well-intentioned but they are not reaching who they are supposed to reach, and so the cash transfers are going into the hands of criminals in some instances. The cash transfers are going into ghost gangs, we saw this happening with the smart cards where people have three and four cards in one house. The cash transfers are not working and the hon. Prime Minister told us there is too much corruption to subsidize. So if you want to have help for the needy, set up a proper unemployment dole benefit system in this country and stop pretending that painting stones on the side of the roads and dragging people from all over the country to go to Woodford Square. Do not fool people. So I am saying, there are millions of dollars going into that kind of unproductive activity.

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We have warnings from international institutions; we have pronouncements by the Governor of the Central Bank because the Government has a strong role in setting right rules and incentives in overseeing public investments to grow a productive economy. We need to learn to create capabilities necessary for continuous development and growth of a competitive economy, and it falls to the Government.

The Minister spoke about the facilitative role of the Government. How do you do that? You create, establish, sustain and maintain an environment for competitive growth and development and that is what the business competitive index is all about.

Once again, we are failing on every part of this business competitive index. We can see our country becoming increasingly uncompetitive under this regime. From pride of place of 35 in 2001 rank under the UNC, this country has consistently been slipping in ranking; from 35, we have now reached to 74.

12.45 p.m.

Jamaica which started off being worse-ranked than Trinidad—they were worse than us; they were 43 when we were 35, do you know where they are now? They have come to 35, what we were then in 2001. All the high criminal activity they have, and they are still doing better. Do you know why? Because they have no PNM! [*Desk thumping*]

There are several other sub-indices that are relevant which are significant. There is one sub-index of this Business Competitiveness Index called the Quality of the National Business Environment. The WEF has been tracking; results again show decline. It means that conditions for doing business are worsening in this country; it is a deterrent for business development on this sub-index. From 39 in 2001 we have collapsed to 75 out of 131 now.

Do you know what the WEF survey revealed? Among the most problematic factors for doing business are crime and theft. And if you pick up the Review of the Economy and the Social Sector Investment Programme documents that were laid in this House here, the Government knows of this; the Government acknowledges it because they printed it in those documents.

Despite the positive economic growth, when we look at the value of GDP, the WEF points to a more immediate problem; that Government has failed to ensure that the benefits of the oil boom and gas are appropriately invested. The result is that these indices show the economy is falling in global competitiveness; we are falling when it comes to the murder rate, and so on; we are falling in terms of best

places to live and our business environment is not geared for improving in future competitiveness.

What this means is Trinidad and Tobago is even more exposed to the disastrous effects which a price shock can prompt, as it has done on two occasions in the past. You know, we had price shocks in oil and price shocks in sugar and we will get back to price shocks in oil.

These are the issues in terms of doing business in this country that has also worsened. How then are you going to grow the rest of the economy and remove that dependence we have on energy? It is the only way for sustainable development, to grow the other sectors. The non-energy sector—I have already talked about the failure in agriculture. That is one plan. I am speaking now about the failure in manufacturing, in the businesses; that is not growing, because the business environment keeps deteriorating.

Another sector we could grow is the tourism sector, but given the world fallout we are going to see that market is going to slow down; there will be a slow-down in tourism. Therefore, we must spend the time in agriculture in this country, services and manufacturing. That is the way that we can diversify this economy.

I will spend a few words on housing because this is where I have a real—I am really troubled by Government's housing policy. They see it as one of great pride. I remain very concerned about the overall cost of these units. The Government has gone into massive projects for these and this has pushed the cost of houses very high.

I have learnt that the HDC has constructed homes which require a household income of an estimated \$30,000 per month. What is the Government's policy for housing? On their website, I quote:

“The HDC is responsible for the provision of affordable shelter and associated community facilities for low and middle income persons.”

Are you telling me \$30,000 a month is low and middle income? The middle class—their earnings—you have battered them and you have battered the middle class! This is not the middle class at \$30,000 a month, so do not let anyone tell you otherwise. You are battering the middle class; \$30,000 a month is for those on the other side. You are \$50,000 a month, so you could have this income of \$860,000 and take \$30,000 to put into this house.

Is an \$860,000 apartment low or middle income? It is not about whom it is for; it is the policy of the Government, as stated in the HDC's website, to provide affordable shelter for low and middle income persons. Are we building \$860,000

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apartments in keeping with the mandate for low and middle income persons? We are not! Again, I come to the point, you say one thing, but you do another. The credibility gap is great! You talk the talk; you do not walk the walk! [*Desk thumping*]

This is official Government housing policy—again, I took it off the website:

“Showing Trinidad and Tobago a new way home; a policy for shelter; a strategy for equity; a commitment for employment and a vision of caring.”

That is the housing policy, but your actions do not implement that policy. The PADCO Associates study which formed the basis of the policy in assessing the housing needs of nations over the period 1995 to 2005, do you know what they found? That the effective demand for housing was 42 per cent from households characterized as low income households and 40 per cent from middle income.

So the low and middle income account for 42 and 40—82 per cent of the demand for housing. But you are building houses for \$850,000-plus, with an income of \$30,000. Your study told you this is the range to build for because that is the greatest demand but you are building at this high end range.

It is important to note that the monthly household income range at the mid-point of the 10-year period—that is 2000—low income is, do you know what? And I am quoting from the policy. Do you know what they class as low income? \$3,632 per month is low income! And you are buying a house for \$860,000 with an income of \$30,000? What this speaks of, below middle income is classified as \$3,633—\$8,843. That is what low and middle is. Do you know what they are calling high income in that study? An income of \$8,844 and over.

So what is this about? In their housing programme, the policy makes specific mention of the need for construction of homes for the low and middle income. The Government’s housing policy will continue, the Minister said, to focus on the provision of low income housing to persons unable to access houses from the private sector.

Does the Minister not know that the private sector does not provide low income housing? Where in the private sector are you getting low income housing? You have accelerated construction in this country until every piece of material you have to buy, first of all, you may not get it when you want it and when you do get it, the price is so exorbitant for building materials and construction. So where are you going to get from the private sector, low income housing? Please tell us. Where on earth? And the Minister tells us the housing policy is to focus on providing low income houses to persons. The official Government policy on

housing makes absolutely no mention of construction for housing of the wealthy, yet we are providing \$860,000 homes. That was left for the private sector.

We mentioned before the minimum wage is still \$9. We have talked about the \$1,950 to the pensioners and there are others in that sector, the government retirees, with the \$1,950 and so on. Where are they going to get money to buy these houses? The cold fact is, Government is not building for this low income group, which constituted the largest demand in the study that they did, who are the most vulnerable.

These are the ones most in need of food, clothing and shelter and it is the Government's duty to care for the dispossessed; it is the Government's duty to mandate to ensure the poor and the powerless are protected and sheltered. But do you know what has happened? We have said it before in this House. The Government has taken its majority—*[Interruption]* Yes, I am watching the time. Mr. Speaker, I notice a lot of people are very concerned to help me with my time but I know that you are keeping tabs on that time, but I thank them all very much. I am saying that we are fully within the time and I will not waste one minute of it.

It is clear the Government's housing policy, as I said, they are talking the talk but they are not walking the walk. But do you know which is the most frightening of all of those when it comes to housing? I quote from the Executive Summary on page 3 under the heading: "Squatters will be Regularized". It comes off the website too.

"A grant of up to \$25,000 will be provided for the purchase of building materials to help squatters under the aided self-help programme."

Listen carefully, Mr. Speaker. A grant of \$25,000 will be provided to help squatters. That is their policy; to give them money for the purchase of materials; to help squatters. But do you know what the Government's action is with regard to squatters? Bulldoze! Break down! Mash up! But you want to give them a grant of \$25,000? Do you know what is going to happen there? They are going to select who they are giving these grants to and they will select which homes they are going to break down. That is what that is about.

[Member holds up photograph]

Look at the Government's real housing policy. This is so sad. Look at this man; look at him! House demolished! Bulldozer! Police! Look at this child! Through you, I say, Mr. Prime Minister, have mercy—mercy, Mr. Manning. Have mercy. Look at these. You say you want to build 100,000 homes but you cannot

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do it yet, so since you cannot do it yet, Mr. Prime Minister, in the meantime leave the people in their galvanized shacks! [*Desk thumping*] Leave them there! What do you want all that land for? You already have your rose garden up at St. Ann's! Why do you want more land?

I want to remind the hon. Prime Minister of the words:

“The quality of mercy is not strained;

It droppeth as a gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath;

It is twice blest;

It blessed him that gives and it blessed him that takes.” [*Desk thumping*]

Today I ask the Government to have mercy on these squatters and on the poor.

When we come to the health sector, my colleagues again from both Caroni Central and Caroni East will certainly give you more with respect to that. But you know, since the Gladys Gafoor Report—the commission of enquiry—nothing has changed. The Minister announced a 100-day plan; nothing has changed. So when we come to the health sector, that is also a failing sector in this country. When it came to the dengue, the same thing; deny; mamaguy. That is the Government's policy in the face of a crisis: deny, deny, deny.

But everyone is living here. Today I have quoted some of the empirical data; the hard facts; the black and white with respect to the indicators, and the conventional wisdom in the minds and the hearts and the knowledge of the people of this land is that this Government has failed miserably. [*Desk thumping*]

On issues of infrastructure, there are massive mega projects which will never be completed. Flooding—putting the cart before the horse. The Mamoral Dam, we have spoken about; the water taxi; the toll highways. All that is happening with these mega projects could be described in the words of a book that is being put out, which is about confessions of economic hit men: “*The Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*”.

What is an economic hit man? This book describes economic hit men, as people who work for large corporations; they target countries aspiring towards development and developed status; they use statistics, economics and indices as weapons; they use specially designed economic surveys; they manipulate data to induce governments to spend billions of dollars in mega projects. We have a lot of those right here: the port; the desalination plant; the rapid rail; the PowerGen plants; all these mega, mega projects. These economic hit men they befriend you;

they fool you; they coerce you; corrupt government officials, they get them to feed out of their hands. Then the Government gives away land; the Government gives away tax holidays; it gives away preferential prices on fuel. That is why up to today we cannot find out what—the top secret in this land—is the price of our gas. We cannot find out how much you are giving away our gas for!

When a government is taken over by economic hit men, it forgets its mandate of providing and maintaining the basic infrastructure: flooding; traffic gridlock; power outages, all of these in the face of the mega projects. So when you look at this Government's stubborn obsession with mega projects, it is clear that Government is being run by economic hit men. [*Desk thumping*] And some of them are very close to your heart. It is a heart to heart relationship.

On these infrastructural matters, my colleague from Fyzabad who is our shadow Minister of Works and Transport will develop these ideas. [*Desk thumping*]

Before I close, my colleague from Cumuto/Manzanilla, our shadow Minister of Housing, will elaborate on his ideas; Community Development from the Member of Parliament for Naparima and our goodly Member for Ortoire/Mayaro will demolish you when it comes to culture.

1.00p.m.

The theme of this fiscal package has nothing to do with shaping our future. I have shown that the more appropriate theme is: PNM Hoax 2009 or A Blind Man's Bluff. [*Desk thumping*] The population wants to know why, with the money to hire the best economists, with the evidence of mismanagement and the offer of solutions from every sector, this Government continues to get it wrong.

There is a popular saying that 1,000 Frenchmen cannot be wrong. It is not the Opposition saying that they are wrong; not us alone; it is every business group, civil society, NGO, labour movement, individual citizen and top foreign body like the IMF. Everyone is saying it is wrong. When it comes to policies, it must be because you are blind; it must be because you are corrupt or believe that people are too stupid to realize it. So we see the hoax that was perpetrated in terms of the fiscal package where year after year they merely reflect foresight and fiscal planning.

When we look at what is happening here in Trinidad and Tobago, it is very clear in the words of Butler:

“A blind man knows he cannot see, and is glad to be led, though it be by a dog; but he that is blind in his understanding, which is the worst blindness of all, believes he sees as the best, and he scorns a guide.”

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Through you, Mr. Speaker, I say to the Government: Let the people be your guide. St. Augustine puts it this way:

“Do you wish to rise? Begin by descending.

You plan a power that will pierce the clouds? Lay first the foundation of humility.”

Do you not feel the people's pain? The *Bible* warns us against arrogance and contempt. Many say the Government has lost its soul and implore that you remember the words from the book of Matthew.

“For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his soul?”

I urge you, hon. Prime Minister, to heed the text from the Book of James:

“Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Amend your ways and your doings.”

The people are suffering and are fed up and their tolerance is waning. You will wake up one day and find that the people will rise up against injustice and evil and you will find that you promised us a land of milk, honey and manna from heaven, but in fact all you have given us is Prime Minister Manning's hell. [*Desk thumping*]

We have not got the heaven and the manna you promised, instead all we have got is that from hell. People will rise up and when they do they will laugh you to scorn. When they rise up, they will restore democracy. Let us not wait for that day.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, I ask the hon. Prime Minister and the Government to lift the hammer of social justice. Nail up the criminals; nail up the bandits; nail up the terrorists; nail up the Treasury raiders; nail up the perpetrators and economic hit men who prey on our Treasury.

When you fail, the day will come when the people, together with them will take the hammer and nail you up. [*Desk thumping*] Until you nail up the unjust and the bandits, know that we on this side will be on your case. We will be the voice of the voiceless and the eyes of the sightless. We will continue to insist that you uphold the ideals of economic justice, of civil rights, of humanity and a decent life for all our citizens who will expose locally and internationally the fact that the wealthiest nation in the Caribbean, a country at the height of its economic wealth, still under this regime, finds it hard to keep its promise and faith with its weakest citizens and continues to find it difficult to see beyond the veil of corruption.

We will continue to show the way you conduct the affairs of government during difficult times as social, economic and cultural changes are moving towards destroying the ideals and the values we hold so dear in the society. We will continue to point out that the fulfilment of your promise to the people always seems to be just within grasp, but remains forever out of reach.

We will continue in this House and outside to ask the right questions and to force you to give honest answers to this nation because a budget is not about a personal agenda; it should reflect the people's desire for a better country because the Government is always the servant of the people.

We will not sleep until we see the people's money spent for their benefit. In this House you boast repeatedly that the people voted for you to be on that side. Today I say that you must vote in favour of the people, not against them. [*Desk thumping*] We pledge to continue our fight on behalf of the people. You know that you are in our prayers so that you may see the light. For the sake of the people, we hope that our prayers are answered. We hope that when you pray you recall the words from the book of Matthew which says:

“And Jesus answered and said unto him: 'What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?' The blind man said unto him; 'Lord, that I might receive my sight.'”

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting of this House is suspended for lunch and we will return at 2.06 p.m.

1.06 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

2.06 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is somewhat difficult to respond to that rambling diatribe to which we were just treated; a surfeit of rhetoric, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.

What bothered me the most about the very weak contribution from the Member for Siparia, who I note is occupying the seat of the Member for Couva North, is that for yet another time the Member for Siparia has demonstrated her inability to do her own research and has relied on a speech written by someone else, replete with factual errors and foolish statements.

At one point I had to stop writing because of the nonsensical nature of what I was hearing.

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I think I had better dispense, at the outset, with some of the absurd statements made by the Member for Siparia. Before I get into that, I notice that the seating order has changed in this Parliament. I see the Member for Oropouche sitting in the seat of the Member for Chaguanas West and the Member for St. Augustine is sitting in the seat of the Member for Couva South.

Hon. Member: That is not your business.

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, while they may wish to make light of it, the fact that the Members opposite had to move up to create an illusion of unity is testimony to the deep division within the UNC. Where is the Opposition Chief Whip? Where is the Member for Chaguanas West?

Mr. S. Panday: His wife is ill and he is in London.

Hon. C. Imbert: Oh, sit down!

Mr. S. Panday: [*Stands*] Mr. Speaker, I wish to answer.

Mr. Speaker: You know better. If the Member is not giving way—

Mr. S. Panday: He is asking a question.

Mr. Speaker: But he is not giving way.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They are jumpy on the other side. So the Member for Tabaquite has decided to absent himself from the puerile contribution of the Member for Siparia, as has the Member for Chaguanas West.

2.10 p.m.

[*Interruption*] Yes, wise men. On a previous occasion, the Member for Tabaquite spoke about a theory he had, which was that the Government on this side would dissolve within six months. Well, it is obvious to me that the dissolution is taking place among Members opposite; the minority Opposition. Why do you not sit in your proper seats? Do you not want people to know that key Members of the UNC have boycotted this debate? Are you going to tell me that something as important as a budget response, the Members for Tabaquite, Chaguanas West and Couva South could not find themselves here? I think not. It is a clear indication of the fracturing and deep divisions on the other side.

Having said that, let me go to some of the more inane comments made by the Member for Siparia. As I have said, she was demonstrating once again her ability to read a speech written by somebody else, not understanding anything written therein, not even being capable of doing basic Arithmetic. One of the most foolish

statements made by the hon. Member opposite was her statement that the total public debt had tripled over the last 6½ years that this PNM administration has been in office. In fact, she indicated that the public debt had increased by 380 per cent. I was so astonished by that bogus statistic. I took careful note to write it down, 380 per cent and a tripling of the public debt. It is clear set-up. It is either that or the person who wrote the speech is an idiot, one of the two. It is either the speech writer set up the Member for Siparia or she is an idiot.

I am going to use documents produced by the UNC, so that they cannot say that we are using our own statistics. I have in my possession the *Review of the Economy 2001*, which was a budget document laid in this Parliament by the UNC government. When we go to appendix 16 in that document, we see that the total public debt in September 2001 was \$31 billion. Let me repeat, the total public debt in September 2001, using the UNC's document, was \$31 billion. No doubt that was an understatement, because they were famous for fiddling the figures. Using their own documents, I have demonstrated that the total public debt, when they demitted office, was in the vicinity of some \$31 billion.

Now, let us go to the document before us, the *Review of the Economy 2008*, which shows that the gross public sector debt in September 2008 is \$42 billion. She got the PNM's figure right, but she did not get the UNC's figure right. To use her own language, any child in primary school will know that if you increase from 31 to 42, that is approximately a 30 per cent increase; not a 380 per cent increase. It is not a tripling of the public debt in six years; it is merely a 30 per cent increase over the last six years. The speech writer got the figures wrong by 1,000 per cent or somewhere around there; maybe even more. It is more than 10 times. She quoted figures more than 10 times of what the reality is. She should go back to school.

The Member spoke about issues with education. The Member for Siparia should go back to school. I know the Member for St. Augustine is quietly chuckling at all of this, because when the Member for Siparia quoted that posterous statistic, I noticed he winked at me. He knew it was totally absurd.

Now let us deal with some other salient facts. He is laughing now. He knows that they are. [*Interruption*] Touché. Let us now look at the figures that matter; not the rambling discourse of the Member for Siparia, a stranger to economics. The percentage of GDP, in terms of debt to GDP in 2002, as we inherited the Government, was 50 per cent. What this meant is that the debt was half of the national gross domestic product and the debt to GDP ratio in percentage, in 2008, is 28 per cent. Under the UNC administration, the brilliant UNC administration, the

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ratio of debt to GDP was 50 per cent. Under the PNM, it is 28 per cent. That is why I found it difficult to follow the calculated logic of the Member for Siparia, totally at sea with economic statistics.

The other thing that I found completely absurd was this mantra about increasing interest rates and difficulties that middle class people would allegedly find because of the fiscal and monetary policies of this administration. If we go to the *Review of the Economy 2008*, which is a reader-friendly document—you do not have to have a PhD to understand these figures—and we go to Appendix 17, we see that the loan rates for real estate and mortgage in 2001, under the UNC, was 16 per cent. There is a steady decrease under the PNM, down to 11.75 per cent in 2007. If the mortgage interest rate was 16 per cent under the UNC, and it is now 11 per cent under the PNM, which party has created the environment for people to invest in housing and mortgages? Obviously, it is the PNM. I have to listen to this “dotishness”? [Interruption] I did not say that you were “dotish”. Mr. Speaker, I am not saying that the Member is “dotish”. I am saying that the speech was “dotish” and it was full of “dotishness”. [Interruption] I cannot help it. When I listen to that “dotishness”—I made a promise I would not find more than 10 “dotish” remarks in that speech, but I had to stop writing.

One of the things that bothered me as well was the foolishness that certain uninformed or mischievous commentators in Trinidad and Tobago parroting about the price of oil that is used for the budget forecast. I heard the hon. Member say that the budget price of US \$70 is too high that we should use a budget estimate of US \$68, as if US \$2 would make a difference. This is the nonsense that is being put in the public domain by mischievous persons who should know better. If you want to know what the medium, long-term or short-term outlook for crude oil prices is, you do not go to a quack at a discredited place up in the East, your mentor. You do not go to that quack. If you want to know what the price of oil would be, you consult with the Energy Information Administration. It is a world-renowned energy forecasting institution.

I have in my possession an article dated August 12, 2008. I read from it:

“In its August short-term energy outlook 2008, the Energy Information Administration (EIA)”—which is the world authority on oil prices—“said that it expects crude prices to average US \$124 a barrel in 2009.”

I do not have to listen to any “dotishness” coming from the other side. I go to the established authorities and I check what they have to say. The EIA has indicated

that the prospect for oil prices in 2009 is an average of US \$124. The Energy Information Administration has a habit of being extremely conservative. In fact they had predicted in 2008 that oil prices would peak at US \$100, when in fact oil prices peaked in excess of US \$140. The EIA is telling us that oil prices are going to average US \$124 per barrel in 2009 and we have forecasted our budget at US \$70; prudence, humility and gentleness. I could not find three better words to describe our Minister of Finance. Let me take this opportunity, it was remiss of me to not say it before, to congratulate the Minister of Finance for her brilliant budget presentation. Mr. Speaker, I do not have to listen to those obscurantists who clearly wrote that speech for the Member for Siparia, obscurantists/fools I would have to call them.

The other thing that I found surprising is—I was checking this only last night. I was looking at infant mortality rates in Trinidad and Tobago. It was just by coincidence. I do not know why. I was looking at indicators. I saw last night that there has been a consistent decline in infant mortality rates over the last seven years. I have in my possession, the statistics from the United Nations Population Division and also from the CIA World Fact Book. Contrary to the “dotishness” in the speech of the erstwhile, quasi opposition, pseudo leader, the CIA has the infant mortality rate in Trinidad and Tobago for 2008 estimated at 23.59 and the United Nations Population Division has the infant mortality rate for Trinidad and Tobago at—[*Interruption*] I have to give way to my Prime Minister—12.4 per cent in 2005. This is based on the 2006 survey.

Once again, the Member for Siparia has been fed foolishness by obscurantists. They are setting her up. They want to make her look foolish. Whoever put in that speech that the public debt has tripled when it has merely gone up by 30 per cent, clearly wanted to make a fool of the Member for Siparia. Whoever put in that speech that the infant mortality rate of Trinidad and Tobago is 38 at this point in time clearly wanted to make a fool of the Member for Siparia. Clearly, they wanted to demonstrate that the hon. Member is not familiar with economic indicators and data and is merely a parrot. That is all the Member for Siparia is, a trained parrot. She comes in here and just reads whatever foolishness they give her to read. I am disappointed. [*Mr. Ramnath enters Chamber*]

“Ay, ay, ay”, the absent Member for Couva South shows up after the contribution by the Member for Siparia. Oh dear, and now has to displace the Member for St. Augustine. Oh, dear me.

2.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, one of the comments made by the Member for Siparia that I found quite hilarious was "show me the leader and you will know you men".

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Where is your leader? [*Desk thumping*] In the courthouse! Who is your leader? Somebody told me that he has more cases than Solo. [*Laughter*] I cannot believe that the Member for Siparia could utter those words. Where is your leader? There is a story in the newspaper where they asked the absent Member for Couva North, Do you intend to listen to the response from the Member for Siparia? And the Member said no. He said that he would be in his office attending to his own business. This is in the newspaper. Even the Leader of the Opposition has no time to listen to the Member for Siparia. That is so silly.

Again, somebody put into the Member for Siparia's speech that there was nothing in the budget for women, but what did the UNC do for women? Member for Siparia, you know what I am saying is true. You will never be the Leader of the Opposition, because it is a practice of the UNC to use women conveniently. The Member knows what I am talking about. How many women are there on your side? There are two female Members of Parliament within the UNC.

Hon. Member: Two and a half. [*Laughter*]

Hon. C. Imbert: Who is the half? [*Interruption*] The fact of the matter is that there are two natural female Members on the Opposition Benches, whereas on our side we have nine. [*Desk thumping*] We do not pay lip service to the concept of women power. It is easy to spout empty rhetoric about women's issues and gender issues and so forth, but by their deeds you shall know them. It is testimony to the PNM's commitment to gender equality and women power that we have nine brilliant and beautiful women in the House of Representatives. [*Desk thumping*] Look at their portfolios. There are eight women in the Cabinet and two women of state. There are 10 female Ministers in this PNM Government.

Let us look at their portfolios: Minister of Finance, Minister of Foreign Affairs; Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, Minister of Education; the Attorney General; Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education; Minister of Local Government and Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment. This is not a Mickey Mouse approach to gender equality and women's issues. This is not lip service as the UNC likes to give. We lead by example. [*Desk thumping*] I dare say that the PNM Government of 2008 is one of the most progressive governments in the world when it comes to gender equality. [*Desk thumping*] I am not going to bother with the rhetoric of the Member for Siparia. As I said, the Member for Siparia knows that she will always be a second-class citizen within the UNC. The Member knows that. The Member will never be Leader of the Opposition. She would always be the bridesmaid, but never the bride. [*Interruption*]

Now, what was the opening statement from the Member for Siparia? She said that the budget is for the rich and not for the poor. “Dotishness”! I promise that I would not say “dotishness” more than 10 times, but I have about 50 pages here and every page has “dotishness” on it uttered by the Member for Siparia.

Mr. Speaker, let us go now to the fiscal measures: a free ferry pass for senior citizens; an increase in the public assistance grant; an increase in the senior citizens grant; an increase in pension for retired public servants; an increase in the allowance for pension contributions; an increase in the provisions for tertiary education; and an abolition of stamp duty on properties costing less than \$850,000. Mr. Speaker, there is almost a 20 per cent increase in the senior citizens grant; an increase in the disability grant in excess of 20 per cent; more pension for public servants and so on. Those were our budget measures. So, increasing old age pension by almost 20 per cent, is that for the rich? Increasing the disability grant from \$600 to \$800 and \$1,200 to \$1,400, is that for the rich? Nonsense! Increasing the pension of retired public servants—are retired public servants rich? We are eliminating the stamp duty on properties below \$850,000, is that for the rich? That is “dotishness” when I listen to the theme of the Member for Siparia that this is a budget for the rich and not the poor.

So, all those low-income people that would benefit from all these caring measures by this caring administration would wonder what cloud the Member for Siparia is on. She is on cloud “cuckoo” land.

This is another piece of nonsense uttered by the Member for Siparia. [*Interruption*] She said that the activities and operations of the state enterprise sector and spending by state enterprises never come to Parliament like the contingent liabilities and so on. Those are nice, fine sounding words, but those are empty foolish words. On Monday, September 22, 2008 a document was laid in this Parliament, and this was not the first time that it had been laid and it was the Supplementary Public Sector Investment Programme 2009. For the illiterate among us, the Supplementary Public Sector Investment Programme deals with the capital programme of every single state enterprise. It is all here. Every single capital programme of every single state enterprise is here within the Supplementary Public Sector Investment Programme.

There is a level of illiteracy on the other side that pains me. I used to think that only the Member for Caroni East was challenged in terms of comprehension and so on, but it is clear that the speech writer and the presenter of the speech are also challenged in terms of comprehension.

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This document has over 100 pages of information on the 2008 projects from Petrotrin, National Quarries and NIDCO and so forth. Everything is in there and I have to hear this foolishness from the Member for Siparia. Who wrote that nonsensical speech for you? You better get yourself away from that quack who keeps setting you up year after year.

I also have to sit and listen to comparisons between Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados. Has the Member ever gone to Barbados? I know it is alleged that the Member for Siparia did some studies at some point in time, but I do not know if these studies were ever in the island of Barbados. *[Interruption]* Clearly, the Member has forgotten.

Mr. Speaker, not only is the per capita GDP of Trinidad and Tobago now higher than Barbados, but the purchasing power parity of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago is way in excess of Barbados. For the illiterate on the other side, I think perhaps the Member for St. Augustine might be the only one who would understand what purchasing power parity means. He may be financially literate. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, when you examine countries, you have to look at the purchasing power of the income of the citizens of that particular country. Our purchasing power parity is so far ahead of Barbados that it is not funny. That is why Bajans are coming here in their hundreds and thousands to shop! *[Desk thumping]* There are plane loads of Bajans coming out of Barbados into Trinidad and going to our shopping malls and our stores to buy Trinidad and Tobago's goods, because the cost of living in Trinidad and Tobago is so much lower than Barbados it is not funny. Our national income is higher and our cost of living is lower. It is absurd in the extreme for the Member for Siparia to compare the situation of a citizen from Trinidad and Tobago to the situation of a citizen in Barbados. We are way ahead of them. It is disingenuous, dishonest and it is downright foolishness. That is why I am asking: Who wrote that “dotish” speech? Why did they not give the Member for Siparia the correct information? Why did they not give the Member truisms and truths to come and tell us about in this House? Why did they set up the Member for Siparia like that?

I heard this lament from the Member for Siparia that the people of this country are unhappy with the PNM Government. Well, Members opposite had their chance between 1995—2001, and they blew it and because they blew their chance to govern this country, they shall be condemned to reside on the Opposition Benches for the rest of your natural political life. *[Desk thumping]* You are doomed to inhabit those benches until the year 3030. *[Interruption]* You helped the Member for Siparia write that “dotishness”. That is obvious to me. *[Interruption]* You do

not want me to debunk the “dotishness” uttered by the Member for Siparia, but that is what I intend to do. So you can bleat and cry all you want, licks are sharing today. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: The population is watching.

Hon. C. Imbert: I know. That is the whole point. You see, during the Member for Siparia’s contribution, you could have heard the contradictions in her speech. The Member indicated to this honourable House that the solution to Trinidad and Tobago's economy is to stop spending money, cut wages and increase interest rates and I noticed eyebrows—again, the Member for St. Augustine knew that this was “dotishness”—raised when the Member for Siparia gave us a dissertation on how to deal with the Trinidad and Tobago economy, and she said the way to deal with it is to increase the Central Bank’s reserve requirement, raise interest rates, cut wages and make it harder for businesses to access money—stifle businesses and cut jobs. That is the end result of the proposals of the hon. Member for Siparia.

2.40 p.m.

The Member went on to utter another piece of "dotishness", that we are not saving enough money in our Heritage and Stabilisation Fund; that if they were in power, by 2008, the balance in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund would be close to US \$40 billion. I had to write it down twice, you know: US \$40 billion, that is what the Member for Siparia said; that if they were in power the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund would reach a balance of US \$40 billion, which is between 2001 and 2008. The entire combined revenue of Trinidad and Tobago over that period is less than US \$40 billion.

So, if the total revenue is equal to or less than US \$40 billion in the period that the Member for Siparia was speaking about, how can you save US \$40 billion? You would have to close down the public service; send everybody home; increase taxes to 100 per cent of income and things like that. It is incredible that somebody who, at least, has some level of education could utter these nonsensical statements in this Parliament. I would fire your speechwriter!

Mr. Manning: All of them.

Hon. C. Imbert: Fire all of them! Fire your speechwriters! How on earth could you save US \$40 billion of our total revenue of US \$40 billion?

Mr. Manning: “I feel Moonilal who write that.”

Hon. C. Imbert: “Yes, Moonilal write that.” [*Interruption*] No, US, I took notes. There are so many things here and for the record let me just repeat what the

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Minister of Finance indicated earlier, our gross external public debt—because the Member for Siparia is a stranger to economics, there is difference between the gross public sector debt, the gross domestic public sector debt and the gross external public sector debt—now stands at a figure of TT \$10.8 billion. That is our gross external debt. Our reserves in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund now stands in excess of TT \$15 billion. [*Desk thumping*]

Therefore, we can pay off our gross external public sector debt with the savings in our Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and have change left over; simple mathematics. If the hon. Member opposite cannot understand that 11 is less than 15, so if our external debt is \$11 billion and our reserves in our Heritage and Stabilisation Fund is \$15 billion, then any sensible child in primary school will know that we could pay off our total external debt with our Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. It really bothers me when I go through my notes in terms of what the hon. Member said.

The hon. Member condemned the Government for blaming food importers and blaming middlemen for the price of food in Trinidad and Tobago. She called the Government wicked, to have the audacity to say it is the food importers and the middlemen who are marking up food prices and causing food price inflation in Trinidad and Tobago. She said we are wicked, and I took notes. This is what the hon. Member said:

"That food prices are not caused by importers and middlemen; that importers are selling food at the lowest possible prices."

Even as the hon. Member uttered that statement, she did not understand what she was saying. If it is true that importers are selling food at the lowest possible prices; if it is true that they are not engaging in profiteering; if it is true that they are not putting high mark-ups on food, then all of our food price inflation is imported. Commonsense, if the importers are importing the food at the lowest possible prices and food prices are rising then the food price inflation is external. It turns her argument on its head because we have made it very clear on this side that because of global trends, because of demands from emerging economies such as China, India, Asia and so on, which are growing at a much faster rate than the economies of the developed world, the growth in the world economy is now taking place in areas to the east of Europe and because of the growth in the economy in China, India and the Asian countries, you have an increased demand for better food, for consumer items and so on, which is driving inflation, which is driving commodity prices and which results itself in higher imported food prices and is the direct consequence and direct result of food price inflation in Trinidad and Tobago. That

is all it is. The price of food has increased on the world market. Any one of them who is even mildly literate can go on the Internet and check and he or she will see what has happened to commodity prices all over the world. You see when you do not know what you are doing and you do not know that you do not know, is a terrible thing. *[Interruption]* Yes, what you call it? Three story ignorance.

Mr. Speaker, as I go through what the hon. Member said, that people do not read the fine print on mortgages, well I guess they did not read the fine print under the UNC, when the mortgage rate was 17 per cent. It is 11 per cent now. Under the UNC, the income tax rate was 33 per cent. Under the UNC, the personal income tax and corporation rate were in excess of 30 per cent. Under the PNM, the income tax rate is 25 per cent. *[Desk thumping]* The personal deduction is 60,000. There has been a revolution in taxation in this country. It has caused more disposable income to go into the pockets of all of our citizens.

Anybody who earns under \$5,000 or less a month no longer has to pay income tax because of this caring PNM administration. The rate above that is 25 per cent and you want to tell me that this Government is not governing for the middle class; is not governing for the lower income groups; is not governing for all the citizens of this country. Under the UNC, we used to eat grass in this country, but because of progressive tax reform by this administration, now we have one of the lowest income tax rates in the world. *[Desk thumping]* That brings me to a point about the Hyatt Hotel.

I heard the Member bleating about the Hyatt Hotel, complaining and condemning the Hyatt Hotel. Anybody who is in business in this country—and that is why that speech was written by a quack; whoever wrote that has no business sense whatsoever—knows that because of the direct foreign investment into this country, because of the foreign participation in our economy, hotel rooms are at a premium in this country. You cannot get hotel rooms; hotels are booked for months.

Foreign businessmen coming to do business here have to stay in private homes, guest houses, some of them have to stay 10 and 20 miles away from the capital city, because of the shortage of hotel rooms in this country. And this Government being aware of that fact, had the vision to develop the waterfront complex; we had the vision to build a five-star hotel in this country, the Hyatt hotel, which is full and I am told that the Hyatt hotel is way ahead of its projections in terms of profitability. *[Desk thumping]*

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In fact, I am told from next year it is going to turn a profit, which is a world record. [*Desk thumping*] You talk to the owners of the Marriott hotel; they are booked out to the gills. The kind of income that the owners at the Marriott hotel are getting, the kind of revenue they are getting, it is beyond their wildest dreams. The other day I saw an article in the newspapers that a second Marriott is going to be constructed in Trinidad and Tobago.

It is because of fantastic demand for hotel rooms and hotel space in this country, because of our investment climate, foreign investors are tripping over themselves to come and invest in Trinidad and Tobago, and yet, I have to hear this "dotishness" that after the Summit of the Americas and after the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, what are we going to do with the hotel rooms. Is this year the hotel is full, you know, not next year! [*Laughter*] Foolishness, Mr. Speaker! Who wrote that speech? That quack! A quack!

There is such a shortage of hotel rooms in this country that the Government has to lease cruise ships to provide the required accommodation for those two conferences next year. We just do not have the hotel rooms, they are all filled with businessmen coming to this country to do business, and yet I have to hear this "dotishness" from the Member for Siparia.

Mr. Speaker: Before I move the Motion for the extension of time, I had indicated to the Chief Whip that the seating arrangement that I afforded Members to my left this morning was only for this morning for the speech of the hon. Member for Siparia. So, I would ask you to take your rightful places; I do not want to displace my good friend from Couva South, and if my other good friends were to arrive, I would not want them to sit to the end. If you take your places now, I will be obliged.

[*Members took their rightful seats*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, everything in the Member's speech was wrong. The figures were wrong, the concepts were wrong, the notions were wrong, the philosophy was wrong, every single thing totally confused. I do not know if it is a dyslexic, dysfunctional person who wrote it. Some kind of dyslexic person,

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somebody who cannot see zeros, who does not know where the comma is in a number, who cannot read statistics. It is probably an insult to dyslexic people.

It is a pity I do not have the same three hours, because there were so many things uttered by the Member for Siparia that were just plain wrong, infantile, puerile, juvenile, childish and just unworthy of the Member's education, that I could have spoken here for three hours just highlighting the nonsense that she has uttered.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is incumbent on me now to talk about some of the things the PNM has been doing. I want to turn to the situation with public transportation because what we are doing in public transportation bothers them tremendously.

2.55 p.m.

There are many things that the UNC did while they were in office to destroy the social fabric of this country. I remember when I was appointed Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education and I went to John Donaldson Technical Institute. I saw the condition of John Donaldson Technical Institute after it had been left by the UNC; the enrolment at John Donaldson Technical Institute was barely 300, down from 2,000 when the UNC demitted office. Two thousand young men and women from Port of Spain and its environs—because everything they did had a pernicious almost evil intent behind it.

The UNC had decided as a matter of policy that they would make sure that the young men and women of Port of Spain and the surrounding areas would not get a technical education. They did the same thing in San Fernando. So, when you looked at the numbers at the John Donaldson Technical Institute under the reign of the UNC, they went from 2,000 down to 300 and I can now say with some pride that under successive Ministers of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education that number is now back up to 4,000. Am I correct? [*Desk thumping*]

I used that by way of example because they did the same thing with the public transport system in this country. Everything they did was a deal. Everything they did had some skull in it. So, under the UNC, it had decided it was not appropriate to buy modern new buses to ensure that the people at the lower income levels in this society could get affordable public transportation. Some UNC “skull man” convinced the UNC to buy some foreign used buses made for temperate climates that worked in areas where you do not require windows. So they bought these ugly yellow foreign used buses—

Hon. Member: Paint in yellow and orange.

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes, these ugly yellow and orange buses—with no windows. The buses are about 20 years old. They painted them in UNC colours and inflicted them on the population. [*Interruption*] How many of those ugly orange buses are there now? None! We scrapped all of them. It was the policy—

Dr. Browne: They are using them for hot dog stands.

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes, they are using them for hot dog stands—of the UNC to buy foreign used junk. They did it with buses and they did it with ambulances.

Hon. Member: And police cars too.

Hon. C. Imbert: Police cars as well. They bought foreign used cars and gave it to the police to drive.

Hon. Member: “All yuh doing it with boats.”

Hon. C. Imbert: “We” under the caring hands of the PNM, when you look at what we have done in the public transport system over the last six years—when the UNC demitted office, the PTSC barely had a fleet of 90 buses. That is all there were! Down from 300 under the PNM administration to 90 and we have systemically acquired modern buses over the last six years. We have acquired articulated buses that can carry up to 150 passengers, that have full access for disabled persons with electronically controlled ramps for the disabled persons, we have articulated buses; we have acquired standard buses that seat up to 60 persons and we have acquired mid-range buses and buses for around the town and city services that could seat 40 persons.

And recently, I had the privilege to be associated with the commissioning of a further 70 buses ranging in size from 29 to 33 seats, specifically designed for rural routes, suburban routes and routes outside of the urban areas.

Of those buses we sent 20 to Tobago because we are a national Government. [*Desk thumping*] We took 20 out of the 70 and sent them to Tobago. You see how we care about Tobago? We do not make joke! This PNM Government does not make joke you know, 313 buses. [*Desk thumping*] From 90 under the UNC to 313 under the PNM, from just about 30 to 40 routes served under the UNC, we are now servicing over 120 routes in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] In all parts of the country!

Mr. Manning: And this is a budget for the rich.

Hon. C. Imbert: And they talk about a budget for the rich, because in this budget there are more buses for poor people. The Member for Siparia will like us

to believe that the budget is just the fiscal measures, but a budget is far more than that. A budget is the appropriations, it is the plans, policies and programmes of the Government and contained in this fiscal package are a number of additional buses to serve the lower income groups, the poor, the disabled and the downtrodden in this country.

In fact, it is our intention to bring the fleet of available buses in the PTSC up to 400. That is our intention. We believe when we get up to 400, which will not be too long from now—I would say before the end of next year, we will have 400 buses operating on the roads in Trinidad and Tobago, and that will give us the critical mass that we need to provide affordable, convenient and efficient public transportation at the lowest end of the spectrum in this country. In fact, with the influx of buses and the transformation that has taken place in the PTSC, I dare say that the PTSC is already close to achieving our 2020 vision in 2008. [*Desk thumping*] Before 2010 the PTSC will achieve the benchmark set for it through our 2020 vision.

They like to pour cold water on the vision of the PNM. I took careful notes of the statements made by the Member for Siparia, talking about confessions of an economic hit man. Where were there more economic hit men than in the UNC Government of 1995? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: All in the courthouses.

Hon. C. Imbert: All in the courthouses. All the economic hit men of the UNC are on the courthouse steps at this point in time. [*Interruption*] All on the courthouse steps, Mr. Speaker. They have the audacity to talk to us about economic hit men. The only thing that the UNC Government was interested in was pilfering! Raiding the purse!

Hon. Member: Economic assassins.

Hon. C. Imbert: They were economic assassins. That is what they were. They were rapacious. [*Interruption*] Their appetites were insatiable.

All of the issues relating to impropriety in public office—we read about it in the newspapers every now and then—that have found their way into the courthouse are there courtesy the United National Congress Government and they have the audacity to tell me about economic hit men. They think we are stupid! If we listen to them and their “dotishness” we would not modernize this country. We would not put the type of infrastructure in place that this country requires. They believe we would listen to them and their foolishness and cut back on development of this

country, so that at the end of five years they can go to the population and say, "What did the PNM do? It did nothing." What are we going to tell the population, that we were saving for a rainy day? They will vote us out of office with a vengeance. We are not stupid! That is why we have a plan and a vision to transform this country.

The Minister of Finance, as I said, in that brilliant presentation which is far more than the budget statement itself, it is what is contained in all of these budget documents: the Supplementary Public Sector Investment Programme; the Public Sector Investment Programme for Tobago; the Social Sector Investment Programme; the Public Sector Investment Programme 2009; the estimates of expenditure; the estimates of recurrent expenditure; of capital expenditure; the funding for statutory bodies and so on. That is what the budget is all about. It is all contained in this matrix of documents. It is not simply what was outlined in the budget speech of the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara.

If the Minister of Finance were to outline everything inside of here she would be speaking for about seven days, but that is not what a budget presentation is all about. A budget presentation gives highlights of Government performance, gives targets, gives information about important policies and programmes of the Government, gives some indication of the philosophy of the Government and gives some indication of the performance of the economy and the sound and prudent management of this economy under the PNM Government. That is what it is all about, Mr. Speaker.

3.05 p.m.

People said that they did not hear this and they did not hear that in the budget, it is impossible. It is absolutely impossible to put everything into a budget speech, and I now wish to speak about another innovative programme of the Trinidad and Tobago Government, of the PNM administration of 2008. I wish to talk about the proposed National Highways Programme because I listened carefully to what the Member for Siparia was saying. She was complaining about the Rapid Rail project, the water taxi project, the National Highways project, all the desalination projects and so on, and saying do not do them and do not spend money and so on because they believe we are foolish enough to listen to them, but we are not. Because we intend to govern this country if the population will allow us for the next 30 years and that is why we have a vision to develop this country. That is why I say to all Members opposite, you are condemned to the benches of the Opposition for the rest of your natural political lives; the rest of your perpetual opposition. Have you ever heard of perpetual motion? Well, you are condemned to perpetual opposition.

The Member complained about the PPP model as if she knew what it meant. She has no idea what the P3 model means. It means private public partnership Mr. Speaker. It is an innovative system where you bring the skills of the private sector and you combine them with the resources of the public sector, and you use the strengths of both groups to develop the infrastructure of your country. It is being done all over the world. There are many large infrastructure projects which are financed through the public private partnership. In fact, it is the preferred developmental model for major infrastructure projects all over the world.

One of the things this Government intends to do, is to develop a national highway system in this country, which will allow for future growth, which will allow for new areas of the country to be opened up, which will allow for easy access from any part of Trinidad and Tobago, to the other parts of Trinidad and Tobago and the Minister of Finance gave some details. I would now like to expand on them in the time available to me.

The Government has decided to engage on a capital development programme to develop a new system of highways, modern freeways in this country, so that at the end of this project, this very ambitious project, no part of Trinidad and Tobago would be further away than two and a half hours by road. So this means that you would be able to drive from Toco to Icacos in two and a half hours. You would be able to drive from Chaguaramas to Galeota in two and a half hours and, of course, all the other locations in between.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. C. Imbert: And the first phase of this much innovative highway programme would be the following projects:

- the Solomon Hochoy extension to Point Fortin;
- the San Fernando to Princes Town freeway;
- a freeway from the Uriah Butler Highway to Trincity. That is part of what used to be the southern link;
- the extension of the Churchill Roosevelt Highway to Manzanilla;
- a causeway through the sea from Port of Spain to Chaguaramas; and
- a new north/south highway from somewhere in the East-West Corridor in the Curepe/Tunapuna area, down to the Princes Town/Rio Claro area.

It is a grid that we are building. That is the first phase.

In the second phase, to open up the possibilities for tourism, both domestic and foreign, we will be constructing a first-class road from the East-West

Corridor to the Maracas Bay area, toddling through the mountain. We will also be continuing the freeway from Princes Town to Mayaro, and also building a first-class road from Moruga to Princes Town. In due course, we will also be building a first-class road from Sangre Grande to Toco, from Blanchisseuse to Toco, from Penal to Guayaguayare and from Manzanilla to Mayaro.

Mr. Speaker, this is an eight year programme and I can assure you it will be accomplished, because it is a PNM vision, and this PNM government [*Desk thumping*] will be in power and there will be nobody around to be thieving out all the money. [*Desk thumping*] These projects will be finished and will be finished to the highest international standards. We are all about performance. I hear them talk about what they did? What did they do? Every time I drive up Churchill Roosevelt Highway and I see that magnificent piece of European engineering at the intersection of the Uriah Butler Highway and the Churchill Roosevelt Highway, [*Desk thumping*] I think about them and what they could not do.

They talk and talk and talk for six years. Fight among themselves; thief from thief, that was what was going on, and for six years instead of spending the people's money on basic infrastructure, instead of doing what we are doing at that intersection by the Grand Bazaar, they got themselves embroiled in all sorts of allegations and counter allegations, where Government Ministers were accused of interfering in the award of contracts, where the matter went to court and was tied up in court for years. So at the end of six years, they had absolutely nothing to show the population in terms of highway development in this country. Absolutely nothing!

In fact, when I think about what this Government has done; when I think about what this administration has done in terms of development of the road sector, in terms of the projects and programmes that we have been able to complete—Mr. Speaker, you are a man who drives around the country, and you would have seen road works that are in place in every nook and cranny of Trinidad and Tobago, everywhere you go, you would see activity taking place on one or another of our main roads, secondary roads and highways. Everywhere you go, you would see activity, what was their solution? Not a holistic, planned approach to road development in this country; not proper engineering; not proper systems; not proper specification; that was not their approach. They spent \$1 billion in about six months. Wasted \$1 billion in about six months, all in a quest to win an election which did not last very long because eventually the Member for Tabaquite could not stand the stench inside that Government and he walked out. But they spent \$1 billion of the people's money. The Member for Tabaquite sorry,

he was then the Member for Couva South, now the Member for Tabaquite, he could not stand the stench inside that Government, so he, Mr. Sudama and Mr. Maraj just walked out. They could not handle the stink inside of there, but they had this idea that if they paved the road they would win election. So through the tourism company, they spent \$1 billion. They paved dead dog in the road. If they had car, they would pave over the car. They had a particular Minister who paved the road to his home three times in one year, and they thought that was what development was all about.

Mr. Speaker, that is not what development is all about. Those are the actions of economic hit men, that is what it is. We do not have any such plans. When we are finished with our road development programme, when we are finished opening up this country, it will allow the birth of new towns, of new settlements and new areas for industry. Can you imagine being able to drive easily from the Valsayn area, the Curepe area, down to the Rio Claro area on a first-class expressway? Can you imagine being able to drive from San Fernando to Mayaro on a freeway? Can you imagine being able to drive from Wallerfield to Manzanilla, down to Mayaro, down to Guayaguayare and back up to Penal and across to Siparia and down to Point Fortin [*Desk thumping*] and across to La Brea? Can you imagine that? Just think of it. That is the vision of this PNM administration. [*Desk thumping*] 3.23 p.m., oh, I have plenty time. I have plenty time, man.

Mr. Speaker, let me indicate to hon. Members opposite and the national community, that there are so many good things happening in the Ministry of Works and Transport. We have three Members of Parliament in the Ministry of Works and Transport, and all three of us will be giving an account of the plans and programmes and achievements of that ministry. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. C. Imbert: That is just for those who say, he did not talk about this and he did not talk about that because I do not have 33 hours to speak. I listened to the Members opposite and I laughed. They are leaderless, rudderless, headless, and visionless. I wonder how Members opposite feel. The other day in speaking in this Parliament, Members opposite were talking about nepotism and I made the point that there are three Pandays on that side—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: No, you cannot sit there and crosstalk. If you can behave in the same manner in which you behaved when the hon. Member for Siparia was giving her brilliant speech this morning, I would appreciate it. [*Desk thumping*] So, listen to another one, please.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker—and of course, trying to hide behind your disingenuous approach to everything. The way the UNC operates like they have no screening on that side. All the emperor will do is that he will select a safe seat; he would select a safe seat for his brother and another safe seat for his daughter, and then he will anoint them to the candidacy and they would become elected. It is nepotism cubed and that is what is causing—they do not have to contest election—the deep divisions on the other side.

Dr. Moonilal: Why are you minding our business?

Hon. C. Imbert: "I like all yuh business man." It is no accident that the Member for Chaguanas West is not here. He is a businessman and he has more important things to do with his time. I seriously doubt that he will spend five years in this Parliament wasting his precious time with them. It is no wonder that the Member for Tabaquite is not here. As I made the point before, if the Leader of the Opposition is unavoidably absent, then parliamentary protocol and the Westminster convention dictates that the Opposition Chief Whip is the next in line to give the response to the budget.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that their party caucuses are quite fierce and they nearly break out into fisticuffs inside of there—like crabs in a barrel. They scramble among themselves for position and I must come back to the point that there is no accident that the Member for Tabaquite is not here because the Member for Caroni Central wants his job.

The other day I saw a piece of correspondence from the Member for Siparia where she wrote about a situation that occurred in the Parliament and indicated in the correspondence that she went to the Parliament with the Chief Whip, Dr. Hamza Rafeeq. Freudian slip, she went to the Parliament with the Chief Whip, Dr. Hamza Rafeeq. This is about three months ago, and at the time the Member for Tabaquite was in the country and was present. But I understand that there is a plot to get rid of the Member for Tabaquite and replace him with the Member for Caroni Central. We will see this plot unfold in due course and as night follows day, we will see the UNC disintegrate.

Mr. Speaker, let me return to the Member for Siparia—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. C. Imbert: One of the greatest failures of the speech of the Member for Siparia was that it offered no alternatives for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Who wrote that speech? Who is the quack that wrote that speech? Three hours of diatribe; three hours of empty rhetoric and not one word; not one semicolon; not a

full stop about what the UNC would do if it were the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Nothing! They have nothing to offer. They are backward and empty. [*Desk thumping*] Whoever wrote that speech, they set you up! You offered nothing.

Mr. Speaker, we on this side have invested in public transportation, in tertiary education and on free medication for citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. We in the PNM have increased old age pension by more than 100 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] We have put up the disability grant by 100 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] We have a plan for this country and we have a vision. What do they have to offer for the citizens of this country? They are not an alternative government. They are just squabbling among themselves about who would deliver the budget speech and it is because of the internecine, petty squabbling on the other side, that we were treated to that sorry diatribe from the Member for Siparia this morning. Because the Member for Chaguanas West and the Member for Tabaquite were alienated from the preparation of the speech, that is why the speech said nothing. Nothing! Spent three hours quoting bogus statistics, showing complete ignorance of fundamental economics, making all sorts of foolish, childish statements, but nothing of substance for this country. Nothing for this country to hold on to. No programmes; no plans; a bankrupt, empty party. That is what you get from the other side.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, as night follows day, we are getting closer to the time when the UNC will disintegrate permanently. They are already splintered in 2006/2007 into the duck and run party and their party and we are getting closer to the day when they will disintegrate forever. And as I said, with that kind of diatribe, they are condemned to inhabit the Opposition Benches for the rest of their natural political life.

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

Mr. Chandresh Sharma (Fyzabad): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am tempted to invite all Members to say a word of prayer for Trinidad and Tobago. I am really, really saddened by what I have just heard. I cannot believe a Member of Parliament, who came in the same time with me in 1991, can get up and bring such a message of hate, practically having nothing to say. There is no message in what he said. In fact, as I flip through last year's budget presentation by the same Member and the year before, he said almost the same things. [*Laughter*] There is absolutely nothing new. [*Desk thumping*]

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Mr. Speaker, this must be a very frightening development for all of us. This morning, we all woke up in Trinidad and Tobago to read and to hear in the media that 257 of our children obtained national scholarships and I want to congratulate those 257 children. [*Desk thumping*] They belong to the children of Members on both sides and that is a very good sign. Can you imagine some of those 257 children watching television or listening to the radio and listening to the Member for Diego Martin North/East?

A total waste of time, but more than that, what anybody could pick up in his tone of voice or from the words his was using, was hate, hate. I hate you; I have no love for you; I am going to destroy you; all of you are dotish; and all of you south of Caroni do not exist in this country. [*Crosstalk*] This is where he was going and I will demonstrate why. What was the message? Here is a senior Cabinet Minister and a senior Member of the PNM, who has he motivated in this country? Of the 26 Members of Parliament opposite me—about 24 are new I think—can they use him as a role model? He is a rude model. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*] Can any one of them say I am going to pattern my contribution in this debate following what the Member said?

3.25 p.m.

We must pray for this country; this is sad, sad. Today, the Minister spoke about division; the country is divided under the PNM the worse it could be. You know his pet words: division, disunity. Why did he say all those things? Was he reflecting his party? Was he reflecting himself? Why does he come over like an attack dog, biting, wanting to bite; only barking, but no bites? Why does he need to be personal with any Member on this side?

I listened to the Member for Siparia, very complimentary to the presenter of the budget, as was expected. [*Desk thumping*] You see a pattern of that from the PNM; it is always personal, about challenges in people's homes. All of us here have challenges in our homes; we are husbands, we are fathers, we are brothers, we are sons; we are uncles; we have children. All our kids are going to have difficulties, from time to time. There is absolutely no need to get personal with them.

We all have skeletons, whatever those might be; I do not know what they are, [*Crosstalk*] but there is absolutely no need to go down there. Trinidad and Tobago is listening. We have listeners on the international web all over the world. I am so disappointed with this message; it pains me; it really, really pains me. The Minister said that he had 50 pages. Do you know what he wrote on them? He wrote dotish, dotish, dotish, 50 times.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Foolish, dotish, foolish, dotish.

Mr. C. Sharma: Was he abused as a child? [*Crosstalk*] What is it? I am asking the question; I am not saying it, but something is coming over; something is coming over. [*Crosstalk*] When you look at the research, when you look at patterns of behaviour—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. C. Sharma: —the Member is reflecting a pattern of behaviour that he was interfered with, at some point, by some force. I do not want to believe—[*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Manning: Budget, budget.

Mr. Ramnath: His father used to call him dotish! [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. S. Panday: Child abuse!

Mr. C. Sharma: Why did this Minister introduce the word "quack"? Is that an attack? Members of the Opposition have officers attached to their offices, and there is also an office in Port of Spain. The persons who work there are agents of the State; they are paid for by the State, so whatever assistance is obtained would come from those offices, including all MPs' offices on both sides of the fences.

Mr. Dumas: Do not blame them?

Mr. C. Sharma: Why did he refer to the staff as quacks? [*Interruption*] The other one is saying lame ducks, why? Why are you attacking these people? They are degreed, some of them; they are servants of the State; they are paid for by the State, and they are performing as they are required to do. Why the personal attack?

For the first time in Trinidad and Tobago a seminar was hosted by the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce and the Trinidad and Tobago Transparency Institute. It was held on Tuesday, September 16, 2008, "Preventing Corruption in the Construction Projects". You had to pay to attend it. It was hosted by Neil Stansbury, cofounder of the Global Infrastructure Anti-Corruption Centre in Chicago. The cost of attending was \$600 for financial members, and for other members \$660.

"Corruption results in overpriced, delayed, defective, unsafe and environmentally dangerous projects."

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Why was this hosted in Trinidad? Because there was corruption in construction in Trinidad and Tobago; that was the only reason, and the majority of it originated at the Ministry of Works and Transport. I will demonstrate that a little later.

"Companies that refuse to pay bribes can be denied contracts, award, certificates, payments and permits."

That obtains in Trinidad and Tobago under this very Minister who just spoke. One of the most corrupt ministries in this country remains the Ministry of Works and Transport. [*Desk thumping*] There is no question about that.

In fact, under this Minister's watch, firms winning contracts are instructed to treat with other companies, to give them subcontracts at higher cost. The Minister cannot deny that, because I have the evidence. The nonsense he spoke was to hide those issues.

You noticed that he said nothing of substance, absolutely nothing. There are so many other units under his watch; he said absolutely nothing about the airport—I will talk a little about that—the Port Authority, MTS and a few others. He came to attack the contribution of the Member for Siparia only to discount what was going to be said. The Minister had nothing to report on his Ministry. He told us about the highways two or three budgets ago.

"Public moneys wasted on projects that have little or no community benefit."

This was the Chamber of Commerce, which the hon. Prime Minister addressed on previous occasions; they are highly recognized in the country. The Transparency Institute of Trinidad and Tobago, highly recognized, because it was the PNM using their information in previous times when they were on this side of the House, so the information has to be correct.

"Planning permission is refused or given for corrupt reasons."

Under this very Minister and the previous Minister of Housing, projects that were approved for six floors suddenly went up to 22 floors, with the major interest holder being a former Minister of Government. So you see the amount of corruption. The Member for Diego Martin North/East, all he is concerned about is making money, causing corruption to take place and doing nothing about it; absolute doing nothing about it.

"Individuals in both the public and private sectors may be placed in personal danger or may be put under pressure to undertake corrupt acts on behalf of their employer."

This is happening at the Ministry of Works and Transport.

I indicated, based on this seminar, that it was the first time, maybe in the last 25 years, that such a seminar took place in Trinidad and Tobago. The reason was because persons in the private sector, contractors and business houses, are very concerned about government corruption, especially corruption in construction.

Mr. Ramnath: Such brilliance!

Mr. C. Sharma: Thank you, you are welcome. *[Laughter]*

I was told that a Chinese company, I do not remember the name, not Shanghai, said that it was in the process of obtaining a contract to build another airport. If that is happening—I am not sure if we need a second airport—how is it that information already there? How could the company indicate that it was getting that contract? I understand it was being negotiated by Mr. Calder Hart. I hope that is not correct. If we need another airport, let us go through the due process; let us not waste taxpayers' money.

Hon. Member: What do you know about due process?

Mr. C. Sharma: The Minister should have told us today a little about infrastructure. For the first time in the country we are seeing a total collapse of infrastructure across the country. The Minister boasted about roads; I think he did that to attack the Member for Barataria/San Juan. We saw on the television two nights ago, and it was reported in the media yesterday, that the Member for Barataria/San Juan had to leave under heavy police guard, because of road conditions in his constituency; seven and a half minutes drive from this Parliament. Were you hurt, Sir? *[Interruption]* *[Laughter]* The Member for Barataria/San Juan had to leave under heavy police guard. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Imbert: "I hear somebody beat you."

Mr. C. Sharma: I will talk about road rage in a few minutes, you might be the next victim. *[Laughter]*

Talking about the projects that he identified, when the Minister spoke about two or three of the projects, he did not indicate—

Mr. Ross: Where did you get that information from?

Mr. C. Sharma: It was on television and the other media as well.

Some years ago the Minister had promised us a Road Authority. I thought the Minister would have indicated today where they were going with that, because we keep fixing these roads, and WASA comes one day and digs them up, and then

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TSTT comes the next day, and some other agency like the cable comes; there seems to be no authority on road management in this country. I thought the Minister would have shared some information, give some light.

The Minister misled this House by saying that there were so many roads fixed all over. In fact, I know other Members on the opposite side, in addition to Members on this side, who have been begging for roads to be repaired. In the constituency of Fyzabad there have been numerous protests in Murray Trace, Mosquito Creek, Point Fortin, and La Brea, just to identify a few areas; in San Fernando West, where the Member for San Fernando West lives. We are seeing a number of roads, so it is unfair for the Minister to come here and say, "We are fixing roads in every nook and cranny."

Why did he say that? To protect corruption; because he has to report to somebody that millions of millions of dollars have been spent all over, but we are not seeing any results for it; we are not seeing value for money. Why did he choose to mislead this House and claim that roads were being fixed all over, when Members of the Opposition were being attacked about the condition of roads in their areas?

I was hoping that the Member would tell us something about flooding. You would recall that on previous occasions he came here and said, "This is the last year for flooding." Since then, we have seen more and more flooding. How does the Government respond? The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources does not treat with applications for assistance the least bit. In fact, in this day and age, we have farmers who are still receiving \$46 compensation for loss of crops.

Mr. Speaker, every year, for the last three, four or five years, the Minister has said that moneys were going to treat with flooding, and up to now rivers and drains throughout the country have not been attended to in many, many areas. We are seeing absolutely no change. We are seeing more areas flooding. We have heard this Minister of Works and Transport blame everyone else for his inability to deliver his duty. He blamed the residents for indiscriminate dumping; farmers for damming the water courses and, on one occasion, he blamed God for sending too much rain. This is where we have reached; Vision 2020 and he blames God for sending too much rain.

In rural communities, in particular, we see absolutely no moneys being put. I was hoping the Minister of Finance would have indicated that. We have heard from the local government bodies. Recently there were 15 national consultations,

and at every one of them persons attending raised the concern, including local government practitioners, that they were not getting enough money to treat with issues. They were not getting money for local drains, recreation grounds, et cetera, et cetera. So to indicate that drainage work was taking place, and we are not seeing any improvement in any area, begs the question: Where is this money going?

Only last year the Minister of Finance promised a national drainage plan to bring an end to flooding. This year, nothing was said. All we were told was that numerous drainage projects were either in the planning stages or to be awarded soon. We are always told about a comprehensive national drainage development study; every year we hear that same story. We hear about a national programme to upgrade all major drainage channels in various areas. Everything is about a new programme.

We heard from the Minister again today about this dam, absolutely nothing. In 2006, to quote the Minister's words:

"Unless we are stopped by some higher power than ourselves, the dam will begin in fiscal 2006."

Not a fork was done yet. [*Interruption*]

Do you want me to repeat it?

Dr. Moonilal: Yes.

Mr. C. Sharma: The designs were complete, according to the Minister. "It would be just like the interchange and the highway to Princes Town." Nothing is being done in Princes Town. "They will all begin in this fiscal year, 2006." Mr. Speaker, none of these statements from the Minister of Works and Transport are true.

Mr. Imbert: Oh, no!

Mr. C. Sharma: The only way to describe these statements by the Minister of Works and Transport starts with an "L". I would leave that out. The Minister of Works and Transport has no credibility speaking in this House today, absolutely none. In fact, none of his promises have come into being.

When I look at the projects under the Ministry of Works and Transport, for which the Minister has responsibility, not a single project has come within

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budget; not a single project. The Minister could not get up and tell us which one. Let us look at the water taxi. How many times we were told that it was going to start next month or the month after? I went down to the San Fernando Wharf to see what was happening, very little work.

The Minister of Finance said that it was going to be November. It certainly could not be November this year; we have heard that on so many occasions before.

3.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister indicated to us that the water taxi would remove 4,000 motor taxis from the road. He did not explain how that would happen. Look at the maths: for four vessels with a maximum capacity of 400 passengers travelling from San Fernando to Port of Spain with a turnaround time of approximately one hour, it means they can only make two trips between the hours of 5.30 a.m. and 9.00 a.m. which are the peak periods, most people having to get into Port of Spain by 7.00—8.00 a.m.

It means that during this time that between 600 and 800 cars can be removed from the traffic on the highway. The Minister is aware of this information, so why does he choose to mislead the House? The reason is to place in the minds of the national community that we are spending big money to take care of a big problem when the facts are totally different. [*Desk thumping*] When you are looking at the quantum of money that is to be spent, again you see the corruption in it. In fact, when we look at the water taxi hub, it is far from finished.

The Minister spoke about the two highways. We heard this in 2004 and the Government has been promising to build the highways from Point Fortin to Mayaro since 2004/2005 and the previous PNM in 1963 during the days of Shell. The opening up of the Churchill Roosevelt Highway from O'Meara to Wallerfield is hung up because the contract was given to a company that could not deliver under the PNM.

So the PNM has a history of awarding large contracts to persons and companies whom we do not know how they get them, and half the times do not deliver, and many times the cost overruns are in excess of 100 per cent to 300 per cent. When you look at the financial complex, the major Government buildings, Mount Hope, not one has come within budget.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall the Opposition had raised concerns about rapid rail and this nonsense the Minister says the Opposition does not want the rapid rail and houses, et cetera. Of course we want but at what cost? We have been

saying that you have been bringing these projects at too high a cost. When you look at some of the construction in this country, it is the highest among the world. When you look at the residence of the Prime Minister and the Diplomatic Centre, dollar per square foot it is the highest in the world. When one looks at the Marriott Hotel built from a loan from the International Finance Corporation (IFC), it was built at a much lower cost, a fraction of that of the Prime Minister's residence. So you cannot say we are against this or that, we are against the wastage, corruption and discrimination. Those are the issues we are concerned about.

Mr. Speaker, when we had raised the concern about the rapid rail in the context of dollars to be spent, the then Minister had indicated that it was going to be \$15 billion. When the Opposition raised concerns and we drew it to the attention of the Integrity Commission, the Commissioner of Police, the Director of Public Prosecutions and even the parliamentary committee, it suddenly reduced to \$7 billion and all of Trinidad and Tobago was very proud of the Opposition. How could you move a project from \$15 billion?

That is why I am concerned when the Minister refers to the staff, the volunteers, the NGOs and the business houses that meet with us and calls them quack, because when they treat with the Opposition they are quacks, when they treat with you they are professionals.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen many companies coming into this country and earning contracts for which there seems to be no process. You get up on a Monday morning and you hear company "X" or "Y" from wherever are getting contracts. The point that has to be made is that all these contracts should be published. Let it be on the Government's website, and the electronic media so that persons who are interested can tender, and this goes for everything.

We are seeing the multipurpose companies spending endless money and we are not getting value for money. In fact when you look at what they are delivering, in some instances it is 1000 per cent more than what the Government agencies like the local government was doing the pavements, roadways, box drains, et cetera for.

Mr. Speaker, our public roads need a lot. We have seen a number of accidents in recent times and many times we are told they could have been avoided. We have been told that persons had to pull away from a pothole or from water on the road which has led to the deaths of many innocent citizens. These are things the Government has to talk about; how they are going to improve the quality of life,

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how costs are going to go down, and how they are going to get value for money. There is absolutely no need to attack everything the Opposition says and become personal in the process.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Siparia spoke about economic hit men. Why is the Government defending that so much? It has come to the attention of the national community, and for this reason the conference for preventing corruption in construction was held in Trinidad. There are a number of people who have suddenly become go betweens between Government agencies and contractors who are commission agents—if I can use that term—earning large sums of money that the State is paying that is not related to the project. And if the loyal Opposition does its duty and brings it to the attention of the Government, it has a responsibility to treat with it.

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, we see the same thing in the smelter plants and the desalination plant. When we brought the desalination plant during the UNC administration, you would recall the amount of noise that was made, and today because of the desalination plant, we can provide water for a large part of this country.

WASA is now asking for \$2 billion per year over the next 10 years, having spent under the last PNM administration close to that same amount with \$10 billion for 600,000 homes in this country. You can see the amount of money going into wastage.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it will be important for us to reflect for a few minutes what obtained previously in this country. Under the UNC administration, when we were doing a budget in some instances between \$9 billion and \$13 billion over the period we were in office, we were able to deliver so much more in fairness. We built schools, fire stations, police stations, roads, bridges and there were a number of self-help projects.

Today, the Government is reading a budget in excess of \$50 billion and in the last few years, more than \$200 billion was spent and you are not seeing anything for it. Today, it is delivering a kindergarten that we started off at \$250,000 and some of those kids are now scholarship winners and this Government is delivering that same thing for \$3 million and \$4 million, and in some instances \$10 million.

What has happened? Something has happened and it cannot be so much cost. We saw happiness in this country; people had a desire to live. I recall I was the international relations officer for the UNC and we were getting letters from all

over the world from nationals of Trinidad and Tobago who wanted to return home. Some were buying lands and then PNM came into office under some arrangement with the former President and all of that reversed.

When you look at the crime situation in the country, it has to be related to the governance. When you look at the high cost of living, the murders, the high food prices, it has to be directly as a result of your governance. And when I listen to the Member for Diego Martin North/East, it tells me why we are having this situation. It is because this Government has absolutely no love for people, they are not standing with the people of Trinidad and Tobago, you seem to be standing on them, and that did not obtain under the UNC.

There was a better relation under the UNC administration. We loved each other, we cared for each other and we visited with each other. Today none of that is happening. A resident standing in front his house at 9.00 p.m. last night was shot dead. There are close to 400 murders and you smile and you grin teeth. Who are you fooling? This is not how we govern a country, and we are part of the Government, the Government does not exist by itself; it cannot exist by itself. You are doing too many things wrong and the time has come when we need to take check, and the Opposition will discharge its duty.

I recall when the Member for St. Augustine brought an urgent matter to this House, a Motion on the Adjournment where a guy who did some gardening, some \$400,000 value in hot peppers and the Government sent its agent to destroy them the next day. What was the message? “Doh mess with the PNM, we have power and resources.” And it does that all the time.

Why does it break the homes of squatters? They have to live somewhere, where is the love and care? And in some instances we take the taxpayers’ money and assist those same squatters to build their homes, and I will tell you why you do that.

Under the National Commission for Self-Help—and I have raised this on numerous occasions—on the last count, 78 per cent of all the resources were going to PNM constituencies. One will argue that they have the majority of constituencies, but it cannot be that applicants are coming from Fyzabad, Oropouche and Mayaro and they are the least treated with but, more than that, when you give that \$10,000 minor house repair grant, and sometimes when there are natural disasters that \$10,000 voucher, it is often to hardware of their choice, not that of the client.

Sometimes the person from Fyzabad is getting the material from Port of Spain at much higher prices with no ability to negotiate. The same thing happens with the squatters. You give them this grant of \$20,000—\$25,000 which is at a

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hardware with PNM connections half the times at high prices and then you demolish the buildings within a few days. That is why I say there is hate in you. You do not only demolish the building, you damage the material so it cannot be reused. What kind of Government are you? Why would you do that? Why would you take the galvanize sheets and pass the backhoe over it and break up all the lumber? Is that an act of love? Is that a Christian value? Why do you do it?

When this is raised with you privately through letters, and in the Parliament, you ignore it. You must never forget what happened in this country in 1970 and in 1990, that is a very dangerous thing to think of. We do not want that to happen again. All of us have to live here, and we have to make sure those things do not happen.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the PNM did not create governance in the country, there was governance before it came, we were all living here, and suddenly something has happened in the last few years more than before. We have seen a trend of people migrating, a trend of business houses selling out, of course, there were people coming in too because there is money to be made in this country.

3.55 p.m.

The first responsibility of governance is to make sure your people from the country that you govern are happy. I want to share with you a poll that seems to suggest differently. What did the poll say? The poll asked—and I am sure Members opposite are aware of the poll. This poll was conducted across Trinidad and Tobago: It states that 70 per cent of the people polled were concerned about facilities for young people; 75 per cent were concerned about maintenance in their areas; 83 per cent were concerned about sport, health and fitness facilities that were lacking across the country.

Eighty five per cent were concerned about policing. They wanted better policing; 83 per cent were concerned about community centres and halls because what they found was that the community centres in many areas were not furnished; did not have the facilities required and oftentimes came under some kind of management that prevented the use. Why do citizens have to pay to use their community centre? That should not be. Community centres should be accessible to all people, but that does not obtain under the PNM.

Eighty-nine per cent were concerned about the environment and cleaner streets; 90 per cent were concerned about parks and open spaces. You do not hear the Government telling us about that. All these concrete jungles they are building; these huge buildings all over the place, people want recreation grounds. In fact, one in four—Dr. Gopeesingh, am I correct?—have diabetes now.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes, about 40 per cent.

Mr. C. Sharma: It is very frightening. I know I should have said, the Member for Caroni East. Thank you.

Ninety-two per cent—very strange—were concerned about getting better jobs; 92 per cent were concerned about obtaining better health care.

Mr. Ramnath: Brilliant research.

Mr. C. Sharma: When you are away having a ball, I do research. [*Laughter*]
[*Crosstalk*]

Ninety-three per cent were concerned about public transport. When the Minister talked about 330 PTSC buses, Madam Deputy Speaker, are you concerned about the bus service in Arima? Without getting you involved. The fact of the matter is, what we are seeing in our constituencies are very few buses. In fact, I have raised with the chairman, Telly Paul—I think that is his name—about making sure buses come into Fyzabad.

Very dissatisfied with Government's performance are 31 per cent; fairly satisfied, 28 per cent. Only 6 per cent were very satisfied; 7 per cent had no opinion. In fact, in recent times many people are not sure what services the Government provides. Many people are not aware if the Government is for them or against them, because oftentimes you see the Government doing something that appears to be a punishment. People do not know when water is going to be locked off in the area; people do not know why the increase in water rates; people do not know why they have to pay water rates when they do not get water in their taps; people do not know if they can get truck-borne water.

When people go to the medical institutions they have to wait 8, 10 and 12 hours to see the doctor. When they die from dengue doctors are forced to write something else on the death certificate; very, very frightening. In terms of the delivery of goods and services from the Government—and I suspect it might include some offices of Members of Parliament; not on this side, I hope—poor service, 71 per cent; slow, 63 per cent; unsatisfactory, 73 per cent. Government offices seem to be uninterested in treating with their issues, 78 per cent; inadequate service, 68 per cent. They were unresponsive, 80 per cent. They were unaccountable. Imagine persons who are going to pay their land tax and when they go to the office you are telling them to come back another day. They do not know how much they have to pay. “Come back and we will tell you.” In many offices they found persons attending to them, many were friendly; many were hard-working. Only 12 per cent thought they were getting good value for money.

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In this same poll, 70 per cent thought that the Government was wasting taxpayers' money—70 per cent. We really need to pray in this country, you know. Even your PNM supporters are of the opinion that you are wasting taxpayers' money. Only 60 per cent thought the service offered was fairly okay. What has happened? Governance has broken down in this country. And this is across the board.

Sixty-one per cent are of the opinion that the Government does not treat with citizens equally. We have raised that on many occasions and for that we have said to the Government, treat with all people equally. The Constitution makes that point. Sixty-one per cent are of the opinion that you do not treat with them equally. This is a very disturbing sign. It means six out of every 10 think you are punishing them.

Eighty per cent—and this is a very important observation—are of the opinion that you do not listen to people. [*Interruption*] Do not disturb me, please. Sixty-seven per cent believe that you do not promote their well-being. Who are you really governing this country for? Who are the beneficiaries of your goods and services? So you see, when you did that injustice to people and brought them into Port of Spain last week, or whenever they came, you did not gain anything. They came against their wishes.

Sixty per cent thought you were not encouraging investments at the local level. So while you are boasting that you have a large number of people coming into the country to do business, many are of the opinion that you are not encouraging locals. And when you go to Nedco, it is a secret society. You went in the middle of the night and removed it and put it under some outfit that does not have to report, as you are now doing with CEPEP.

Eighty-four per cent thought that most of you are not helping people. [*Interruption*] You do not know CEPEP is going under one of the multipurpose companies? You do not know Nedco does not have to report to Parliament? You see, you are new in Government.

Sixty-three per cent of all residents in Trinidad—not in Tobago—are concerned about drainage; 67 per cent are concerned about roads. It seems as though the street lighting is working. Only 30 per cent is concerned about the street lighting.

Mr. Manning: Is that the MORI poll?

Mr. C. Sharma: I will make a copy available to you.

Mr. Manning: We want the source.

Mr. C. Sharma: Garbage disposal and landfills—concerned. Street cleaners talked about that. Upkeep of cemeteries, 76 per cent. I remember when the UNC was in government we were negotiating to make sure that these cemeteries went into some kind of arrangement, where there was a partnership, as the Minister talked about PPP—public, private partnership—to make sure at least the cemeteries look okay; the cremation sites and so on. When you look at what is happening at the Mosquito Creek, it is falling into the sea and for the last five years the PNM has been saying, next year, next year, next year. Absolutely no work is taking place.

Dr. Gopeesingh: No dignity in life and in death.

Mr. C. Sharma: Many people are still very concerned about truck-borne water distribution in areas that need it. What they are concerned about is they do not know when it will come. You could imagine the challenge a family suffers when they have to send their two or three kids to school on mornings and there is no water and you call WASA or whoever is responsible for water distribution, and they will not tell you; you are just left out there all alone.

Eighty per cent is concerned about beach safety. So these are the things we want to hear from the Government. Do not come and hoodwink us with nonsense. Let the national community know that you are doing something for them; you intend to do something and give them time lines; give them measurements as well. Tell them, “Look, you are going to get it next week.”

It is for this reason I always argued for a constituency fund. I think the current situation we find ourselves in, in Trinidad and Tobago today with more and more Members of Parliament having to deliver more and more, there is need for a constituency fund. I remember the Prime Minister in his capacity as the Minister of Finance in a previous time, had caused us to send a document, which I did, but we have heard nothing of it. The reason I suspect the Government does not want to treat with it is because they want to deny our constituents assistance.

Recently we saw the heavy rains and the flooding—

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. C. Sharma: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. You know, when I listened to the Member for Diego Martin North/East, I could not help but think how he must be thinking when he looked at the PricewaterhouseCoopers

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budget commentary, because only one project in his ministry was completed. That is what they were hiding.

Hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. C. Sharma: Every other project is either: in progress or was not started.

Mr. S. Panday: Give him! Let him have it!

Mr. C. Sharma: But what I want to raise, really, I want to ask the hon. Minister why is it that every single project under his watch from the time he became Minister on the second occasion—with the departure of the former Member for Mayaro—has been outside of budget? Every single one!

Mr. S. Panday: Corruption?

Mr. C. Sharma: I want to ask the hon. Minister as it relates to the Airports Authority, why is there so much expenditure and we are not seeing value for it? I want to ask the hon. Minister as it relates to the Airports Authority, the employment practices. Because in recent times there has been an increase in employment without any advertisement? The Airports Authority comes under the Minister.

The same thing obtains at the Port Authority, especially the port of Port of Spain. There have been cost overruns on almost every project undertaken at the Port Authority, and the Minister must come and tell us. Also, the Minister must tell this House what he has done when it came to his attention that illegal goods were coming into the port, including arms.

4.10 p.m.

It was drawn to the Minister's attention and, Madam Deputy Speaker, you are aware that there are lots of guns on the streets of Port of Spain and elsewhere. How is it that these guns are coming in and when it was drawn to the Minister's attention he did absolutely nothing? One reason he might be doing it is: Is he benefitting from it? Is he aware that people who engage in this have a working relationship?

On the work done to date on the Solomon Hochoy Highway, there are cost overruns; Churchill Roosevelt Highway, cost overruns; Uriah Butler Highway, cost overruns; Lady Young Road, cost overruns; Beetham Highway, cost overruns; Diego Martin Highway, cost overruns; Manzanilla/Mayaro Road, cost overruns; Mayaro/Guayaguayare Road, cost overruns; Toco Main Road, cost overruns; Manahambre Road in the constituency of the hon. Prime Minister, cost overruns;

Naparima/Mayaro Road, cost overruns; a stone's throw from here, Wrightson Road, cost overruns; the Southern Main Road, cost overruns.

So the Minister did not come to tell us about that. He should be apologizing to the House. [*Desk thumping*] When the Minister is talking, his colleagues are so much in glee; he is attacking the Member for Siparia; he is scoring cheap points, but stealing the people's money, their confidence and their wealth.

I cannot believe that the hon. Minister is aware of this. Contractors wrote to the hon. Minister about the construction cost of the overpasses at Bamboo, El Socorro and Aranguez. The Minister did absolutely nothing. Contractors and others wrote the Minister about the construction cost of additional lanes both on the Churchill Roosevelt Highway and the Uriah Butler Highway. Absolutely no action was taken. The Minister will say he never received those letters or he sent them to someone to investigate; his job is not to investigate.

It cannot be that every time there are cost overruns and evidence of corruption, he dismisses it. The reason this conference took place is that the people got fed up of writing. I was told that some letters even went to the Office of the Prime Minister on these same matters.

Mr. Manning: What is that?

Mr. C. Sharma: About cost overruns on many projects and corruption in construction projects.

Mr. Manning: There were no cost overruns.

Mr. C. Sharma: I did not say there were cost overruns, I said that the cost it came in at per square foot—and I have the figures—amounts to being among the most expensive.

Mr. Manning: Madam Deputy Speaker, for the record, the cost of construction at the Prime Minister's residence per square foot is one of the lowest in Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, it was about \$750, which is well below the norm. Fifteen hundred dollars is the norm and at best, construction is \$1,200 to \$1,400. Incorrect!

Mr. C. Sharma: Hon. Prime Minister, I think I may have to take you up on the offer to visit your residence, but I will have to come with my tape measure.

Mr. Manning: I would be very pleased because at least when you speak in the Parliament, you will now talk from a background of information and not surmise. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Sharma: Hon. Prime Minister, let me tell you what is in the public domain. The Prime Minister's residence, including the Diplomatic Centre, has cost in excess of TT \$170 million and the square footage is over 80,000. That amounts to \$1,600 per square foot.

The point is that even if you claim it is \$750 that is raw construction. I am talking about the finished product.

Mr. Manning: That is the finished cost.

Mr. C. Sharma: Do not depend on the Member for Diego Martin West. You will be in trouble. I will get back to that.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when I spoke about corruption in construction, it is not only related to the Ministry of Works and Transport. I have raised this at great pains. In fact, I think I was assaulted for it. The Ministry of Housing and Settlements then had not delivered a single house, unit, apartment, building lot within cost, but I am not the spokesperson for that.

In fact, when you leave San Fernando and enter the highway in Tarouba, those housing units are in excess of \$400,000. The shelf life is expected to be 10 years. Many of the houses there—and I have visited; the hon. Prime Minister himself has visited that area—already show signs of cracks, land movement and there are plumbing problems. This is in the public domain.

Why do we raise this? Because the Member for Diego Martin North/East wants to communicate to the national community that we are against housing. We are not. One of the major problems is that we are spending too much money. I want you, hon. Prime Minister, to allow me to make a suggestion to have a marriage of what the UNC did.

In Cross Crossing, we made housing lots available at \$18,000 per lot, fully serviceable—roads, lights, sewer, drainage, telephones. That is your constituency, by the way. Look at the houses those people built and look at what you were offering them down the road for \$400,000 and \$500,000 per unit.

Mr. Manning: You are talking about Union Hall?

Mr. C. Sharma: Yes.

Mr. Manning: Madam Deputy Speaker, Union Hall Housing Development was initiated by the PNM. If you drive into Union Hall today, you will come to the inescapable conclusion that the wrong people got those houses. The people who got those houses were not low-income people by any means. You should see the houses in Union Hall. It is an upscale housing development as opposed to

Tarodale Hills. If you go there, you will see a housing development for the man at the economic base of the society. Those houses are under \$200,000. The houses at Union Hall are million-dollar houses.

While you are there, south of Claxton Bay, you have to deal with clay soil and generally for construction in south Trinidad you pile. Many of those houses are not built by piles, and on this occasion, we have built the houses without disturbing the soil and therefore minimize the problems.

It is a new approach and we are trying it to see how it works. That is how it is done. It is working reasonably well. We have no doubt that there are one or two houses with cracks, but we will rectify that. By and large, it has been successful.

Mr. C. Sharma: I was on the point that we need to have a marriage. We should make some lots available for people; let them borrow from the banks. Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance is 2 per cent on \$450,000. This means that if someone borrows \$450,000, a joint family will have an instalment of \$3,000 per month, which they may be able to manage and produce a much longer lasting house.

Government has to build houses, but make sure that people who wish to obtain lands get lands. In addition to that, I would like us to revisit the whole question of mortgage financing. Under the present arrangement, only persons buying a house from the HDC and some Caroni (1975) Limited workers can obtain that loan at 2 per cent. That should be across the board. So, the poor person in Fyzabad or Oropouche can go to Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance or any government-aided institution and borrow money at 2 per cent.

Madam Deputy Speaker, one of the things that has to happen is that we have to strengthen our relationship with the persons with whom we govern—both sides. It is said that when government fails to represent the people, and to acknowledge its responsibility to every citizen; when it fails in its duty to be fair and just to one and all; when it charges high taxes to those who can least afford them, it breaks the law, in terms of the people's law.

People are getting fed up and we need to turn them back. They are on the brink now. I say this with pain in my heart. It disturbs me. I am concerned. I am a young man who has many years to live in this country. I want to make sure it is for all of us. Government must make sure they approach all citizens with equality.

Why is a letter from a Member of the Opposition treated differently by a Member of Government or by a government office? That should not be so for simple things. When I do a letter of recommendation for any constituent—it is

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public knowledge from the days of my good friend the former Member for La Brea and Member for Point Fortin; we worked closely. When the current Member for La Brea is in Port of Spain, his constituents are serviced by me. I hope when I get into government and he is in La Brea, he will assist.

Mr. Manning: What year is that?

Mr. C. Sharma: The year 2012. The question is there must be fairness. We cannot come to this Parliament and take oaths of office to serve across the board and practise discrimination and Government must not be a sponsor of discrimination. [*Desk thumping*] They say that Government must realize that its first and last duty is to represent all the people fairly, equally and justly.

That brings me to some concerns in Fyzabad. Over the last year we have found the provision of goods and services lacking in Fyzabad. We have made representation and many ministries oftentimes do not reply to our correspondence. That is why we have spoken about a constituency fund. I, as a Member of Parliament, must be able to tell constituents what they can expect to get. I must be able to tell them about the school that has a leaking roof, as the Member for San Juan/Barataria told the people who attacked him a few days ago, that the roads will be repaired in a few days. He is a Member of Government.

We saw that same thing with the Member for Laventille East/Morvant and the Member for Laventille West. Why are their powers different from the Members opposite? That should never be. When I write a letter to WASA for the installation of pipelines, it must be treated in the same way as when a Member of Government writes it. We are both doing the same thing. We are representing people.

When I write a recommendation for an applicant to be considered for employment, having met the entry requirements, it must be no different from a letter written by the Member for St. Joseph or the Member for Tobago East. In front of all our offices, there is a sign: "Office of the Member of Parliament, Constituency A, B, or C." It does not have PNM Member or UNC Member. We have to change that. I make an appeal that we start working in that direction.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when you look at the last election, you realize that a number of people did not vote and we must be concerned because this is their only opportunity to identify with the governance of the country and too often they are removing themselves from that.

I had raised on previous occasions—and I am certain before all—the concerns about health care. I have many constituents who have to receive surgery of one

kind or the other and they are told the appointment is next two years. Often the required pharmaceuticals are not available. There is no system.

4.25 p.m.

All that is required—the pharmacy in Fyzabad must know what the pharmacy in Oropouche or Siparia has—is that they call and refer the patient to the next health centre, rather than leave the patient to go without medication until a month or six weeks down the road.

Some other concerns are about housing. We have raised on too many occasions, the issue with respect to the distribution of housing. Every time you give an argument that satisfies yourself. Too many people seem not to know how to get a Government house. Too many people are on long waiting lists and are always told: “Come back.” When they go to the offices there is no—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Manning: I thank the Member for Fyzabad for giving way again. When people are on a long waiting list, it is not that someone is wicked and malicious and do not want to give them a house. It is because we have built 26,000 houses so far and the demand is over 125,000. That is the reality. It is supply and demand. No matter how urgent a case might be, if no house is available at the particular point in time, as is the case now, then there is nothing the authorities could do about it. I went to the office yesterday and I saw a number of people who came for housing. There is none available at this time. You could do nothing about it. You sympathize with them because the cases are indeed deserving cases, but unless a house is available, there is nothing you can do. That is why we take the approach that we accelerate the housing construction programme.

Mr. C. Sharma: Hon. Prime Minister, I identify with what you are saying. The disturbing development is that too many people do not know what is happening. The information is not spread. I agree that there are 26,000 units, but oftentimes whether the perception is right or wrong, many people are of the opinion that they can get a house if they are close to a PNM Member or if they belong to a PNM party group and that has to change. Let us put in the public domain that you have these houses and these are the applicants.

As I listened to the budget presentation of the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara, who is my schoolmate—she is a bit younger than me—but, I am concerned. *[Interruption]*

Mrs. Nunez-Teshiera: And also?

Mr. C. Sharma: Much younger. I would find out. With respect to the quality of life in Trinidad and Tobago, under the current PNM administration, there have

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been major concerns of material well-being. People are concerned about their health. Persons who are diabetic and also cancer patients have to wait long periods to get attention. Persons who need kidney transplants have to travel all over the world at their own cost.

Political stability and security—people are concerned about the security of themselves and their loved ones. That is why the increase in the cost of gasoline is not a good idea. Many people have kids going to classes on evenings. Young girls working in Port of Spain and far areas from home need a motor car. You need to revisit the cost of gas.

Family life has never been as bad as it is in this country. There are too many pains in family homes that we need to revisit that. We are seeing an increase in divorce.

Community life—community groups think that in order to exist, they must be a PNM party group. We have to change that. Let the NGOs, CBOs and faith-based organizations do their work. Whatever funding is available, let it be across the board. Do not do like the previous Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs and give to her PNM friends and family \$46 million and not a dog bark. [*Interruption*] I said the former Minister, not this Minister. I have tremendous love for her.

There is concern about the climate in this country; the wheather patterns. We must start to address it. We must look at the drainage, et cetera.

Job security—I come into contact with lots of people. I am concerned about their job security. They are not sure if they are going or coming. There are a number of persons with degrees and there is a long drawn out process to become a teacher. They would go to the Ministry of Education and register and would have to wait on another body, while many schools have vacancies. The Teaching Service Commission does not respond in a quick manner. There are vacancies at Fyzabad Composite School; four of the elementary schools; Siparia Junior Secondary; Siparia Senior Secondary; and the school my friend from in La Brea came from. People want to emphasize and participate in their political beliefs and there must be political freedom. Do not punish people because they support the UNC. Do not do that.

We have spoken about gender equality. The Member for Siparia raised the concern about single mothers.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, this House will now suspend until 5.01 p.m. for the tea beak.

4.31 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. C. Sharma: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. I did raise the concerns of the licensing offices in Trinidad and Tobago. Things have changed in better ways with the appointment of the new Transport Commissioner. There are a number of people, in my capacity as spokesperson on behalf of the Opposition, who bring in trucks. A number of small business people have reported to us that they are having difficulty in getting their trucks licensed. The Minister in his absence—the Minister of Works and Transport has gone from the House. I hope they read the *Hansard* and know that I have raised this concern.

The Minister, in moving the Bill, spoke about traffic congestion. One of the things we want to propose from this side is staggering of the working hours so that not everybody needs to get to the main cities at the same time. Many people come from deep South and East. They are already leaving their homes between 4.00 a.m. and 5.00 a.m. and getting home between 6.00 p.m. to 8.00 p.m. One of the considerations for the Government is to allow a four-day workweek, getting the same five-day hours, because you need 40 hours. In four days you can do the number of hours that would give you the 40. You can remove, give or take, a day of the week because it would be changing 20,000 cars on the road. That is one thing you may want to consider.

Recently we have been seeing an increase in road rage. I want to appeal, through the amount of money that the Government spends on public ads showing the faces of Minister, to the Minister to provide education and counselling for drivers who may need that kind of thing.

In addition, the time has come, because of the number of road accidents we are seeing, that public drivers, in the first instance taxi drivers and drivers of commercial vehicles, should be allowed or assisted in doing some kind of first aid courses to assist people with CPR, because we are seeing too many accidents of that kind.

It is without doubt that this budget—I have listened to Members opposite and to 17 budgets in this House—I must confess, did not really come over too well. Something was lost in it. I think it is because the Government has lost its will to love people and to be kind and caring. The budget came over rigid. It did not seem to demonstrate that we are about people. This budget is intended to add value to people's life. The Minister would want to consider, in a very serious and meaningful way, in her response to revisit some of the measures she is introducing, which are really punishing people.

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Since I came soon after the Minister of Works and Transport, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, it is clear that the Minister either treats this House with contempt or has no respect for this House because he comes and rehash the same thing he does in every budget. He has fooled nobody at the end of the day. Infrastructure in this country has totally collapsed and he really needs to revisit. He needs to develop some mannerism. Certainly, he has to know that we care about him and we love him. He is a Member of this House family and something is wrong.

I had to come back to say that during the tea break I got 17 text messages saying: "Let the Minister go to church, the mosque for counselling." I do not know. They said: "Let him talk to Dr. Gopeesingh." I do not know. I am best known in my constituency for helping people and having a high success rate for helping people. I am prepared to help him. It is clear from this debate that the PNM stands for "Promises Never Materializing". Again, we see that today.

I kept the best for last. Unfortunately, the Member for Siparia is not in her chair, but she did a fantastic job. We are very, very proud. I want to advise Members opposite. You gain absolutely no points getting personal; absolutely none. You are Members of Parliament and Ministers of Government and your job is to deliver. We score no points. You would notice in our debates that we would have no personal attacks. We would speak the truth. We would state the facts without fear or favour. We would deal with the issues. We would tell you when you go wrong. We would show you where the corruption is and tell you how you are living off the corruption, if in fact you are. But, at the end of the day, we are just like you, citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, taking the oath of office to serve. We are concerned about all the people, whether they live in Laventille, Cedros, Point Fortin or Fyzabad. We love everybody. We come from a leadership.

One must not discount that Mr. Panday has given 40 years of his life. I have been associated with Mr. Panday for 38 years. Mr. Panday has never bought an inch of land in this country. He has never bought property in this country. He has devoted his life. Many of us would do similar. Let us look at the bigger picture and save Trinidad and Tobago and love people. Let us feel it. Say you love the person next to you.

Thank you very much.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Esther Le Gendre): Madam Deputy Speaker, I am honoured to have this opportunity to contribute to this honourable House and participate in the debate on the national Budget 2009, which was presented by the Minister of Finance on Monday, September 22, 2008.

I am constrained to bring this debate back to the issue at hand which is really the 2008/2009 Budget. This budget outlines a strategy towards sectors relating to energy, industry, agriculture, tourism and financial services.

The Member for Fyzabad appears to have been raising three issues generally: the efficiency of Government's spending, the appropriateness of certain developmental initiatives and some vague discomfort with the social programmes, which I am sure the Minister of Social Development will address in due course.

What is lacking in this submission from the other side is the sharing of a vision; an alternative beyond criticism and griping. I am still without any idea how Members on the other side really view Government's plans for the International Financial Centre; the plan for national industrial growth and diversification; the scope of infrastructural and other development; the National Highways Programme; plans to enhance national savings; the Rapid Rail Transport System; the plan for national skills development; the expansion of the water service; the policy shift proposed for the health sector; the establishment of a Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority; the reform of the Property Tax Regime; and measures for enhancing community development and culture, sport and education.

5.10 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the budget addresses all these issues. If the Opposition is to do more than oppose, it must at least analyse our budget proposals for the people; acknowledge the good if they care to do so; and provide reasonable alternatives where they see fit. What is lacking in the submissions on the other side is the long view, and such a view would take a particular perspective of the requirements of national transformation and the non-partisan collaboration that can certainly help to speed it up.

The Minister of Finance in her maiden budget presentation noted, among other things, that the Government recognizes that a sound education system is the strongest catalyst for national development, poverty reduction and the building of an inclusive society. This catalytic role of education in shaping our future together was further strengthened in the statement "Human resource development is pivotal to achieving our medium and long term goals." This explains our comprehensive interventions into education starting from early childhood care, right through the primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

As we progress along the journey to developed country status by 2010, we remain committed to fulfilling the national mandate for creating a human resource base of highly skilled and well-educated people aspiring to a local culture of excellence that is driven by equal access to learning opportunities.

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The transformation of the education landscape in Trinidad and Tobago is also a continuation of the reformed initiatives of the Education Policy Paper 1993—2003 and the ministry's own Strategic Plan 2008—2012. Moreover, the fiscal measures contained in this budget mark seven years of sustained comprehensive reform of the education system. The ministry's own corporate plan takes its queue from the guidelines espoused in Vision 2020.

May I remind this honourable House that Vision 2020 speaks of excellence in education; the development of imaginative intellectual and spirited learners. Moreover, the Ministry's plan is underpinned by our own philosophical tenet that every child can learn and it focuses on building the enabling environment that makes this a reality for all learners. As such, our strategic priorities over the next year are simple and threefold. It is about focusing on the school; it is about changing the ministry; and it is about involving our community.

Education at both the early childhood to secondary levels as well as the tertiary level has been given the lion's share of resources. Each year the budget gets high audience ratings as everyone waits to hear: What is in it for me. As successive governments have sought to respond to the needs of citizens, somewhere along the line the steady stream of measures to improve the quality of life of each of us got translated into a "goody bag" and for some governments, not the PNM, the "goody bag" became a bag of tricks, smoke and mirrors and empty measures sweet in goat mouth.

Madam Deputy Speaker, to those led to believe that this particular budget has nothing for them or as the Member for Fyzabad said he was looking for something else, I ask them to look to education, because if they are paying taxes it is because they have a job; if they have a job they owe it to education; and if they are my age or younger they paid nothing, if anything at all for it.

For those who have children and grandchildren—and that is practically everyone here—here is what you are getting. Madam Deputy Speaker, every child in Trinidad and Tobago, as opposed to children anywhere else in the western hemisphere, receives a free education inclusive of core textbooks. [*Desk thumping*] For those who are disadvantaged, free meals and transport as well. So, if you live anywhere else in the western hemisphere, you would have to pay the average cost of educating a child at a newly constructed ECCEC of \$21,318 per year. That is what goes back to the parents of children who are in early childhood education. [*Desk thumping*]

At the primary level, what goes back into your pocket and what is in this budget for you this year embedded in the Ministry of Education's budget is

\$14,258 for a child at the primary level. If you have a child at the secondary school level, what is not coming out of your pocket this year is \$12,570. [*Desk thumping*] This is an investment that my Government is happy to make, because we understand that an investment in education is really an investment in the most important asset of any nation, its people. We do not lose anything in comparison.

For the budget year 1999/2000, the expenditure on education was \$1.4 billion and in 2008 \$4.3 billion. More importantly, the expenditure on development in education in 1999—2000 was \$160 million and today it is \$775.6 million. The private rates of return on education average 15 per cent while the social rates of return average about 10 per cent. Few investments can boast of such returns.

The advantage of an investment in education is the great amount of really positive spillover that you can have. For instance, education assists in addressing inflationary trends since education assists the consumer to make better choices. It assists in the development of good citizenry and social cohesion, et cetera and all of these things facilitate a stable economy.

Education and training have proven over the years to be a productivity augmenting function, one of which advances GDP growth; that is to say, an educated worker out produces an uneducated worker any day. Education is also essential for maintaining stable civilization; understanding trade and interdependence and, therefore, it fosters economic growth and social development. And so, we focus on the schools and developing a strong human resource based infrastructure.

Madam Deputy Speaker, to date, we have constructed 21 ECCECs and another 18 are in the ground. This is in keeping with the budget promise of 2007/2008 to have 33 centres either built or at various stages of construction. Between the years 2001—2008, we have built 20 primary schools and renovated another 30; we have built 22 secondary schools—[*Interruption*]—I am coming to you just now. You just wait on your turn. You see that foolishness about you built 100 schools, I have it right here. This is in direct contradiction to the UNC's claims.

We are constrained not to use the "I" word in the House, but I really do not know how else to describe it, but as an outright lie, the claims on the other side that they have constructed 100 schools in their tenure. I know the Member for St. Augustine could count, so I could only assume, in all good faith that was another case of bad information, because this was the UNC's record. They constructed 38 ECCECs—take notes and count—23 primary schools; and 11 secondary schools and the Biche High School was included. That is a total of 73 schools, while in both Houses they have been lying to the people claiming that they have built 100 schools.

Mr. Warner: How much did you build?

Hon. E. Le Gendre: I just told you. For the period, 20 primary schools and we renovated 30; 22 secondary schools and we extended 10—*[Interruption]* I am going to hand it to you before the end of my contribution. I suppose their claim about building all these schools was to aim at universal secondary education.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there was a curious article which was created on March 08, 2002 by one Ria Taitt writing for—it does not say here. I am sure that it is not the *Newsday*. That article suggests:

“Government could have achieved the goal of universal secondary education without building the 20 new schools, the Inter-American Development Bank stated in a letter to the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education. The letter was copied to Education Minister...”

Now, the hon. Member for Siparia.

“The Bank, in a letter dated February 17, 2000, stated that while government was saying that the rationale for accelerating the construction of all schools by 2001 was the need to achieve universal secondary education, an examination of the information showed otherwise.

In fact, the Bank said, that ‘a closer examination of the information and analysis indicated that ‘universal secondary education is not the primary factor driving the construction of new schools’, ‘nor’, it added, ‘is the completion of the 20 new schools by 2001 critical to achieving the goals of the SEMP...’. The Bank did not identify what it believed was the primary motive behind the construction programme.”

Madam Deputy Speaker, time and time again, we are asked about the Biche High School, the same school that the Inter-American Development Bank recommended unfit for occupancy. This came fast on the heels of the shutting down of a \$30-million Ibis High School on Sackville Street, Port of Spain. *[Interruption]* I have articles by Harry Partap. He was really good in those days. In those days the Member took a different view of the non-opening of schools. He actually took the then Minister of Education, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, to task. Perhaps, you would like to have some copies. They were well written.

Madam Deputy Speaker, our focus on schools leads to the development of ICT that will maximize output and our return on investment. Under this Government, with few exceptions that relate to schools that are either under construction or to be expanded, every primary and secondary school can boast of a computer lab which gives access to computers to every student.

5.25 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in 2005, 340 out of 478 primary schools were equipped, and in 2008, the equipping of the remaining 139 schools with computer labs began, with infrastructural work on another 123 schools. Research findings show that a strong education system focuses on trainability, adaptability, flexibility, the development of analytical and critical thinking skills. It also promotes the development of the so-called affective traits, the human mystic elements such as respect for others that the Member for Fyzabad, when he was here—

That is another disturbing trend I notice from the Members on the other side. They stand before us and as long as the camera is on them they speak, and as soon as the cameras move away they do not have the courtesy to listen to the response of the Members on the other side. The Member for Siparia being the most famous example of that, and I see the Member for Fyzabad is fast following; not at all the Member for Mayaro, he is always here, you should take a page out of his book. Manners it is called.

We continue to provide the physical infrastructure that supports a diversified and world of work curriculum that incorporates information, communication and technology as well as vocational training. This Government is proud that in this particular budget we continue to expand our thrust to provide a Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ) to students in Trinidad and Tobago. The CVQ is a competency-based qualification and students must demonstrate competence in Caricom-approved occupational standards developed by practitioners and employers as well as industry experts. These standards are organized in units and students may earn units towards achieving a complete CVQ.

I am happy to say that to date, 700 students have been awarded CVQ certification and in 2008, the programme is expanding and there are 1,545 students enrolled to receive this certification in 2008. What the CVQ is, it is the introduction of 24 skills and subject areas into our schools so that those students who are not solely academically inclined can have an alternative, which can provide them with proper training and acceptance into the world of work, which can allow them to be able to pursue a career of their choice after leaving school.

We are also proud of the fact that we have deshifted the last of the junior secondary schools [*Desk thumping*] and through this, we are able to provide equitable and quality access to five- and seven-year schools for the full day rather than the half-day basis on which the shift system operated.

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In 1993 to 2003, the Government of the day—not the PNM—had proposed a deshifting of schools. [*Interruption*] I am talking about the period 1995 specifically to 2001, when despite your proposal between the years 1993 and the education policy, which was set in 1993, not one single school was deshifted under the UNC government. It took a caring Government—in case the Member for Fyzabad wants to know how we demonstrate our caring—to undertake that deshifting as soon as it came into the Government in 2002, and we are happy that the last of those schools have been deshifted and are in operation.

Through sustained efforts at reform, we are creating an enabling environment at the Ministry, one that speaks to decentralized structures and improved service delivery. In this regard, I am pleased to inform this honourable House that we have recently completed proprietary work for a multiphase 10-year loan project for the seamless education system programme in partnership with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). There are provisions in this year's budget for the Government's responsibilities under this particular programme.

This seamless education programme will see enhancements to early childhood education, to build management, enrolment capacity and to ensure sustainability of quality at this level. Under the IDB project, we will build 50 of these centres.

The hon. Member for Fyzabad mentioned that in his time, it cost \$250,000 to build an ECCE centre, and you will recall that they built 38 of these ECCE centres. Quite apart from the fact that we are busy repairing all of those centres today, as a result of shoddy workmanship and cheap materials, the centres built at that time and the centres you see today, chalk and cheese. [*Desk thumping*]

We invite the Members on the other side to visit. I think the Member for Mayaro could surely bear me out on this because his community has been one of the first beneficiaries of the state-of-the-art ECCE centres and he was happy to sit beside me and open one earlier this year. [*Desk thumping*] He can tell you that for the first time there are computers in the classrooms of our three- and four-year-olds, [*Desk thumping*] even though he had nothing to do with it. Chalk and cheese. What they pay for today is quality education, quality environment so that we can begin the transformation of our citizens for the long term.

I understand the Member for Siparia was saying in the media some time ago that the building of ECCE centres and other infrastructural problems will only serve to heat up the economy. I do not know whether she was proposing that we halt the march to enhancements in the education system by fixing, from the very beginning some of issues. We have issues of literacy, moral ethics and values, teamwork, that we are addressing today with our three- and four-year-olds;

whether she is saying do not build these centres and let us go on as before. Fortunately, for the country, this is not the view on this side and we plan to build 601 of these centres by the year 2012. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, on the other side they are saying it is not going to happen. If it does not happen we will certainly die trying. This year the spokesmen for the Members on the other side, when we presented the accelerated programme for 150 ECCE centres were busy all over the press, *Newsday*, et cetera saying that this is not possible, nobody will be interested in that; there is no capacity among local contractors; the project is too big; you cannot build them in “graps” of 10 or 50 or 100. Eighty local contractors responded to our calls for expressions of interest to build these ECCE centres at a pace. So that whatever happens we will continue to try and whatever we do, we will move towards the 601 centres by the year 2012.

Curriculum revision at the primary level creates backward and forward linkages with these ECCE centres and the secondary levels respectively, assessment and testing as well as Spanish as the first foreign language. The linkages of this are a feature with our proposals for a diversified economy, expanded trade and the establishment of the Trinidad and Tobago International Financial Centre are obvious. Teacher professional development is another aspect of the seamless education system project that we now have with the IDB.

Hon. ladies and gentlemen, we have added to the Trinidad and Tobago thesaurus words like: inclusiveness, seamlessness in education. I wish to emphasize that our efforts for fiscal 2009 are being built on the achievements for fiscal 2008. In 2008, our reform initiatives continued to build the bridge connecting our current reality to our vision of the future. The skills taught at the nation's schools are knowledge and skills required in the 21st Century.

In accordance with the national model for education in Trinidad and Tobago, which was developed in 2007, we have now established eight core subjects in forms I to III, those are: English, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Spanish, Visual and Performing Arts, Technology, Education and Physical Education.

The Ministry's core business is the overall education and development of our students. In 2007/2008, our performance versus budget in all areas of such development is evidenced by our performance in the ECCE sector where we were absolutely on target. We also promised to train 300 ECCE teachers and administrators. To date, I am happy to say that we have trained and deployed 78 administrators

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and teachers. Another 32 are in year one as assistant teachers; 18 are in the second year at UWI and 14 in the final year. There are 78 teachers currently enrolled pursuing certificates in ECCE training; another 32 are enrolled in degree programmes. In addition to this, there is a first cohort of 700 teachers set to graduate in 2010.

Madam Deputy Speaker, with this emphasis on teacher training, we also reduced the number of pupils scoring 30 per cent or less at the SEA. The turnaround has begun with a definite improvement in SEA results. In 2008, as you know, 17,855 students wrote the SEA exams, with 15,473 students or 87 per cent, scoring more than 30 per cent. This, again, represents an increase over 2007.

5.40 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, of note, what happened in the year 2000 was a crime. A crime perpetrated against the children of Trinidad and Tobago in the guise of secondary education for all whether you were ready or not.

The Member for Siparia stands here on occasion and continues to defend an ill-advised decision reached without consultation with anyone in the Ministry of Education, because she is on record in *Hansard* as saying that she got a bright idea one day and she went to her boss and said, “Wouldn't it be good if we sent everybody off to school?”; without infrastructure—”

Dr. Moonilal: What reference to *Hansard*?

Hon. E. Le Gendre: You can go back. I am absolutely certain about what I am saying—without teaching training, with nothing but a desire to please her master. [*Interruption*]

To hear her tell the story, she approached her boss just before election with the bright idea and that idea in 2005 and 2006—the result of that was that we saw a decrease in the students who gained five subjects or more at CXC. We first saw a decrease of 5.8 per cent in 2005 and a whopping 12.4 per cent in 2006, a further .8 per cent in 2007, over the previously high levels set in 2004.

Thank God for the PNM. Since 2001 the remediation programmes which ought to have been in place—when that step was taken, when education for all, whether you passed or failed—have now been put in place and slowly but surely the reversal of the damage done has begun. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Secondary School Technical Upgrade and Expansion Programme has also continued. Eleven secondary schools are being upgraded and/or replaced to meet the requirements of a modernized curriculum, as well as

to facilitate the deshifting and the conversion of schools which have been completed. At the secondary level our long-term goal is to ensure that 80 per cent of students leave school with appropriate certification. The National Certificate of Secondary Education Level I examinations were conducted in 11 subject areas between May and June 2008 for 17,556 students at 140 secondary schools.

Madam Deputy Speaker, 41.3 per cent of Form V students attained full CSEC certificates representing a 2 per cent increase over 2007 in the number of CSEC graduates achieving five or more passes.

Finally, we have dispelled the curse of 2000. There is hope. We achieved a 94 per cent pass rate at CAPE examinations this year. [*Desk thumping*] For the academic year 2007/2008 this Government awarded 257 national scholarships overall, adding to the award of open scholarships by an additional 24 open scholarships which have been happily accepted by our students.

If you allow me to go off a bit, I really would like to say how happy the Members on this side were to read the words of young Jordanna Deane this morning, when she so simply thanked everyone for their contribution to her success and immediately after that pledged to return to Trinidad and Tobago to be of service to the country. [*Desk thumping*] That is all we wish to have from our students, that they go ahead—[*Interruption*][*Inaudible*] "All yuh hush nah", let me just—

[*Mr. Bharath stands*]

I am not giving way, Sir. Would you like me to give way?

Mr. Warner: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. E. Le Gendre: This is a debate; I am sure that the Member for Chaguanas West who also has one hour and 15 minutes is going to do himself proud. [*Crosstalk*]

The new ECCE curriculum has been standardized at 104 government and government-assisted centres and it exposes our three- and four-year-olds to an integrated approach to child development. At the primary level we have completed the revision and testing of the curriculum for Social Studies and Science and we have introduced Spanish as the first foreign language in 30 primary schools for Standards 1 to 5. At the secondary level we now have one national curriculum—

Mr. Bharath: Minister, thanks for giving way. Just for clarification. I did not hear you mention exactly how many of the ECCE centres you have built so far. Just for my own clarification, I am sorry. If you said it I am sorry.

Hon. E. Le Gendre: There were seven of those schools built in 2007 and this year there were 14.

Mr. Partap: Where?

Hon. E. Le Gendre: How do you mean where? Are you not seeing them opened? I am on television every week opening new ones: [*Interruption*] Mayaro; Little Gems—

Hon. Member: Mayaro?

Hon. E. Le Gendre: Yes. Ask the Member for Mayaro, he can tell you. [*Desk thumping*]—Santa Flora; Arranguez North; Arranguez South; Chinapoo Village; Morvant; Toco—[*Crosstalk*]

Do you want me to go on, there are 19 you know? I cannot remember all but—

Mr. Partap: You opened the schools.

Hon. E. Le Gendre: No, not opened them, they were built and they are in operation. This is not a UNC operation. We built, we opened and they are in operation. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Bharath: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. E. Le Gendre: Nineteen in all. Nineteen total! Seven and 14, and for the year 2008 there are 33 centres started. Fourteen already built and opened, another four in late stages of completion and another 18 in the ground. Does that answer your question?

Mr. Bharath: Seven in 2007 built; 14 built this year, is that correct?

Hon. Member: Go ahead Minister. [*Crosstalk*] Proceed.

Hon. E. Le Gendre: I know you had a little problem with the maths just now with that 100 schools you thought you built. [*Crosstalk*] We will talk after.

Madam Deputy Speaker, to get back on track, the ministry's Information and Communications Technology Programme continued in fiscal 2008. ICT in education will ultimately facilitate the development of individuals capable of functioning in a technology-driven knowledge-based society. In this regard, the establishment of computer facilities at schools continued with the installation of a total of 9,640 computers at schools nationwide, including 22 computers at ECCE centres. We have established network computer laboratories at 339 primary schools and commenced work, as I said earlier, on the remaining 139. We have established network computer laboratories at 127 secondary schools and at five public special

schools and works are ongoing on another three. We have provided high speed Internet connections at 83 primary schools and 97 secondary schools.

During the fiscal year to increase confidence and effectiveness in the use of ICT in the teaching and learning environment we also undertook the following: We trained 680 primary school teachers in basic network administration and we trained another 532 secondary school teachers in network administration and classroom management software.

The focus on teacher training and development is ongoing and forms a part of the budget proposals in 2008/2009. In 2007/2008 there were 88 scholarships awarded, bringing the total number of pre-service student/teachers pursuing the bachelor of education at the UTT to 288. Four hundred and seventy two teachers participated in professional development workshops in over 15 educational areas. The skills of 35 untrained teachers were upgraded during the July/August period of 2008. Four hundred secondary school teachers were trained to deliver the revised ICT curriculum at the Form V level. The skills of another 200 teachers were upgraded to facilitate the integration of ICT in teaching and in learning. Seventy teachers have completed the first year of a bachelors—

Madam Deputy Speaker: The speaking time of the hon. Minister of Education has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Hon. E. Le Gendre: I notice the Member for Chaguanas West has a headline about plagiarism. I would think that he would be the last person to mention the word. [Interruption] School administration was strengthened by the following—

Mr. Warner: I am coming to you on Monday.

Hon. E. Le Gendre: Push on plagiarism? You really want to go there? [Inaudible]

Mr. Warner: Monday I am coming with this. [Holds up document]

Hon. E. Le Gendre: You want to go there?

Dr. Moonilal: Tell us, tell us, Minister. [Laughter]

Hon. E. Le Gendre: You do not want to go there, trust me.

Mr. Warner: Monday, I am coming.

Hon. E. Le Gendre: He said he is coming; we will hold it in the back pocket. When he comes on Monday we will tell him what we know about plagiarism and where.

Mr. Speaker, our school administration was strengthened by the following: the installation of 159 new teachers; 160 heads of department and 261 senior teachers at the primary level. We were able to hire 357 new teachers, 343 heads of department and 323 deans were deployed at the secondary level.

The Cabinet has also agreed to the establishment and piloting of a new administrative structure for 22 secondary schools to provide, among other things; 22 new vice principals for curriculum and administration; 22 administrative officers; 127 ICT technicians; 254 learning support assistants and 22 clerks.

Mr. Speaker, if I go on and on about the numbers—all of this is simply to bring the attention of the Members on the other side and the members of the public at large who might be looking on at this debate to the measures that are contained in the budget 2008/2009, and to answer the question: where the money goes; to answer the question of efficiency in Government spending, and to answer the questions about our investment in our human assets.

5.55 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to provide our students with the tools for success. A total of 257,795 students from the early childhood to the secondary level, as well as special education, technical and vocational schools have benefitted from the provision of text books and other educational resources. Under the UNC, these features did not exist.

Mr. Hartap: We did not have the money.

Hon. E. Le Gendre: As a matter of fact—you never had the money. It is what you do with it. If you had gotten back some from the airport, do you know what you could have done with that money you all wasted? [*Crosstalk*] The fiscal measures—Minister of Education expenditure, is that clear enough for you? Mr. Speaker, our school nutrition policy was drafted to ensure that each child can access at least one nutritious meal per school day and under the school nutrition programme, approximately 100,221 daily lunches and 51,099 daily breakfast meals were delivered to 883 schools, inclusive of 181 public ECCE centres, primary and secondary schools.

Mr. Speaker, one really needs to compare what was happening in 2001, because in 2001, the Members on the other side saw it fit to provide only 88,000 meals of any kind, three times per week. In 2008, we are providing in excess of

160,000 meals every day. [*Desk thumping*] The measures that are contained and supported in the 2008/2009 budget would not be effectively managed, were it not for the support of our international cooperation initiatives and the unit which was established by this Government in 2004, to collaborate with regional and international agencies for the provision of technical assistance to the Ministry of Education.

These initiatives have resulted in assistance for teacher education and reform, early childhood education policy and our CVQ programme. We have also established a Student Support Service Division which is growing. It is a multi-disciplinary team which delivers guidance and counselling, diagnostic and prescriptive services, social work and special education services to students, as well as parents. Phase II of our phase rollout to 2013 is on the way at an annual cost of \$25 million.

The Ministry of Education in the 2008/2009 budget continues to pay fees for all students registered in private special schools, and funding for the upkeep of these premises to the tune of \$15 million annually. Beginning in 2006, 2008 will see the completion of a review of the Education Act which has already begun. Our budget in 2008/2009 will support the substitute teacher management system, which has been introduced, with a pool of approximately 500 teachers already in place. I think it is good information for this House to note, that an ICT census report gave us a good rating of 97.1 per cent of teachers and 96.9 per cent of students are now computer literate. [*Desk thumping*] That is where our budget spending goes.

Mr. Speaker, in winding up, I have two points I would like to leave with the Members of this honourable House. The 2008/2009 budget represents a single milestone on the road to developed country status. We have taken some steps before and we still have same way to go. The second point that I would like to make is that in presenting this budget, we have held true to the principle that the main purpose of Government is the welfare of the people, and that all economic and social programmes must redound to the individual and collective well-being.

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

Mr. Winston Peters (*Mayaro*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Manning: I want to reply to you.

Mr. W. Peters: I do not mind you replying to me, that is all right. Mr. Speaker, last Monday I was subjected to three hours of regurgitation and an idea free presentation [*Desk thumping*] by a Minister of Finance, who by her own admittance—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Admission.

Mr. W. Peters: By her own admission? Okay, that is all right. Do not worry about that—who by her own admission—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. W. Peters: —admitted that she knows nothing about finance, and who was given the mantel of Finance Minister by a former Finance Minister, who also declared that he is not good with handling money.

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. W. Peters: You forget you said that. When they wanted to foreclose on your house, you said you are not good with money—Just let me remind you. Okay.

Mr. Speaker, it is no wonder that today, our country is in the state that it is in, even though we have a great deal of money flowing through this country, moneys that flow so much that the average man and woman in Trinidad and Tobago, today, are not feeling the impact of the windfall that we have here. I want to say that I heard the Government boasting that it is because of their prudence. That has nothing to do with the Government's prudence, if you were living in Timbuktu and you had money coming from oil, everybody would have had it. [*Desk thumping*] Why they are not feeling it: we have to take out "manage" and put "mis" in front of manage. They cannot feel it because of the mismanagement of this Government. Today, for yet another time, I have to sit here and suffer through the arrogance of the Member for Diego Martin North/East.

The Member for Diego Martin North/East comes here today, boasts and talks about all the things that he has accomplished and all that he has in the pipeline. Well, the PNM government is known for having things in the pipeline that never come out. So, today, I had a good laugh because the fraternity from which I come is one that makes people laugh and makes people happy; so he made me laugh at sadness.

When he talks about building a road from Point Fortin to Mayaro—now the truth be told that since I was in primary school—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: He did not say that. He said from Penal to Mayaro.

Mr. W. Peters: He building from Penal to Mayaro. “All yuh not going Point again? [*Laughter*] All yuh shorten it.” No problem, I can understand why. We forgive you. We forgive you for shortening it. If I were the Member for San

Fernando East, I would shorten it too. I would not go Point because you could not even build one from the racetrack in Arima in four years, to join up with a dual highway to Wallerfield. So if I were you, I would have shortened it myself.

So, when the Member for Diego Martin North/East comes here and tells us about building highways from Penal to Mayaro and from Manzanilla to Mayaro, we know that my great-great-grandchildren will never see that as long as the PNM stays in power. [*Desk thumping*] The only place that I have heard more jokes than that—and while he was presenting it, not only did he sound like a comedian, he looked like one too—was in a Learie Joseph show. Nobody would take him seriously because what he was saying there has been said over and over and over and over. I must say the one thing I could give him credit for; he is a truthful man, because anybody who could come here and say the same thing over and over without making a mistake must be telling the truth. But the thing about it is, when would that ever materialize.

Mr. Speaker, before he sits down and learns something about what people are saying about our country, he stands there and mouths off and mouths off and mouths off everything about things that he knows for a fact, he cannot fulfil. But it sounds good to the people out there, probably those who do not know better. I believe that the only people who would take the Member for Diego Martin North/East seriously, are diehard fans and sycophants because nobody else would take him seriously. When we speak about the economic hit man, I think that it is important that he should take some time and learn about what the economic hit man is, if he does not already know because it exists in this country—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. W. Peters: No, I am not going to tell you anything because I am better at singing than talking.

Mr. Manning: Sing it for us. [*Laughter*]

Mr. W. Peters: So the next song that I am going to make since he “ain’t” believe in the economic hit man, is one called the “Exposure of an economic bagman and his baggers”. [*Desk thumping*] So when I write the song, “Exposure of an economic—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: Give us the first verse of the song.

Mr. W. Peters: You want to hear it?

Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. W. Peters: Mr. Speaker, do you want to hear it?

[*Mr. Speaker indicated no, by shaking his head*]

Mr. W. Peters: Oh. [*Laughter*] You see, it is not you.

6.10p.m.

I want to tell him that the time would come when you would hear it. Do not worry; I hope when you hear it, you like it. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, as I stand I want to take some time to congratulate one of my constituents, Ms. Jordana Deane; I want to congratulate her mother and father, [*Desk thumping*] because, like myself, they are from the village, Navet.

Hon. Member: I thought you were from Couva.

Mr. W. Peters: I am from Mayaro; my grandparents are from Navet. I am the quintessential Trinidadian. [*Laughter*]

When you are from that part of the country, it is really hard. I want to tell the Minister that I listened to her when she made her contribution.

Mr. Manning: And you liked some of the things you heard.

Mr. W. Peters: I like some of the things I heard; I am an honest man. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. W. Peters: Jordana and persons like herself do not have it easy. I have children right in Navet in my constituency, and Biche, who cannot go to school because the bus on which they travelled to go to school has been taken away from them.

Mr. Imbert: Not true.

Mr. W. Peters: I have 11 children. I am going to supply you with the names, Madam Minister. They cannot go to school. I also have children there who have passed their exam to go to school in Princes Town and Mayaro, but their farming parents cannot afford to send them. So while the Minister boasted about the schools and how well they were doing, I want her to know that there are persons who have fallen off the train. You have to pay attention to them as well. It is, indeed, persons from the countryside.

The people in Port of Spain could walk to school. If you had opened the Biche High School or built the other one that was supposed to be built—as a matter fact, I was told to tell you that the land which you said they should find and vest into

the Ministry, they have found it. I hope by next year you would not have to come here and make that kind of excuse again. They have been kicked off the bus, so they cannot go to school.

The Minister boasted and talked about the early childhood centres (ECC) she has built. We have three of them in my constituency and I am happy for that. [*Desk thumping*] May I remind you that they are understaffed and the children cannot teach themselves. In order for them to learn anything, it has to be staffed. I have persons in the constituency who have certificates, degrees and stuff, in education. They have applied for the jobs; they are just not getting any reply, because the reply is long in coming.

Hon. Member: Jobs for the boys!

Mr. W. Peters: I guess “jobs for the boys” is right. “Allyuh taking all de jobs for your boys and girls too.”

Hon. Member: You have a list of names?

Mr. W. Peters: I do have a list of names, because I keep some names on file that we could use to staff these schools.

With a budget of \$49.4 billion, this Government continues to spend plenty, but their implementation and delivery is minimal and pathetic, at best.

Hon. Member: How many schools did you get?

Mr. W. Peters: There are three early childhood centres; you were supposed to build 700. I did not get any. [*Crosstalk*] I do not need any.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. W. Peters: We would have thought that when this Government presented its budget, they would have told the people how many beds would be purchased for our hospitals, and how they would be distributed in each facility; what improvements there would be to the public health care sector. [*Interruption*] I read the document, why do you feel I wrote this?

Hon. Member: Read the document!

Mr. W. Peters: The thing about it is that those documents have been presented time and time again, but we wanted you to tell us how many we were going to get and when they would be distributed. That is what we wanted you to tell us, not to put it in some book and put it in some far place where people cannot

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even see it. We wanted to know what new measures and resources would be spent to deal with and alleviate the level of flooding across the country.

We wanted to know how much money would be equally and equitably allocated to the regional corporations too under the proposed increased roles and responsibilities, because, as you know, they are putting additional responsibilities in reforming the regional corporations. At the same time, the moneys are not there for these people. How would Government bring about relief to the consumers who are traumatized by the high food prices in the country? Then again, what could this clueless and inept regime do? What could they do that they have not done already? They have tried everything. We want to know what they would do to alleviate and eliminate the monstrous level of crime, criminality and violence raging across the country.

Mr. Speaker, as I stand here and speak to you, I do not know if I could say celebrate. I know that before this week is done, we might very well be celebrating the 400th murder in our country.

Hon. Members: Celebrate?

Mr. W. Peters: Well, it comes like a celebration, because everyday you hear it all over the place. What are you doing about it? That is what we thought we would hear in the budget. [*Desk thumping*] That is what we thought you would tell us. It is, indeed, a big achievement for them, because "dey say" everything going up, so I guess that is just another level of the rise in what you have created.

This Government has been shameless in its repetition of so many unfulfilled promises of budgets between 2002 and 2008. I want to identify just a few. I want to say to you that my background is culture; that is where I came from. I am really a culture person; I am a people's person. I am a successful one too, if I may say so; very successful. [*Desk thumping*]

In 2003, the Government promised to develop the National Strategic Plan for Culture with widespread consultation. This is five years later; we have no consultation, we have no plan. They promised to collaborate with Pan Trinbago for rehabilitation of the pan yards throughout the country; that was five years ago. I hope that when the Minister of Culture and Gender Affairs gets up she would say exactly how much they have rehabilitated so far.

Mr. Dumas: Thirty-six.

Mr. W. Peters: Thirty-six pan yards? "Dey must be do all that in Tobago alone."

Mr. Dumas: Go walking and you will find them.

Mr. W. Peters: They promised to implement a pan in the classroom programme. In 2004, they came back with more promises. They promised to have a mobile pan institute. Now that you are there, Junior, I guess you could help them do something about it, but so far "yuh dey for a year and I eh think yuh do nothing". [Laughter] It "must be" only Skiffle Bunch pan yard alone, and that is because it is near to the Member for San Fernando East. [Interruption] I am strong in any area. [Laughter]

They said that Government would develop a strategic plan for the development of the culture and creative arts; that was in 2004. A new state-of-the-art National Carnival Centre; they said that phase one would commence in March 2006, immediately after Carnival, at a cost—and "dey boldface", they gave a cost as well—of \$450 million. They said that it would be completed in 2007. I am here to ask of you today: What has become of our National Carnival Centre? This year in the budget they have more promises again.

We do not even have a National Carnival Commission (NCC) board right this minute.

Dr. Moonilal: "Who running Carnival?"

Mr. W. Peters: I think Carnival is remotely controlled; it is going to be run from White Hall or wherever they move to. [Crosstalk]

In 2007, they came back with more promises. We have not heard about the completion of the headquarters for Pan Trinbago, which is a national eyesore. If anybody goes up on the highway on a regular basis, in Trincity—the Member for San Fernando West really should be talking about this, but because his tongue has been tied, it falls on me to talk about it. I could talk. "He cyar say nothing; yuh cyar fire me, so me eh care." The Member for San Fernando West cannot say anything; poor "fella"; I feel sorry for him. All the time "he there" you made him junior Minister, now he "cyar even say a word for de people in pan". They have an eyesore up on the highway. This is happening long after the UNC gave this land to the pan fraternity; long after. As a matter of fact, I was the Chairman of that handing over ceremony, proudly so. They have gotten the money too.

What about the pan museum that was promised to the pan fraternity? This Government has their priorities skewed, for whilst they speak about a nurturing and caring society, token expenditure is allocated for social sector programmes, health security and, of course, for food security.

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I want to speak about calypso too, but I want to speak a little about the Public Sector Investment Programme for 2009.

Hon. Member: Speak about the sinking ship.

Mr. W. Peters: I could speak about that, because we on one right now. Your ship is sinking so fast, that I had to rework it. But I guess all of you would go down on it when the time comes; do not worry.

I am pleading for funding for the completion of the Mayaro Recreation Ground to be transformed. Indeed, the UNC's plan was to transform that into an Eastern Regional Complex, a mini stadium. I am pleading with you today, that with the \$80 million you propose in 2009, we in Mayaro would have a recreational facility becoming of a country which has the kind of money we have.

Under local government there is an urgent need to upgrade the Mafeking cremation site. If you ever go down to that place, you would not believe that it is a place which services the whole region of Mayaro, Rio Claro, Guayaguayare and Biche. We need these things; we need these facilities. When you have a budget of almost \$50 billion, these are the things that the Government is supposed to do. We hear a lot of talk.

Under local government there is an urgent need to upgrade the Mafeking cremation site and the Rio Claro/Mayaro—it is, presently, inadequate, very, very much inadequate. We have a growing population in that part of the country. The facilities we have are really inadequate, so we need that.

I am also calling on the Minister of Finance to consider the urgent reconstruction of the Rio Claro market, which is very dilapidated. We are talking about First World status, we are building a Prime Minister's mansion, we are having water taxis and we are having tall buildings in Port of Spain, while in places like Mayaro and Rio Claro, the market is like a doghouse. Not like my dog house of course, it is better than that, and if I had my own way and money, it would not be like that, but I do not, and the responsibility falls on the Government to do it. When we talk about the kind of budget we have here, we have a right to have better facilities in places like Mayaro, Guyaguayare and Rio Claro from where the bulk of the wealth that sustains Trinidad and Tobago comes. It is a crying shame.

6.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, under the Infrastructure Development Fund, \$200 million has been allocated for physical investment programmes and I do see that they have included extensions for the Mayaro District Health Facility and I welcome this. But the thing is that having it on paper and implementing it is a different story.

Mr. Speaker, given the track record of this Government, I am almost sure that next year we are going to be back here. I can come back with this same paper because you are going to come back with the said thing too. I want to say to the Government that coming here every year and escalating a budget—this Government can come here and present a budget for \$1.00 you know, because I am sure with the \$49 billion it had, maybe before next year it will be back here again to ask for more, because they have a mismanagement problem.

I hear them speak a lot of who are before the courts now. I want to tell Members on the other side that the only reason some of you are not before the court yet is because you are still in office. I want to tell you that the day you step out, which in my belief is not going to be very long, because the people of Trinidad and Tobago cannot take all this suffrage. So some of you might very well be there, because when they can tell the Chief Justice—Mr. Speaker, I do not want to go there. *[Interruption]* I am not casting aspersions, I am futuristic. I am just trying to get some things for the people I represent, the people who voted for me and put me to represent them.

Mr. Speaker, I am saying to you that we have a growing population and while I am happy to see that they have this upgrade of the Mayaro Health Facility, I am saying that we know how they promise things which never happen. Another thing, I would like to see the facility open on a 24-hour basis because at 11 o'clock if you get sick in Mayaro, Guyaguayare, or even Rio Claro where we also have a health facility which was put in place some years ago and indeed, it was supposed to be a 24-hour facility, closes at 8 o'clock right now.

If you get sick there, you either have to go to Sangre Grande or San Fernando and when you do get there, you might end up on a bench or a chair because there are no beds on the ward. Simple things like beds we do not have.

I see funding for development programme under the Ministry of Health is \$326 million for 2009. There is need to revamp this unit for it to become more modernized, proactive and effective. If there is a need to increase the manpower and equipment, do it now.

People are becoming afflicted with dengue, children are dying, there is an outbreak and the health institutions are bursting at their seams and the Minister of Health continues to tell untruths and give people a “Jerry” all the way. But what do you expect when you put square pegs in round holes. What does he know about managing any health facility?

[Mr. Manning rises] “Ah only giving way because yuh is the Prime Minister eh.”

Mr. Manning: Thank you very much, Member for Mayaro. Mr. Speaker, I gather that the Member for Mayaro is disagreeing with the hon. Jerry Narace as Minister of Health. Are you suggesting that a better choice would have been a doctor?

Mr. W. Peters: I suggest that a better choice might have been you, Mr. Prime Minister, but then again, I think I should take that back given how badly you have done in finance. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, there is also a critical need to accelerate the public awareness programme and to enforce the laws that relate to littering and dumping. I know there is a need for that; I heard that from the Secretary for Health in Tobago. We need to have a comprehensive programme so we can protect ourselves and the health ministry is supposed to do that.

We need that because Tobago was a place which never had any dengue. You are spending too much money on the wrong things. We do not mind you spending money; we do not want you to promote it in the newspapers. I heard you spent \$1.3 billion; you do not have to put that in the newspapers to tell people what you are doing, just do it for crying out loud. [*Desk thumping*] If you take the money and do it, there will be no need to promote that in the newspapers. I guess if it is not promoted in the newspapers, then somebody would not be able to line their pockets.

Mr. Speaker, we have to be careful with so many women and children sleeping on the floors and corridors and benches for a long period of time at our hospitals. It is a national disgrace. We have to establish a national surgery fund. We have people from all over the world who come here and do surgeries for us, so if we take some of the money and put it into a national surgery fund, we will be able to tap into that so we will be able to cater for adults and children with life threatening ailments, diseases and disorders which require urgent surgical procedures.

In most instances, these surgeries can only be done abroad. Oftentimes, you see people on the newspapers begging for money in this rich country to send their child away to correct some disorder. Not that they can go in some fund that the Government has, and while the people of the country whose wealth it is, have to go cap in hand begging ordinary citizens for money, there are people from other countries who are benefitting in a big way and riding on the backs of these poor people.

Mr. Speaker, our health care is in shambles. While the Government talks about a \$50 billion budget, beds, medication and things like sheets we cannot get;

when you go into the hospital it smells like a morgue. It gets you sick. I go to visit people and I pray to God not to get sick and have to go there.

Mr. Speaker, with the proliferation of thousands of food establishment in the country, and the potential for airborne and communicable diseases, there is also an urgency to hire more public health inspectors. At present, just in case the Prime Minister does not know, we only have two or three per region.

Mr. Speaker, this Government talks about Vision 2020 but it surely lacks the capacity to be visionary. All it speaks about are the things it is going to do, but we want the Government to have a delivery system. [*Desk thumping*] The physically challenged, infirmed and elderly do not have adequate modern facilities for therapy and rehabilitation, and this is close to my heart.

As I speak my mother is lying on a bed in New York City because she had a stroke and I had to take her out of here to get adequate health care—a country that boasts of a \$50 billion budget. My mother is lying on a bed in New York because she cannot get adequate health care down here.

Mr. Speaker, it is a crying shame and a sad indictment on the Government when people like the Member for Diego Martin North/East can get up and boast in all his arrogance about what he has done and it amounts to really nothing.

I would like to see the construction of at least six therapeutic rehabilitation complexes catering to the needs of these persons. I want to see them in the North, the East, the South, in the West and in Central, of course. It is not too much. [*Interruption*] Well Tobago gets what Tobago wants, so I do not think I have to speak for Tobago, there are two persons across there to do that. So I do not think I have to speak for Tobago, Tobago has its representatives across there who never say anything about Tobago. “I doh know what Tobago people send yuh here for.” I am sure you have heard me speak about Mayaro, the constituency that I represent, but I have never heard you say anything for the people of Tobago. The only time I heard you say anything was during election.

Mr. Dumas: I beg for so many things for you in Mayaro.

Mr. W. Peters: The present facilities at the Port of Spain General Hospital are primitive and inadequate to deal with the care and recovery of persons. I wish the Minister of Health would listen to this; the present facilities at the Port of Spain General Hospital are inadequate and antiquated. It cannot deal with the problems we are having in this country, and with the amount of money we have, there is no need for it to be that way.

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Mr. Speaker, recently I read of a very chilling story on the death of one of my constituents, a young lady named Emily Jemmot. I do not know if you have read about it as well. She was from Mafeking, and she died from renal failure, and her body had to be transferred to a private funeral home and it started decaying because the mortuary at Mount Hope is overcrowded, it is inadequate.

We talk about Vision 2020 and our people in the first place are dying from the inadequacy of this Government, and even after they die they are not given the dignity, they are not kept in a dignified way. So neither the living nor dead could be pleased with what is happening in this country under this Government. Imagine this Government boasts about prudent management of the economy, caring people.

6.40 p.m.

I want to try to say something here. I agree that Trinidad and Tobago has caring people. The people of Trinidad and Tobago are caring people, but this Government is a cruel, callous and heartless bunch of people. [*Desk thumping*]

The story went on to highlight a malfunction of the refrigeration system at the hospital. How could we in a country that has two major hospitals—Mount Hope and Port of Spain; well, and San Fernando; how could we in a country that boasts of \$49 billion or \$50 billion, have malfunctioning refrigerators at a hospital? How could that happen?—at the same time, the opulence of the Prime Minister?

I want to say that I have travelled all over the world and most of the small African countries that I go to, the people are poor even though the country has a lot of money and the hierarchy is always rich and live in some kind of palace and drive around in the nicest of things while the people suffer. As I notice my country from time to time, it is fast becoming like that, where the only people who benefit from the riches of our country are the leaders. It is typical of African countries. We see it all the time and I would hate to think that we are becoming like that.

The story went on to highlight the malfunctioning of the refrigeration. Why are we allowing this situation to develop? Did the Gladys Gafoor Report into the health sector not alert them to these grave deficiencies? Did it not? But it is always this Government's procrastination. They are a government that procrastinates. They do not have the delivery mechanism and the time has come for them to put that in place, to deliver what they promise the people. In some other country they would be brought to book, but in places like this where we are so primordial, we are never able to do the things that we say or take the people to book. [*Interruption*]

Member for Diego Martin North/East, I remember another man who used to be sitting near by you who used to be talking just so. ‘Doh worry.’ Your relegation term is going to come just now. All of you on that side there are viewed as styrotex utensils, you know. You are very disposable.

The constituency that I represent is a multifaceted one. As I said before, most of the wealth that we boast about here comes from that part of our country. I want to touch briefly on the agriculture and food sector. In spite of an increased allocation of \$2.1 billion in fiscal 2009 and in spite of a plethora of promises and initiatives, this sector is still marginalized; despite talk of 17 megafarms in the past budget. Every year we hear about that; a recurring decimal—every year, every year. [*Interruption*] You cannot teach me how to speak, my friend, believe me. I have spoken to more people in the world than you ever met. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: But did they understand?

Mr. W. Peters: And they understood every single word I said.

This year they talk about it again; they talk about more megafarms. But agriculture has become unaffordable and unattractive as an enterprise. There was a meagre \$50 million increase in allocation to the Agricultural Development Bank, from \$75 million to \$100 million in 2008 and \$125 million this year. Is that adequate enough? Do you believe it is adequate given the high price of food? I think the initiative that the Flour Mills took on the other day, they lost more money than what you allocate now to boost agriculture.

A lot of people do not know but I, too, was a farmer. In Trinidad when I lived here, I planted rice in a place called Kernahan.

Hon. Member: Where are you living now?

Mr. W. Peters: Well, before I left here. And when I lived in the United States I planted corn, strange as that might sound. Not people corn, you know, mine; 165 acres of it. So I have a good idea. So if you want to talk about mega farm, when you talk of 100 acres, it is a miniscule farm. You have to take a magnifying glass to see that.

Hon. Member: Was that in Trinidad?

Mr. W. Peters: No, I did not plant it in Trinidad; I planted it in New Jersey.

So when these people come here and they speak about agriculture, what they have to do is to make land affordable and stop removing farmers from arable land, and building houses. They have to fast track the process of agricultural lease

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approvals. Many applicants have to wait indefinitely with little or no relief. How in the world can you expect to boost agriculture when you run the people off the land? “Where yuh want them to plant it, in the sky?” What do you want them to plant, when the Member for Princes Town South/Tableland give people a few ochro seeds and two corn seeds to plant in the back of their outside latrine? What do you expect to get from that? What kind of farming is that?

We have to protect and preserve prime agricultural land from being issued for private and public housing and industrial development. Every day you see the people protesting, trying to get some place to plant. It is the only way that we can become self-sufficient in our food production. Timely processing and issuance of—

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. K. Swaratsingh*]

Question put and agreed to. [Desk thumping]

Mr. W. Peters: Mr. Speaker, I give way to the hon. Member for Princes Town South/Tableland.

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Speaker, I am grateful to the hon. Member for giving way. I was enjoying the contribution of the Member for Mayaro until he sought to disappoint the House by suggesting that the distribution of the Ministry of Legal Affairs was not appreciated. In fact, so much was it appreciated that the Member for Fyzabad prevailed on me to come to his constituency to engage in that distribution. [*Desk thumping*] So I would like to urge the Member for Mayaro to give credit where it is due. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. W. Peters: Mr. Speaker, that is what you get when you mash somebody’s corn. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, it is my belief that the idea to involve CEPEP in large-scale agricultural production is long overdue. From the inception, CEPEP has spent more than \$2 billion and I understand that a special purpose company is being set up to manage CEPEP and the Solid Waste Management Company (SWMCOL) will now be restructured to concentrate on its core mandate of waste management. Well, I hope that they extend SWMCOL to managing the Government because the biggest

waste in this country is being done by the Government. [*Desk thumping*] So I think we have to put SWMCOL in charge of the Government so waste management would be really effected.

Dr. Gopeesingh: They fired Ray Brathwaite.

Mr. W. Peters: They fired him?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes. He got demoted.

Mr. W. Peters: I do not know. He is a Baptist “fella” I like.

Mr. Speaker, where are the initiatives in agro-processing industries? We are still importing products which we have the land and the capacity and the expertise to produce ourselves. Could you imagine that in Trinidad and Tobago we are importing mango juice? Mango juice we import in Trinidad and Tobago! And we import it from Turkey and you guess right, the other place; China. I hope we take it to Cariri and have it checked and make sure that we do not get any pesticide in our mango juice.

But we have more mango in Trinidad and Tobago than the law allows. Any mango season you could walk around here and billions of mangoes you could get. But again, the Government does not have the capacity to enhance the things that we have here. They do not have the capacity to enhance it; they do not have the capacity to deliver it.

The pine and citrus farmers of Tableland where my good friend from Princes Town South/Tableland—that is his constituency. I once represented them as well. They produce large quantities of these products. When the UNC was in power, we proposed to have a processing plant, but we did not stay long enough in there, and now you are there for eight years and these people have to be subjected to standing on the highway with two pines in their hands for the whole day and hoping that somebody would pass to buy them, after they have taken their hard-earned money, their time and labour to plant these things. This is an initiative that should be pursued.

What is the role of the Seafood Development Company? This Government is specialized in having special purpose companies. If they want to go to the bathroom, they have a special purpose company to go to the washroom—anything. But I have my own ideas about why these special purpose companies exist. What have they been doing to develop the fishing processing plant? In last year's budget, Moruga was earmarked for the construction of a modern fishing facility. They had a sum of \$90 million. I would like the Government to tell us what has become of that. I welcome the fact that the people of Moruga would get a fishing

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facility and I urge the Member for Princes Town South/Tableland to ensure that the fishermen of Moruga get their fishing facility. Fishing is near to my heart too because I spent a good deal of my life as a fisherman. [*Interruption*] Yes, I did, and it is still one of my passions. But some of the people on the other side do not know what it is.

Mr. Speaker, when the UNC was in government, I proposed to have a fishing complex in Mayaro for the fishermen of Mayaro, because when I spoke to them that was what they wanted, something similar to what they are talking about in Moruga. It was well on track because we had meetings and everything, and started it. But today with this Government in power, do you know what they have done with the land? They have taken it and designated it for a volleyball court. So the fishermen of Mayaro are still without the proper facilities for their boats. The fishermen of Guayaguayare have to sleep on their boats with a shotgun because every time they turn their backs, their engines are gone.

This Government says it is a caring government; this Government cares only about itself and its cronies. Within the last five years many farmers have retired from farming because of these tragedies and they see no help coming. Meagre compensations are still paid out to these farmers long months after their crops have been devastated by floods and what have you: I know of two farmers who got \$75. I mean, if that is not wickedness at the highest, what is?

6.55 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I have nothing against helping my Caribbean brothers and sisters because I am a Caribbean person. I love the Caribbean. I have sung about unity in the Caribbean and written songs about it. I have lived in many Caribbean countries, but I am also saying that while we send millions of dollars to our brothers and sisters in the Caribbean, our people do not have homes. They are suffering and this caring Government has people living here who have no place to sleep when the night comes.

There is an expansion of the vagrant population in Trinidad and Tobago. Long ago, when you came to Port of Spain, you would see a vagrant here and there, now it has exploded. Everywhere you go in Port of Spain there are vagrants. Not only do we have vagrants in Port of Spain, but when you go to Princes Town, Mayaro, Rio Claro and even Biche, we have vagrants. We are manufacturing them. That is one of our by-products of PNM's mismanagement. [*Desk thumping*]

We have just sent \$26 million to Jamaica, Cuba and Haiti and that is admirable, but there are people in Claxton Bay right now who were flooded out at the same time but who have not gotten one black cent. Their homes are still

unlivable; yet we have sent millions to our brothers and sisters. I have nothing against that, but I was taught that charity begins at home. We cannot leave our people to suffer while we take care of other people.

The time might very well come, if we have not put things in place for ourselves, when one of us, might be even you, Mr. Speaker, might very well need that assistance and it would not be in place for you or me or anybody else.

Mr. Speaker, we still do not have a land use reform policy. Infrastructure upgrade was done in Kernahan and I am happy because it is something I lobbied for. If we are to have agriculture the way we want it to be, much more will have to be done. There are access roads in there that need rehabilitation.

The National Housing Development Programme geared towards 10,000 units per year is commendable if only to fulfil the supply need. From the inception, this development was all about political expediency. It is admirable that the Prime Minister says they have built 26,000 houses. If they were distributed in an equitable way, it would be all right; or if the reason for doing it were honourable, it would be all right; but this was done for political expediency. It was done to capture votes in the marginal constituencies.

Mr. Speaker, if you go to some places in Trinidad, for instance Couva, they pretend to build homes. For years now, they have had some white pipe and blue things sticking out all over the place. They have graded it down, but when you go to places like Tarouba, going up on the link road, you would see houses that mushroomed almost overnight.

There is a reason for that. Quality assurance and mechanisms are non-existent. Low income units have no design; they have no yard space. The houses are so small you can hardly change your mind.

Only recently in Mayaro they went ahead in their haste to bring people and put them in homes—there people really need homes; some are still under their grandmother's, mother's and father's houses. In their haste to build these homes, they decimated the swamp. They built the homes so quickly that after three floods they had to demolish five of them and now the people are living in some other houses they built on the other side of the road.

This Government has gone down and continues to go down a dangerous road. While Members on the other side thump the desk, clap and rejoice today because of where they sit, tomorrow they may be singing a different song.

There is a place in Mayaro they call Coconut Grove. They have a Coconut Grove in Ortoire and they built 51 units; it has been under construction since

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2004. As a little fellow, I used to catch crab there and if you had gone up there last week, you would have seen people from all over the country still going there to catch crabs. But this caring Government finds it fit and expedient to grade down that whole place in the swamp. It is only a matter of time before we have some kind of rip tide and the Ortoire River overflows its banks and all those houses are washed away and we have some kind of disaster. That is a disaster waiting to happen. I hope it never does, but it looks like that.

We are being deprived of our fertile lands by this Government because they find it expedient to fulfil their dream of house padding. I want to say also, with respect to all these big contracts that the Government is giving out and the Member for Diego Martin North/East spoke about, the kind of theft of the people's money that is going on in this country has never happened before. All the corruption that the Members on the other side speak about would look as child's play when the time comes and they have been investigated.

They talk about the Piarco Airport. That would be chunk change to what is happening now. [*Desk thumping*] I hope that we have an extradition treaty with people who have a "calder" kind of heart. I hope they have some kind of treaty wherever they come from. No one person could ever be endowed with such power in my country that we cannot investigate that person. With the kind of corruption that is taking place, the Members on the other side would shudder to know one day that they have contributed and been part of it when the demise of this country comes.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that these lofty systems are only designed to funnel moneys to their supporters. I would like to see the time come in this country when everything is done in an equitable way and not for political expediency by anybody. When you build homes, they must be given to persons deserving of the homes, and if there is a system, who can afford it. I would like to see them give all Members of Parliament a quota of housing application approvals to the needy and eligible persons and family.

Also, allow MPs a quota of approvals for home improvement grants/subsidies within their region. With the high cost of material, I would like to see an increase in the Home Improvement Grant to \$25,000. What they are giving today and boasting about is to tell the hardware man good morning.

I would also like to see a reduced processing time for these applications to at least two months. Housing Development Corporation must establish a monitoring and evaluation unit for construction of these homes. If they have it already,

someone will say they have it, but let me remind them that if they do have it, they are not working. This lottery system they have in place, I believe it is the biggest cover-up in this country to keep people who they do not want out of certain areas and when the homes have been given to their friends, nobody could question it because they won it in a lottery.

I want the people on the other side to know, especially the leader, that the money he is wasting does not belong to him. He has already declared many years ago that he is not good with spending money. I would like him to know that the money belongs to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It does not belong to a certain sector of people in Trinidad and Tobago; it belongs to each and every one of us, him included. Just let him get his fair share.

I would like to see a reduction in the processing time for the micro enterprises grant under the Poverty Reduction Programme and Management by the Regional Social and Human Development Council; an increased community development funds ceiling from \$15,000 to \$200,000 for community-based projects; an increased minor repairs reconstruction grant under National Commission Self-Help Limited from \$10,000 to at least \$20,000.

We have an electrification programme for poor people. You would be surprised to see some of the people whose homes are electrified; people who can almost buy the electric company. Their homes are being electrified while the poor people are told that they have a 4,000 applications backlog. People who live in a one-room shack, who need electricity, cannot get it but the friends and family of people on the other side have it.

All these things are wrong. As a word of caution, we need to invest more in male support programmes at the workplace or at community centres to deal with domestic violence and other domestic relationship issues. When you look around today, the male is becoming more violent because he feels displaced. When a man comes home and he sees his children hungry and he cannot feed them; when he works all day and the money is insufficient—this Government is not addressing the minimum wage. Every year they say the same thing and nothing is being done.

Mr. Speaker, the Government spent more than \$20 million to lobby for Port of Spain to be the headquarters for the Free Trade Area of the Americas. What has become of that? Are we not hearing anything? Our money is being spent. What has happened? Twenty million dollars! That could have electrified all the poor people's home. Why do we need Free Trade Area of the Americas here? We do not need that. We need improved customer care and social service offices.

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While I am on training—this is for the Member for Diego Martin Central—we need better training for the social service officers because every time people go to these offices, they are faced with hostility.

7.10 p.m.

They act as though when you go there, you are begging them for something that is theirs personally. There is too much hostility and abuse of the poor and elderly. We need a budget that would fix that. We need a budget that would address those things and reduce the processing time for grants and welfare. We have “fairy passes”. [*Interruption*] What it is?

Hon. Members: Ferry!

Mr. W. Peters: A ferry pass? What is that? It is a ferry pass? We have free ferry passes to go to Tobago. I wonder “if dey have free ferry pass on the water taxi too?” That applies to the water taxis? I agree with you, when it comes, which might be never—“We eh talking about making yuh regular car into ah water taxi; it might flood?” We are talking about the real water taxis. This might be admirable, but how many people are going to access that?

It looks as if the Member for San Fernando East ran away. He came back. That is all right. I am glad he is here. Sometimes it is hard to sit and listen to, basically, the truth when the truth hurts.

Taxpayers are scared. Taxpayers’ scarce resources are wasted in duplication roadwork. Recently, in May of 2008, a contract was awarded under PURE, for \$13.1 million to restore and upgrade roadworks from Plaisance to Miland Village in Mayaro. In October, 2007 before the general election, these roads were paved. It just reminds us that these things are not done for the sake of doing it for the people. Shoddy and substandard works are being done while the people suffer and their moneys are disappearing before their eyes.

I am urging and imploring this Government to put things in place so that the people of this country would benefit from the moneys that are coming our way. We have to find some way to stop the wastage. As the Member of Parliament for Mayaro, I am calling for the widening of the bridge at 21¼ mile mark on the Naparima/Mayaro Road in Fonrose Village. The watercourses—we are talking about dengue and flooding. We have enough money in the country for us to dredge the watercourses at a more rapid rate than we are now. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: Dredge?

Mr. W. Peters: Yes, we can dredge them. That sounds alien to you? You are a geologist. What do you mean dredge? “Clean it with ah hoe den, or however

yuh want to clean it.” Clean it with whatever you want. I think we have enough resources in this country to ensure that we dredge the watercourses, so that the water would run. We can make more dams around; it is easy. Where there is flooding, take 100 acres of land, instead of a phony megafarm, dredge it and allow the dams.

We need restoration work along the beachfront areas of Mayaro. We have a lot of erosion up there. I know that they have started doing some work in Manzanilla. We need more work to be done in Guayaguayare in order to prevent further erosion.

In winding up I want to, as a word of caution, tell this Government that people do in fact get frustrated and people do in fact get tired of promises. This Government is well-known for promising and not fulfilling anything. I want this Government to understand that it is not just a saying that a hungry man is an angry man. A lot of people in this country are becoming more hungry and they are becoming more angry. When people become hungry and angry they react in a hungry and angry way.

A word of caution to the Minister of National Security or “insecurity”, we need this Government, with all the people’s money, to pay more attention to the significant needs of the people and not to the needs of a few for political reasons.

Mr. Speaker, the time has come for us to draw the line and for us to do things that the people want us to do and not what one man believes should be done.

I thank you.

The Minister of National Security (Sen. The Hon. Martin Joseph): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to contribute in this debate on a Bill to provide for the Service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending September 30, 2009.

I would like to compliment the Minister of Finance, Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira, for presenting her first budget in the Parliament. I wish to congratulate her on a job well done.

I am coming after the Member for Mayaro. I listened to all that he said. Unfortunately, at the very last, he said something to me as the Minister of National Security to pay some attention to, which I would address. I guess others would address some of the other things. I will not be unkind, in terms of characterizing his contribution. I am always mindful of the fact that I am a visitor here and as a result, would behave as a visitor. As I have said, others would respond to the contribution made by the Member for Mayaro.

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I would indicate to other Members, notwithstanding all of the gloom and doom that the Member for Mayaro attempted to paint, and also remind the Member for Mayaro that it was only a few months that the vast majority of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago endorsed the party's appeal to them and endorsed its programmes and returned us to office and as a result we are here taking care of the people's business. We will continue—[*Interruption*] thanks to whoever—to make sure that the business of the people is attended to in an efficient and effective manner, so that at the end of day, our vision for Trinidad and Tobago, a developed society on or before 2020, is realized with the primary objective being improving the quality of life and standard of living of the citizens of this country, comparable to what obtains in a developed society. I think that, perhaps, annoys many of those on the other side, because there is a clear vision articulated for what is to happen in Trinidad and Tobago. I am going to take off on that point.

When we talk about improving the quality of life and standard of living of the citizens, the key barometer in that is the question of security and safety. This Government has made it clear that the major challenge that we face, as we move towards developed society, is the question of unacceptable levels of crime and violence in the country. We have never hidden from that. We have never jimmied the figures or indicated what is not the case.

Before I get in, I would respond to what the hon. Member for Siparia made, in terms of her presentation—I want to remind Members of this honourable House of parts of a contribution made by the Member for Couva North who was the Prime Minister, in the 2000 budget debate. I have some quotes. I just pulled out parts:

- “1. The battle against crime is a long and bitter battle. The Government has never said that by providing vehicles to police, crime will be solved.
2. Mr. Speaker, the struggle against crime involves more than just police vehicles; it involves a change of culture in the country.
3. The statistics will show that some 75 to 80 per cent of all the crimes committed in Trinidad and Tobago are drug-related.”

This is Prime Minister Panday in 2000. The final quote is:

- “4. Crime threatens every single person in society and we are particularly vulnerable, given the designs and the connections of the international drug trafficking cartels and their money laundering.”

This was in 2000. There is also another quote that was not said in the Parliament but said, I think, at a post-Cabinet press conference in Whitehall. He said:

“My Government cannot solve this crime problem.”

Put that in within the context of understanding that the major challenge facing us is the issue of crime and violence, but it must be seen within some context. The context in which it must be seen is the reality of our location and secondly, the reality that, over the years, law enforcement has been unable to keep its step with developments that were taking place in the environment of which we speak.

We have been witnessing an increase in the number of crimes over the last few years. As I have said, that has a lot to do with the environment in which we are. It is no gainsaying that we are smack between the major drug-producers of the south and the consumers of the north; a major transshipment. What has happened over the years is that whereas in the past most of the drugs, especially cocaine would transship up north, most of the drugs are now being accompanied by guns. [*Interruption*] It is not the same speech, it is the same reality. Until such time as we can deal with the reality, the question of the solutions to the problem will continue to evade us. The drugs are accompanied by guns. The guns remain in Trinidad while the drugs continue to go north. Not only are there other countries in the region that are transshipment countries, the guns remain there until the last drop-off point for the drugs. I would say some things as to how the region is treating with this, et cetera, because it is important. We would also talk about what is new. It must be put into context. That is one.

The second challenge that we face is a challenge with respect to weak law enforcement; law enforcement incapability of keeping steps with new developments. I want to be clear, because somebody would say: “There he goes, he is criticizing the police.” I am not criticizing. We have to understand what are the root causes, so when we start identifying what we have been doing, where we have had successes and where we have failures, it would be clearly understood.

Let me first start with the figures. What has been happening? Overall crime between 2007/2008, in terms of murders in 2007 at this time, 219; 2008, 358; a 63 per cent increase. [*Interruption*] It is not a shame. This is the reality. “What you talking ’bout ashamed?” You are behaving as if we are going out there and killing people. This is the reality. Woundings and shootings, 123 per cent increase; rape and incest, 24 per cent reduction for the similar period; kidnappings, 18 per cent reduction; burglaries and break-ins, 9.1 per cent reduction; robberies, 7 per cent reduction; fraud offences, 11 per cent reduction; larceny, 11 per cent increase; larceny of motor vehicles, 4.7 per cent reduction; larceny/breaking and entering of

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homes, 9.1 per cent increase; narcotics offence, 15 per cent decrease; other serious crimes, 9.2 per cent. Overall, serious crimes are down marginally, 3.2 per cent. This is the overall figure. Crime against persons: murders, 63 per cent increase; woundings and shootings, 12.3 per cent increase; rape and incest 24 per cent reduction; and kidnappings, 18 per cent reduction. With respect to crime against persons, increase of 2.5 per cent; crime against property, burglaries and break-ins, 9 per cent reduction; robberies, 7 per cent reduction; larceny, 11.8 per cent increase; larceny of motor vehicles, 4.7 per cent reduction; and larceny of dwelling houses, 9.1 per cent increase. The overall crime against property is 2.9 per cent reduction. I said that we have to look at the context.

What is happening—again it is necessary for me to remind Members of this honourable House of the World Bank’s Report of 2007. Allow me to quote:

“Several factors which cut across the diverse countries of the region heighten their vulnerability to crime and violence. Primary among these is the region’s vulnerability to drug trafficking. Wedged between the world’s source of cocaine to the south and its primary consumers in the north, the Caribbean is the transit point for a torrent of narcotics...Compounding their difficulty, Caribbean countries have large coastlines and territorial waters and many have weak criminal justice systems that are easily overwhelmed...

While levels of crime and associated circumstances vary from country, the strongest explanation for the relatively high rates of crime and violence rates in the region—and their apparent rise in recent years—is narcotics trafficking. The drug trade drives crime...through violence tied to trafficking, by normalizing illegal behaviour, by diverting criminal justice resources from other activities, by provoking property crime related to addiction, by contributing to the widespread availability of firearms and by undermining and corrupting societal institutions.”

Therein that is the situation.

The region recognizing the challenge faced—a special Heads of Government Meeting was convened on April 04 and 05 right here in Port of Spain, under the chair of the current Prime Minister who has responsibility for security in the region; all heads. This is what the heads agreed to at the conclusion of that conference.

7.29 p.m.

With respect to the maritime and airspace cooperation and the sharing of assets, the conference agreed to the following:

- to sign a maritime and airspace security cooperation agreement by July, 2008;

- to engage international partners, particularly the United States of America, with respect to the implications for the region of their anti-narcotics efforts in Central America and the Pacific Coast; and
- to immediately draft model national legislation for enactment by member States.

With regard to intelligence and information sharing, the conference approved the conduct of a region wide information campaign against crime to be facilitated by the Caricom Secretariat and the retooling, retraining and realignment of national and regional intelligence units to assist law enforcement agencies in the fight against crime.

With regard to illegal firearms the conference agreed to:

- enforcing existing regulations that pertain to the use and storage of firearms and ammunition;
- develop a regional database of firearms which is accessible by all regional law enforcement agencies;
- increase the capacity of detection and surveillance methods in relation to the movement of firearms including the importation, sale, transfer, theft and use of firearms; and
- introduce measures to improve systems, procedures, intelligence and training with a view to enhancing border security.

With regard to drug trafficking, the conference agreed to increase the capability and coordination among law enforcement agencies to develop intelligence to conduct operations and to enhance the enforcement of laws.

With regard to murders, the conference agreed to:

- the development of specially trained, equipped and dedicated teams of homicide investigators;
- the full utilization of forensic, including DNA and comprehensive crime scene management;
- introduce video in criminal proceedings, inclusive of ID parades;
- the timely completion of investigations; and
- improve conditions for speedy prosecution of persons charged.

With regard to crime prevention, the conference agreed to promote inter-agency collaboration for crime prevention at the national level and establish a

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regional investigative management team to support difficult and protracted investigations. It also agreed to implement the Caricom Justice Protection Programme and work towards the establishment of a western hemispheric justice protection programme and to establish a Caricom polygraphing capacity with a view to addressing corruption in law enforcement and other agencies.

Mr. Speaker, I am saying this to give you an indication as to what was agreed to at the regional level to combat the unacceptable levels of crime and violence plaguing, not just Trinidad and Tobago but the region.

I would indicate to you what are some of the developments, but before I do so, the Member for Siparia mentioned in her contribution the fact that there is a lack of a witness protection programme. Mr. Speaker, for the record, let me just indicate that the Justice Protection Act was proclaimed on April 04, 2007, and the regulations have been published in Legal Notice No. 96 dated April 20, 2007. This Justice Protection Programme takes on board and evaluates comments and criticisms that have been made about the operations of the programme and reviews its practices and processes to meet its goal of providing a viable credible system of protection that can enjoy the highest public confidence. Mr. Speaker, for the record, at this time, there are 76 witnesses and 100 associates which is a total of 176 persons who are currently in the programme.

The status of cases that involved witnesses currently managed by this programme is as follows: Cases in the Magistrates' Court, 7; cases in the High Court, 42; and cases for retrial 4. Mr. Speaker, 27 matters have been completed which involve persons in the programme. In 12 cases, there have been guilty verdicts. There were headlines in daily newspapers that infer that the honourable Chief Justice felt that witnesses were not being protected.

On reviewing the text of the Chief Justice's speech, it was realized that he spoke not about the protection of witnesses, but rather about the need to take care of and guide witnesses through the courtroom environment and trial process. These activities are referred to as witness victim support and envisage the setting up of a witness care unit. This is a separate activity from ensuring the physical protection of witnesses. That is the mandate of the justice protection programme. I thought I should just put that on the record. As I said, the hon. Member for Siparia, in making her contribution, gave the impression that there is no witness protection programme.

There is an example of this witness care programme in the United Kingdom which is called: "No Witness No Justice". This is an initiative of the United Kingdom. So, witnesses under the protection are afforded similar support within

the justice protection programme. Just for the record, I thought I should clear that up so that Members would be aware that there is in fact a practising witness protection programme. At the regional level, it was felt that the programme should be expanded so that more countries would be able to participate in the witness protection programme.

Mr. Speaker, coming out of the developments and discussions at the Heads, a number of developments have taken place. We now have a joint regional communication centre in the region which is fully up and running; there is a regional intelligence fusion centre; there is a Regional Integrated Ballistic Information Network (RIBIN) which uses automatic ballistic identification systems to allow for the linking of Caricom database regionally and internationally. RIBIN will be established under the United Nations Programme of Action, as a regional network for information sharing among law enforcement, borders on customs control agencies with a view to preventing, combating and eradicating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons across borders.

There is also the development of a regional investigative management system to allow law enforcement to be able to assist other Caricom member States, in terms of investigations. The Caricom Maritime and Airspace Cooperation agreement has been signed; the Caricom Arrest Warrant Treaty has been signed; and there is an integrated criminal record system that is being developed. All this is as a result of the success of the security arrangements put in place for Cricket World Cup.

Mr. Ramnath: That was a failure.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: That was not a failure. As a result of the success of those mechanisms put in place, other international entities are looking at how we were able to put those mechanisms in place and the political will to do it, and they are trying to model best practice. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago, at the Eighth Ministers of Defence Conference held in Alberta, Canada, Caricom was required to make a presentation so that other regions can see how they can use some of the best practices. I do not know why it is we have this, perchance of giving the impression that nothing good could come from the region in terms of development and, by the same token, nothing good could come from Trinidad and Tobago. That is certainly not the case and they know that.

Mr. Speaker, I said earlier on that the homicide rate is running at about 63 per cent and it seems as if people are relishing the fact that it must go over 400 or

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500. I cannot understand, for the life of me, how citizens who are concerned about this country are just sitting back and waiting to see that and to celebrate. It is cynical. I think what has happened is that they believe that this is our Achilles' heel and that crime would have been the thing that would have brought us down at the last election, and the fact that it did not happen they are smarting. We are living here too and, at the same token, we are not satisfied with what is happening, but we are putting things in place to treat with the matter.

The other issue, as I indicated, is if you look at the unacceptable levels of crime there are two things related; guns and drugs. The aim is to minimize the inflow of both drugs and guns coming into this country. What has this Government done?

7.40 p.m.

This Government, recognizing that our borders are porous, has pumped millions of taxpayers' dollars in acquiring assets designed to stem the inflow of drugs and guns. We have now signed and the three offshore patrol boats are being built. The intention being that the first offshore patrol vessel, VT Tauneka, is due to be delivered in 2009, the other in 2010 and the other in 2012. Six fast patrol vessels and six patrol crafts are also being developed.

In the meantime, we have acquired two interim vessels that are now actively patrolling our coastlines. In the absence of having those naval assets, the ability to reduce the inflow is seriously compromised. The 360-degree radar system is in place so that we are in a position to see what is happening with respect to drug movements. The important thing is our ability now to treat and run it down.

The Member asked where are the gunboats and where are the helicopters? It takes time for ordering and the delivery, but all of the assets necessary are somewhere in the pipeline as it relates to being able to be delivered. In the meantime, the National Security Council has also agreed to an inter-agency crime suppression plan, aimed to booster the protection of our coast, which involves the purchasing of some 12 pirogues, in short order. So, that will assist in the—I do not want to call it the reintroduction of the marine police, but it will certainly provide some additional assets for both the coastguard, police and customs as we attempt to treat with the question about the inflow of drugs into our space.

As I have said before, crime is a problem that is being faced by the entire region and the efforts being made by regional heads have been identified as a means to treat with this level. The Member for Siparia raised the issue of Mastrofski and that Government paid \$80 million for a team of eight persons.

Mr. Speaker, we came to this Parliament and we indicated that the Government did engage the services of George Mason University, under the leadership of Prof. Mastrofski, to help in our transformation process, and we indicated that the team comprised, under the George Mason team, 12 persons from varying levels of expertise. We also indicated that the Justice and Safety Institute from the Pennsylvania State University was also part of the team, comprising some five persons, and Justice and Security Strategies Incorporated, comprising some four persons. So it was not eight persons, there were a number of other persons.

We also indicated that the consultancy for the transformation was for a period of four years, from 2004 to 2008. We are now in 2008 and as a result, the consultancy is coming to an end. There is a one-year, no-cost clause for which some of the things are being wrapped up.

Mr. Warner: With what effect?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Well, we will see with what effect in terms of the transformation, because again, if you go back to what your leader said, transformation is not an overnight thing, transformation talks about the changing of the culture of the organization, and in my contribution I will continue to address that.

Let me just deal with what it is the Mastrofski team was able to do. The transformation programme led by Prof. Mastrofski of the George Mason University has followed three distinct tracks: institutional strengthening, operations and training. The institutional strengthening component has led to the shift from seniority-based promotions to merit-based promotions.

The team provided the basis for the institution of a modern performance appraisal system, which is now being finalized by the new civilian head of the TTPS human resource department: Improving the efficiency and fairness of the operations of the Police Complaints Division, by reorganizing methods for recruiting quality investigators to the Police Complaints Division; maintaining assignments stability to and within the Police Complaints Division; improving the mobility of the Police Complaints Division investigators, among other things; assistance in the development of modern legislation package, including the Police Service Act, the Constitution (Amdt.) Act, and the Police Complaints Authority Act for the TTPS; and introduction of the model station initiative at West End, Morvant, Arouca, Chaguanas and San Fernando.

This approach underscores service; it emphasizes the features of policing that the public values most, and sets forth expectations about how officers should deal with the public. Policing for people places a high value on the following: attentiveness,

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being accessible to the public to attend to their needs; responsiveness, timely assistance that helps citizens solve their problems, competence knowing how to get the job done, whatever it is; reliability, police service that routinely meets acceptable standards; respect, treating all members of the public with dignity and using only the amount of force required by a competent officer to get the job done; fairness, treating people equally under the law and without bias toward personal characteristic and background.

The introduction of policing for people and the model station was itself a very important initiative. I will give you some of the results of the independent survey done by citizens who live in the area of the model stations. Let me just indicate for the hon. Members, the cultural outcomes that the model stations initiative is attempting to change and in fact is changing: First, the need for officers assigned to model stations to show up for work routinely and to put in a full day's work while on the job. That may seem as if that is expected, but trust me, the question about making sure that in the model stations this basic thing was being done was important.

Second, we want the model station officers to behave in ways that place service to the community uppermost in their priorities.

Mr. Warner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thank you for giving way, Minister. I asked you just now if West End was a model station; you said yes. I want to tell you Minister, that at that West End Police Station at 9.30 p.m. on Tuesday last, there were only two policemen on duty. I called because a woman called for help; they said they could not go because they did not have anybody in the station. I asked: Where is the Sergeant on duty? They said: He has gone out on an investigation. I said: Who is in charge? They said: Corporal Ode. I then said, "Well listen, you have to help the lady." Eventually two hours after they helped her. That was West End station, Minister, your model station.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Thanks for the information, because we will check. That has not been the experience with respect to West End. Second, we want the model station officers to behave in ways that place service to the community uppermost in their priorities, and I just identified what were some of those things. As I said: attentiveness, responsiveness, competence, reliability, et cetera.

Third, we expect that when model station constables engage in policing for people, the citizens in those districts would recognize and appreciate the difference. When that happens they would make greater use of the police, and will also support them in their efforts to identify and apprehend wrongdoers.

The fourth element of the cultural change we seek is for the police to adopt a strategic approach to dealing with crime and other problems that affect the model stations.

In terms of accomplishments, the first step of the model station initiative was to bring model stations staffing to a higher level, and that was done. The extent to which it has been sustained is itself a challenge, because it also created some other problems with respect to that, in that in bringing the model stations up to a certain staffing level, the issue of overtime, et cetera did not occur and as a result that in itself created some other challenges and that had to be looked at. The second was to create better working conditions for the model stations, moving away from the charge room to bring it as customer service areas, refitted it, et cetera. Simultaneously, we also provided officers with more and better equipment so they could do their work more effectively.

A third important step was to provide intensive training to officers assigned to the model stations. A fourth major step was to introduce modern methods of police supervision and management in the model stations, so that basically, you had what is normally referred to as roll-call; you literally had the whole question about assignment; a greater interface with the public, so that whereas in the past, most police officers would be in their police stations, it was a question about going out more, interfacing with the public as opposed to the public coming in.

The hon. Member for Chaguanas West point will be taken and will certainly be investigated, because there is also a model station in Chaguanas. The thing about it is that the initiative is designed to change the way in which police have traditionally discharge their responsibilities. The police have embraced it. They have embraced it in the sense that, not only have they endorsed it, they have asked that the model station be expanded and I will come to that just now.

What was necessary in the introduction of the model stations initiative was to have field advisors. You had to have people come and assigned to the model stations, and there is where the cost of the transformation occurs. So, that when we talk about \$80 million—and I read an article in a newspaper today, talking about “Mastrofski walks away with \$80 million”. The article said “Mastrofski and eight people walked away with \$8 million”.

Hon. Member: What paper was that?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: It is not a reputable newspaper—nothing could be further from the truth. Mr. Speaker, let me just say for the record, because the Member for Siparia also made heavy weather of it this morning, in a disparaging

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kind of way, as if we were wasting \$80 million. The assignment was from 2004 to 2008, four years, \$80 million for Mastrofski and team, not Mastrofski, and I told you the team was about 27 in terms of professionals. Which turns out to be what? That is about US \$12 million.

When you look at the competence and the calibre of the people who were involved in the transformation, and what it is that they brought to the table, we got value for money. I came in this Parliament and said that we decided to go with this team as opposed to Giuliani and Partners. We said that the initial cost of Giuliani and Partners was going to be US \$60 million for an assessment. Here we had an intervention for four years at a cost of TT \$80 million, which turns out to be about US \$12 million, which really turns out to be a US \$3 million per year, and we are saying that is too much to spend to help in terms of the transformation of law enforcement, when we recognize that law enforcement has to be transformed. The law enforcement must be provided with the means in which it can be much more efficient and effective, not just dealing with current situations.

7.55 p.m.

Your leader said part of the problem—and I am not being critical, it is a reality—is law enforcement has not been able to keep step with what has been happening in the environment and as a result of that—I do not want to sound academic—you have to look at the opportunities and threats in the environment and what are the strengths and weaknesses of the organization. We have taken too long to build the police and I do not want to be political. In 1998 when this gentleman here, the Member for San Fernando East—people do not like to hear me say that—approached our general council to get approval to enter into dialogue with the then Prime Minister to treat with the issue of crime, because he said crime was bigger than party, it was too important, let us meet and treat with it. In 1998!

Dr. Moonilal: When the murder rate was 93, what would he have done today?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Mr. Speaker and hon. Members, if then we had taken the decisions that we needed to take we would not be where we are today. There is no question about that! We would not be where we are today, because at the end of the day it is the improvement of the management of the police organization that is indispensable to the levels of security and safety which this country must have.

I do not care what you say! If you want improved law enforcement, if you do not get better law enforcement officers, then you will not have it. Not only that,

you need to have law enforcement that is capable of dealing with the environment as it exists now, but what future crimes are going to be like what that lurks on the environment. What about cyber crimes? What about the other things and how prepared are we going to be? This Government is committed to investing the resources necessary to strengthen and improve law enforcement capability. [*Desk thumping*] There is no gainsaying that we would have liked to see the results faster. You do not think we would like to see the results faster? But, the thing is a little more complex than it seems. [*Interruption*]

This is the situation with respect to the model station. The model station represents the attempt to change the organization at the bottom level. So the transformation is taking place at two levels. At the leadership, et cetera, but then down here, here is where we interface. With all due respect—and this is not a criticism of the police. I want to be clear—the police has been—how should I put it—historically, the relationship between police and civilians—and it is not just confined to us; in other jurisdictions it has been like that. When you talk to other people they are saying, we are where they were 30 years ago. Thirty years ago that is where they were in terms of relationship between police and citizens and as a result we tried community policing and we tried all the other kinds of things. We tried all kinds of things but the relationship has to be different because police are there to provide while they protect and serve, they are protecting and serving a clientele, so others must be interfaced with, there must be proper relationships that exist. Because at the end of the day if the citizen does not trust the police, then the information necessary to deal with crime will not be forthcoming.

Not only that, if you are interfacing with police it is one for which at the end of the day how you feel about the police remains embedded in you for a long time—do you follow what I am saying? It is that that needs to change. It is easy to blame and defend, you know. It is easy to say it is not happening, why not, why not; but, Mr. Speaker, hon. Members, in the absence of fundamental attempt at change—otherwise it would just be superficial and at the end of the day we are not going to be building an organization that is built to last. As I said, you have to build an organization that will constantly be looking at the environment.

Let me just back up and say something. Do you know why our cocaine situation is what it is? When cocaine first started to be transshipped in this country, do you know what was the reaction of law enforcement? Trinidadians and Tobagonians do not use cocaine, so, what is the big thing? “What is the thing? We doh use it, so wha is de thing?” Failing to realize that as changes

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occurred; back then cocaine did not used to be accompanied with guns. People were not using it so as a result there was no rivalry; there were not other things and then other things started to develop. They started to come with guns, the guns stayed; and then they started to use cocaine as payment and then it started to stay in the society and create the problem.

There is another development taking place and I have said to law enforcement, we must not make the same mistake with this as we made with cocaine, that is heroin. We are starting to see an increase in the transshipment of heroin coming through this country, because I understand heroin fetches a much better price than cocaine. Now, we do not use heroin! So if we take the same position, that no big thing, you know what is going to happen? Eventually the heroin market is going to change and I understand heroin is a drug, the consequences of which are even worse than cocaine. So, we have to be very vigilant, and must be now in a position to treat with it. That is just an example and as I said, pretty soon you are going to hear about cyber crimes, you are going to hear about other kinds of crimes, electronic and other things and they have to be prepared.

Part of the other problem that we are facing and we are having with respect to problems with crime is the same thing with respect to witnesses: witness elimination and witness intimidation. Other jurisdictions say they face the same thing too, so what we have to do, technology, DNA and other kinds of evidence that must now be used to counter that. You figure you can just jump up and start using DNA? The answer is no. You must be trained. You must now be exposed, so it is a whole new set of policing that is so indispensable. It means then that existing police must now be exposed to a new type of training and development so that they could be effective and at the same time incoming recruits must now also be exposed to the same kind of training and development. Part of the transformation, part of the job of the team that was here over the last four years was to help us.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I did not realize that I took so much time and I still have much more to go. [*Interruption*]

Again, in items of the work done by the consultants, the establishment of the Crime and Problem Analysis Unit (CAPA) to improve the capacity of the TTPS to gather accurate and timely information about crime, analyze it, produce insights into more effective interventions, evaluate the impact of those interventions and report the results of its assessments back to both operational and administrative personnel.

This was also a very critical development because this CAPA replaced modus operandi which was a sort of a historical—the fact that I can come here and give all these statistics is evidence of the operation of the CAPA unit. So real-time information being fed, so that police would know when crimes are likely to be occurring, sometimes you hear talk about, put a police officer at every corner. That is so unrealistic if you know what I am saying. It is so unrealistic! What has to happen—like I said—is, intelligence; it is technology, et cetera, to help in the fight against crime, and of course we have to talk about increasing our human resources, I am not disputing that, but at the same time we have to use—

Mr. Warner: I will give you a few more hundreds.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph:—technology. The establishment of the Homicide Prevention Working Group, this group brings together representatives of the TTPS units and other government agencies to analyze the homicide problem looking for the most effective ways to intervene.

The restructuring of the Homicide Bureau of Investigations: The Bureau was restructured, expanded and assigned primary responsibility for investigating all homicides, staff was increased and there was enhanced management of their investigations.

Improving intelligence on gangs: Much of the violence in Trinidad is perpetrated by criminal gangs. Intelligence on these gangs is scattered throughout various units of the TTPS and other agencies. The team developed a new set of procedures and tools for gathering and analyzing gang intelligence. The establishment of a physical evidence team based on observations of numerous crime scenes, interviews with TTPS and Forensic Science Centre personnel, analysis of data from the Forensic Science Centre and the passage of the new DNA legislation, the team recommended a large number of sweeping reforms in the handling of physical evidence in Trinidad and Tobago, the team has implemented 32 GMU recommendations for physical evidence reform.

Gang Repeat Offender Programme: Based on six months of field work with the CID officers at Besson Street Station as well as analysis of gang intelligence

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and criminal record data, the strategy is to focus police and other justice system resources on the worst offenders and get them off the streets as quickly as possible. That is the reason the police was so much in support of the Bail (Amdt.) Bill.

The third component of the transformation was training. George Mason University strategic crime control seminars, high impact supervisory training: High impact supervisory training provided first line leadership training to corporals, sergeants and inspectors; some 2,171 officers trained.

Instructor development academy: An Instructor Development Academy for the TTPC instructors and divisions so that they would learn how to develop more effective lesson plans and use effective adult teaching techniques. PSU trained 62 officers and 14 retirees in this programme.

Incident Command Training: This training familiarized police executives with a proven command and response system for handling events of all sizes. Sessions were conducted including not only police personnel but personnel from other first response agencies

And finally Values Based Management and Change Planning.

Mr. Speaker, introducing fundamental changes into an established organization with deep-seated cultural norms and accepted practices is always challenging. However, we are convinced that the institutional changes are beginning to have a favourable impact on the TTPS. Specifically, the focus of the operational side of the transformation will be on strengthening the operations of the repeat offenders programme which currently has the services of a street gang expert from Chicago. He will provide specialized training in high-risk patrol tactics, gang intelligence, criminal investigation and case preparation.

CAPA will be strengthened through increased training and links with the international association of crime analysts. Eight senior and 22 junior crime analysts have been recruited and connectivity to all stations is being improved to ensure that data is readily available. A fully functional CAPA unit will increase the TTPS use of crime data to effectively fight crime.

On-site training and technical support to key officials within the TTPS and other agencies on firearms related projects: firearms tracing; the use of ballistic imaging evidence and improving gun seizures. So far, 224 firearms were recovered in 2007; to date, 268 recovered so far.

Developing and monitoring of programme designed to prosecute active shooters.

The model station initiative will be expanded to five additional stations: Belmont; Crown Point; Marabella; Mayaro and Point Fortin. The intention is to make sure that there is a model station in each division and once this happens that will serve as the seed, Mr. Speaker, hon. Members, to make sure that that initiative continues. Unfortunately, I do not have the time to discuss the results of the model station but a survey was done on June 28—the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service Model Station survey one year progress report and then another one September 2008, and all the indicators are from both—the survey was done with respect to the police, the survey was done with respect to the citizens and they have indicated an improvement in terms of their interface with respect to—the important thing now is making sure it is sustained and identifying what are some of the challenges being faced.

8.10 p.m.

The following aspects of the institutional strengthening and assistance to the Ministry will continue:

- improvements in the processing of complaints against the police;
- improvements to or replacing the current Police Complaints Authority Act;
- implementation and support of the Office of Law Enforcement policy at the Ministry;
- improving the performance appraisal system for police officers; and
- improving governance structures for police, including liaison with the Police Service Commission and the Crime and Justice commission, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make a point concerning the amount of moneys provided to the Ministry. The Member for Siparia in her contribution also talked about the amount of money allocated to the Ministry. In 2005, the Ministry received \$2.2 billion, which was 7.8 per cent of the national budget; in 2006, it received \$2.8 billion, which was 8.2 per cent; in 2007, it received \$3.1 billion, which was 8.16 per cent of the national budget; in 2008, it received \$4.4 billion, which is 10.5 per cent; and in 2009, \$4.7 billion, which is 9.5 per cent.

I think one of the things that Members ought to recognize—that again as part of ensuring that law enforcement is provided with what is necessary in order for them to do the job as best as they can. Members need to know that between 2001—2007, the cost of compensation for police was: in 2001, it was approximately

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\$413,919,000; in 2004, as a result of salary negotiations and increase, it went to \$545,751,000; and in 2007, it went to \$730,793,000.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you what it meant as strange as it sounds. In 2001, an Assistant Commissioner of Police used to get a basic salary of \$7,749. Can you imagine that? In 2004, it went to \$15,000;—this is this Government—and then in 2007, it went to \$17,319. A Senior Superintendent went from \$7,117 in 2001, to \$12,200 in 2004, to \$14,000. I would not have time to go through the ranks, but in 2001, a Police Constable's salary was \$2,861. In 2004, it went to \$4,395; and in 2007, it went to \$5,123. Just think about those kinds of increases.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell us something else. This Government is committed to ensuring that law enforcement is adequately compensated. Do you know what they do now and I am not criticizing the reality? The police are compared with the salaries paid to a security person in the oil company or a security person in T&TEC or something like that, and those kinds of comparators. We have decided that we cannot compare police work with any security officer in any part of Trinidad and Tobago.

Police work is police work and it has to be evaluated, and as a result of this, the Government of Canada accepted a request from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and now we have a compensation expert consultant from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police or what have you, doing an exercise as it relates to making sure that we properly value, a job evaluation. Because we do not want police to have to moonlight; we do not want police having to wonder about their compensation, we want to minimize the possibility that persons could try to exploit their "bad pay". Mr. Speaker, of course you know that money cannot be it all—I do not care what is paid, but if there are persons who are bent on compromising their integrity, as a result, we have to put systems in place to also treat with that.

The Member for Siparia also talked about the fact that there are no cameras, CCTV or anything. Let me indicate that we introduced the CCTV with the upsurge in criminal activities, CCTV system is one element that allows law enforcement to more effectively monitor public areas and boost intelligence operations. The pilot phase of the CCTV network, which involves 18 cameras, was launched in Port of Spain during the carnival 2008, following the implementation of a temporary system during Cricket World Cup. At present, the pilot project has 98 cameras strong. The Ministry is also negotiating with the private sector to expand the system to other critical areas, such as on the main highways and the priority bus route, as well as within the environs of Port of Spain and in San Fernando.

The Member for Siparia talked about the fact that the radar keeps breaking down. I mentioned earlier on the question about the—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Spare capacity.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Well, we have redundancies, so if one is down it does not compromise our ability—Trinidad and Tobago Police Service infrastructure. In response to the need to increase police presence, construction of five police stations and three police posts were completed. Stations at Belmont, Gasparillo, Mayaro, Toco and Tunapuna; post at Las Lomas, Manzanilla and Brasso. We have completed Phase III of the Police Stations Refurbishment Programme, involving 56 police stations across Trinidad and Tobago. Works undertaken included the finishing works, such as painting, furnishings and some minor plumbing works. The estimated total expenditure on that phase was \$21 million.

In terms of equipment, the following are among the acquired for law enforcement—“Kamla knocks Government for lack of police vehicles” in her contribution:

- 1,500 bullet-proof vests;
- 2,000 expandable battons;
- 2,000 utility belts;
- 500 taser guns;
- 950 tactical uniforms
- arms and ammunition—because I do not think I should be saying the quantities of them.
- 340 new vehicles to join a fleet now of approximately—but the point is police are now provided with adequate vehicles, so that the question about visibility, but then I am reminded—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: No, we have approximately 600-plus operational. I do not know. Rentals would not be—I am about talking “marked”, I am not about the unmarked.

Mr. Speaker, strength is an issue. The sanctioned strength is 7,691; existing strength is 5,944, and as a result, the police are looking at different ways. In the United Kingdom when they were faced with this, they had a 33-plus programme where they brought back some of the better functioning police officers. I think in Canada they are also bringing back persons for specific competencies, but of

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course, you know you have to deal with the whole pension arrangements, et cetera. So the police are currently looking at that. But we have also indicated the Government's intention of 500 recruits per year. I had indicated that one expected that we were going to be bringing in 500; we have just refurbished the police academy that can accommodate 225. Part of the challenge that the law enforcement is facing is because of the higher levels of qualifications necessary, five Olevels. But that is not the issue; there is also the issue of passing polygraph tests and psychometrics.

Mr. Speaker, I do not think I should bring the House into, but I think I should. If I am out of place, tell me. We are also assisting in terms of the special parliamentary police where a decision was taken to hire approximately 55 parliamentary police, and I think they are having problems getting the 55 because they are not passing the polygraph testing and the psychometrics that—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Everybody like— [*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Or using drugs. So, there is a challenge as we attempt to recruit, to take care of the gaps that are taking place and we would have to find a way. We cannot lower the bar because part of the problem that we are facing now, is the question about quality, so we are going to have to find ways and means of getting around that. How much more time do I have?

Mr. Speaker: Thirteen minutes.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Thirteen minutes, so I still have some time then.

So, Mr. Speaker, the issue of recruitment is an issue that we are going to have to treat with. Somebody was making a suggestion that why we do not go the way of Bahamas because the Bahamas recruits from the region. I do not know, it is something that maybe we may need to look at. We have not raised this anywhere, so I do not want it to seem as if I am “policy from the hoof” or anything like that.

The Member talked about that no armed gun boats as promised, and as I have indicated, Mr. Speaker, the first of the offshore patrol vessels will be coming in March, 2009, the other one in the later part of 2009 and the third in August 2010. I talked about the fast patrol craft that are due at the end of 2009, and the six vessels are also due at a subsequent time. The question about the helicopters is again, request for proposals, et cetera, are being developed for that.

Mr. Speaker, last Saturday, 361 new members joined the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force: 120 joined the Coast Guard; 39 joined the Air Guard; and another 202 enlisted in the Regiment. Seventy-three uniformed staff members received

training over the last eight months, as we build the capacity of the defence force to deal with the assets that they are going to be acquiring, and as they are called more and more into assisting/aiding the police in discharging their responsibility. I must say the defence force has made a strategic shift from defending the nation to securing, and as a result, the missions, et cetera, are now being reviewed in that regard: and also, the Defence Act, itself, is undergoing some review.

Mr. Speaker, I must talk about the special anti-crime unit, and the Minister in her presentation talked about the special anti-crime unit. Of course, the anti-crime unit is now in its fifth year of operation and has focused on three main areas: strengthening national forensic capability, providing developmental training for law enforcement and lending operational support to the police service and other law enforcement agencies. Coming out of the developments that are taking place, we have now asked the special anti-crime unit for responsibility for the gang-related homicides, and as a result, they have established a homicide investigation task force to help.

Gang-related homicides are the most difficult homicides to detect because of the very nature of the crime and that is not just confined to us, it is a universal thing. As a result of that and as I said earlier on, the question about forensics and other kinds of things, because of witness elimination and witness intimidation, there is a greater amount of technology that needs to be used in that, and until such time as it is infused in the wider police, like anything else, you have to do things on a pilot stage and SAUTT is being given the responsibility for that. That is based on collaboration, consultation, et cetera.

We have promised SAUTT legislation and that legislation is going to be coming before the end of 2009. It has given us an opportunity to deal with all of the challenges, et cetera. Now, SAUTT is going to be modelled on SOCA, which is an entity that exists in the United Kingdom, which is Serious Organized Crime, et cetera, dealing with certain types of crimes. We have to make sure that in clothing SAUTT in its legal framework, that we take into consideration some of the various challenges for which it is. We have proceeded sufficiently so that the question of SAUTT legislation will be coming to the Parliament in 2009.

8.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Forensic Science Centre took delivery of a number of key equipment that would impact directly on the delivery of its services. It now has its Ibis up and running; it is awaiting delivery of a number of critical equipment ordered in fiscal 2008 to be used in DNA testing. This equipment upgrade will

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significantly increase the centre's capacity to cope with the new demand for services in the area of DNA analysis, consequent upon the passage of the DNA Act, 2007.

We have strengthened its human resource base, as follows: In June 2008, Cabinet approval was granted for the creation of 14 additional positions at the centre's establishment effective July 2008; provided developmental training for staff members in the areas of project management, forensic fibre and glass examination and comparison, alcohol and highway safety testing.

In 2008, the Forensic Science Centre made 3,100 case submissions; made 13,491 exhibit submissions; conducted 53 field visits; generating 3,614 certificates of analysis; performed 747 autopsies; made 67 court attendances, and reported results of DNA analysis in three cases. The centre accommodated requests from 242 members of the public and six private companies, for the test firing of illegal firearms.

The major focus of the Trinidad and Tobago Forensic Science Centre for fiscal year 2009 would be to continue working towards accreditation of all the laboratories services by 2010; continue work on the quality manual; validation of methods and standard operation procedures; to take all necessary measures to achieve their goals; purchase new equipment; upgrade technology, and recruit additional personnel.

On April 15, 2008, the Immigration Division launched an appointment system to eliminate the long lines being created outside immigration offices for the new machine readable passports. The Ministry of National Security engages the services of the TTPost call centre to receive calls from the public and schedule appointments through the assigned number, 669-4MRP. From the date the appointment system was launched, it was inundated with calls. To date, 144,412 appointments have been scheduled and a total of 136,612 machine readable passport applications have been received. These are in addition to emergency applications which are processed on a case by case basis. Today, 112,033 machine readable passports have been processed. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Warner: What about the long lines at immigration?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: To better serve the communities, the division opened offices in Point Fortin and Chaguanas. Both these offices began operations on August 04, 2008. Cabinet recently agreed to the creation of six temporary positions of Immigration Attaché for assignment to the foreign missions at London, Washington, Toronto, Miami, New York and Caracas. These officers have all assumed duties.

The Immigration Division is undertaking preliminary work towards the restructuring of its Deportation and Investigations Unit. It will also continue its collaboration with the International Organization of Migration in the following areas: establishing a document examination laboratory at Piarco International Airport; advancing a comprehensive review of the Immigration and Citizenship Acts; implementation of the training curriculum, focusing on such topics as criminal intelligence analysis and risk profiling. We opened the Point Fortin and Chaguanas offices; acquired 14 Dell computers from the International Office of Migration for use at the division's training lab; increased its operational capacity; 72 uniformed officers and six civilian officers were added to the division staff for fiscal year; training was provided to 144 members of staff. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: On the last occasion you were here we had raised the question of mobile units to assist the numbers in the rural communities. Can you tell us what is happening with that?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: We have ordered a number of mobile units. There are three mobile units to be used in North America, and there are another four or five mobile units to be used in Trinidad to ease the issue of going into rural areas. That is due to be by the first quarter of next year. At the same time, we have recruited another 100 or 200 persons to assist the Immigration in the processing. Of course, you know that we have a deadline for ensuring that all our citizens are issued machine readable passports by April 2010. We have set December 2009 as our deadline. We have made a commitment to make sure that all our citizens are provided with machine readable passports.

The other area that I wanted to make a quick comment on was the Citizen Security Programme, which mention is made of in the Public Sector Investment Programme at page 97. The Citizen Security Programme is very important, because, again, the Member for Siparia asked about some of the preventative measures. The Citizen Security Programme, which is a joint venture between the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, was designed for a pro-social type of activity to create a community level type of preventative measure; some 22 communities are involved. The programme is well on underway. It is designed to provide alternatives to gang violence and other kinds of antisocial behaviour taking place in the various communities. It is a pity I do not have enough time, but I am sure the communities would be identified. I am sure somebody would provide the House with that information.

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In keeping with goal five of the development pillar, promoting effective government, we are committed to making Trinidad and Tobago a safe and secure place to live, visit, do business and raise families.

In keeping with the theme of this year's budget, we ask all our citizens to be part of shaping our future together.

I thank you.

Mr. Subhas Panday (*Princes Town North*): Mr. Speaker, having heard the hon. Minister, one would think that here is paradise. I want to let him know "ol' talk"; performance beats "ol' talk" all the time. [*Desk thumping*] What they gave us here tonight was "ol' talk", nothing relevant.

Dr. Moonilal: Wake up the House now!

Mr. S. Panday: Before I go at him, may I kindly talk to that hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Dr. Moonilal: Our favourite punching bag!

Mr. S. Panday: His contribution has been the greatest disgrace, not only to the House, but to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, including young children. [*Desk thumping*] Children who have heard him, I am asking you not to emulate him, not to emulate him at all. He has brought this House, singlehandedly into scorn, hate, odium and ridicule, that Member for Diego Martin North/East.

It is a shame that Member would come to the Parliament, and being a senior Member of the Government, would come here so unprepared, disgraceful. Then he is the same Member who takes the green book and keeps on harassing persons on this side.

We wanted him to make a fool of himself today, that was the reason we did not take the green book and say, "Irrelevant". We did not want to do that, because we wanted the nation to see what the PNM is and what the PNM represents, and we succeeded. He went on and went on, calling people dotish, saying that it was dotishness they were speaking all the time. Mr. Speaker, I ask, not him, not you, not the Members opposite, but the five-year-old children in Trinidad and Tobago, to pass judgment on him; especially those young ones who have gotten scholarships, to have a look at him.

It is sad and pathetic and a dark day in the history of this House, to have a Member like that speaking in that manner in the House in the presence of the Prime Minister, who was clapping and beating the desk. Disgraceful is the only

word we could use to describe that contribution. Contemptuous is too sophisticated a word to describe him.

As to the hon. Minister of Finance, the hon. Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, I promise you, I will never behave like him. I will never bring the House into scorn and disrepute by attacking a lady. I only want to say that I have to follow Hazel Brown. At the meeting of the civil groups at the interview at the Central Bank, when Fraser told the questioners, "Say something nice about the budget before you ask questions." She said, "Oh, dress, appearance, pass."

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: Appearance, A; quote correctly.

Mr. S. Panday: The ferry ticket, pass; and she said that she was going to use the ferry ticket. [*Interruption*] The hon. Member for Tobago East is telling me that it is women's business, but he was the person who chased out a great lady, Eudine Job-Davis, from that seat. He was like a "zandolie" all over Trinidad, trying to go for the Member for Tobago West. Thank God for London, that he is safe. So you behave yourself, Member for Tobago East. [*Laughter*] "Zandolie" you are.

Mr. Speaker, Hazel Brown said that after the ferry ticket it was downhill. She said, "Delivery, fail."

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: She did not say fail. She said "B". [*Laughter*]

Mr. S. Panday: She said, "Content, fail." She said, "Comprehension of the contents, fail also."

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: You are adding on.

Mr. S. Panday: This is what the country is saying about the budget, and not only Hazel Brown, but other persons.

At the same time, I take this opportunity to congratulate the Members who have spoken on this side and, in particular, the Member for Siparia. [*Desk thumping*] I told you what to expect, and I am certain you were not disappointed; you were demolished. [*Laughter*] The Member for Fyzabad who also spoke, it was the best we have heard him, [*Desk thumping*] congratulations.

My brother from Mayaro is a man who speaks from his heart. [*Desk thumping*] He is not false as the Minister of National Security, who came here with all kinds of highfalutin statements. He spoke from his heart and he spoke to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I say congratulations to the Member for Mayaro; a good job.

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As to the Member for Tunapuna, I do not belong to the category of the Member for Diego Martin North/East, and hence I will make no comment. He has done so much damage to the reputation of this House, that all of us in this House have to come together, in a bipartisan way, to redeem the House from the degrading position to which he has brought it.

8.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I come now to the Minister of National Security and he gave us certain quotations about the Members on this side; the then Prime Minister, Basdeo Panday, who said sometime in 2000 that the Government alone cannot deal with the problem of crime. I want to tell the Minister that was the way the government was working, that was a government that was working, because for the first four years it had crime—in 1996, 96; in 1997, 101; in 1998, 98; in 1999, 93; in 2000, 118—and we were so sensitive to that small increase in crime that we were marshalling the nation to deal with crime. So please, Members on the Opposite side, do not take things out of context, analyze what has been said and interpret it in the situation and circumstance in which it was said.

Mr. Speaker, do not come here with crime at 300, I feel it is over 400 already because if I am saying that the statistics are not true because the only time it becomes a statistic is if you are killed at the same time. If you are shot and taken to the hospital and you die a few days after, they are not counting it. So the people are hiding—

Mr. Dumas: So you are advising people to kill the people?

Mr. S. Panday: No, this is the kind of stupidity that comes from the PNM Members. You say we are advising to kill the people, that is the nonsense we expect from people like you. *[Interruption]* Who is celebrating? I am saying it is true, it is a fact. So we must lie, the PNM wants you to lie and do not talk the truth. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, that Member for Chaguanas East says that I am disgracing the House. You are a terrorist! You should be in jail.

Mr. Speaker: Order! Order! No, you cannot accuse the Member of being a terrorist. You have been speaking about honourable things, do the honourable thing.

Mr. S. Panday: “Mr. Speaker, ah want to withdraw it, ah so honourable.” But to say that he was sent to blow up the airport and he saw the police and ran and hid in a drain in Patna. *[Laughter]* “All right, leave meh alone.”

Mr. Speaker, the Minister spoke about law enforcement being weak and he also spoke at the same time that only the murder rate is 63 per cent, and all the

other rates have been reduced by 2.3 per cent. If that Minister has been a Minister for so long and he comes now and says that there is reduction in serious crime by 2 to 3 per cent, then that has been the greatest failure as a Minister of National Security, and he has been the longest serving failure as a Minister.

He comes here with his sweet talk trying to sound nice, but at the end of the day when one looks at the statistics, they are just trying to fool the population by these statistics.

Mr. Speaker, he spoke about the World Cup and how they passed legislation. What he was speaking about was the Advanced Passenger legislation which was passed. And lo and behold, after the legislation was passed, we have more illegal immigrants in Trinidad and Tobago than before. We are passing laws, but this Government is so inefficient and incompetent that it is not implementing the laws. There are more illegal immigrants in Trinidad now than ever before. Go to any gas station in Trinidad and 99 per cent of the workers are illegal immigrants. They come from Ghana, Nigeria, Brazil and Venezuela.

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: And why is that?

Mr. S. Panday: Because this Government is so incompetent, it is allowing illegal immigrants to come here. As a matter of fact, there are certain groups of people organizing marriages for them to increase their vote bank. That is why you are allowing illegal immigrants to come into the country, and they are closing their eyes to it.

Mr. Speaker, so when they talk about solving crimes, I want them to tell us how many illegal immigrants there are in Trinidad. How many illegal immigrants have been held since the passing of the Advance Passenger Information Bill and you will see they are coming here to make us pass legislation and not implementing it. That is the hallmark of the PNM, never implementing the law, but putting things in the law book, and nothing coming out of it.

Mr. Speaker, they are talking about going to Barbados and having this conference to deal with the region, but Trinidad and Tobago has the opening to bring in illegal immigrants to export to other parts of the Caribbean. The Minister talked about the Police Service Act and I will come to that in a minute.

He talked about the model stations after spending \$80 million, he is talking about five model stations and about having five again. How many police stations do we have in Trinidad and Tobago? Are you not fooling people with these model stations? One would have expected that for the length of time Mastrofski was here—in four years you built five police stations, now he has gone you are

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going to build five again. Therefore, you are only at experimental stage for imperpetuity, experimenting all the time.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister also spoke about bringing legislation to deal with gangs as though they have just been formed, as though we are now going to get intelligence. But it is this Prime Minister who met the gang leaders and fete with them when he came into office. At that time, you could not understand the psychology of the gang? After seven years you now want to bring legislation to the House and you have presided over 2,000 murders, you now want to bring gang legislation. Who is this Government trying to fool? Nice “ol’ talk” on paper, but in reality it is a different story.

Mr. Speaker, I observed the Minister tonight glossed over the issue of SAUTT which I would deal with in a minute. The Member for Diego Martin North/East tried to create strife on this side. Two Members were out of the country: the Member for Couva South, and the Member for Chaguanas West and he tried to divide this party, talked all kinds of nonsense about this party, he tried to make confusion. Our Members were outside and they tried to get flights to come in and at the first opportunity they were here. So do not try to make any confusion and divide us. [*Desk thumping*] We are solid together.

He spoke about the Member for Tabaquite who was not here when the budget was read, and I do not want to put his business on the street, but he has personal family difficulties and he has gone to deal with a personal family emergency. He tried to get a flight to be here today, but he is getting a flight on Saturday or Sunday, and he will be here on Monday. I do not want to speak people’s business in public but to indicate that trying to drive a wedge among us would not take hold.

We are not like you all. Mr. Speaker, if there was ever a hatchet man; it is that Member for Diego Martin North/East. He knows what he did to the Member for Diego Martin West, he knew what he did to the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, he knew what he did to the Member for Diego Martin Central and because he behaves in such a manner, he believes everybody is the same way. Do not judge everybody by your own standard.

Mr. Speaker, he tried to boast to this House today that there are three Ministers in the Ministry of Works and Transport. I want to ask him if he has given the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo a desk yet? I hear he only has a chair. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, have you ever seen in the newspaper anywhere where he has ever opened a shoe box? Has he ever been given the opportunity to officially open anything? When you throw stones be careful what you are saying.

We want to warn the other side when they attack Members on this side, be careful what you are doing. We will not bring the House into scorn and disrepute, but we will defend ourselves manfully, and we will defend any one of us you attack. It is the most senior Member on the other side who behaves in that way, and I hope that these OJT Ministers do not follow.

Mr. Speaker, when the UNC was in office in 1996 there were 106 murders; in 1997, 101; in 1998, 98; in 1999, 93 and in 2000, 118. One would see that about \$900,000 was allocated to the Ministry of National Security and with such small amount of money the UNC could have kept crime low.

The hon. Minister said the people put you there and you have a mandate. I want to ask the same people if they feel safe today under the PNM, or were they safer under the UNC. The answer will surely be that they were safer under the UNC. [*Desk thumping*] Use your heads, do not allow your emotions and freeness to fool you, do not allow the gangsters to fool you because in 2012, we will make your lives safe again.

8.55 p.m.

When one looks at the PNM record, one sees that the moment they went into office, crime started to shoot up. In 2002, 171; in 2003, 229; in 2004, 266; in 2005, 386; in 2006, 386—that number looks wrong in 2007, 395 and to date I say it is over 394. We ask the question: how is it suddenly when the PNM came into office the curve went straight up? What is wrong? As you look and you observe you will see that as time went along they started throwing more and more money into the Ministry of National Security. It went from \$1 billion, \$2 billion, \$3 billion; I think today it is about \$4 billion.

How is it that you are spending so much money in the Ministry of National Security and crime is going up? Then money is not the panacea to solve crime. There is a deep and inherent cause of crime. What is that cause? I thought the hon. Minister of National Security would have come today and told us, “We have found the cause for the increase in crime.” It was only when you have found the cause for the increase in crime that you could deal with it. So all this nonsense about this conference here and that conference there, you will see that is really tinkering with the problem and we have not gone to find out the root cause of crime under the PNM.

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Anybody there on the other side, are you willing to search your consciences and answer that question? Why has crime been increasing like this under the PNM? Why has the murder rate been increasing like this under the PNM?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Global warming.

Mr. S. Panday: Is it because of global warming, somebody said? One theory is that the crime rate has been increased because it is fuelled by the PNM, and the PNM has been giving the criminals a soft landing. That is why to date not a single person has been executed for the last seven years. They blame the Privy Council; they blame Pratt and Morgan which says that after conviction, after five years you cannot carry out the death penalty. So they are saying, to deal with the death penalty, get rid of the Privy Council, because they do not want to work! They cannot work and they are incompetent!

We ask the question: Was not Pratt and Morgan's decision in place when the UNC carried out executions? So the law could be implemented. But because people know that you are so inefficient, they do not care about you; they do not care about anything you do. They know that you do not have the will or the intention to implement the law.

The Member for Tabaquite, when he was Attorney General, presented a booklet—that hard-working Member for Tabaquite—and in that booklet which he distributed to every single Member of this House sometime in 1997 or 1998—“The Law and You”— he could have told you the stage at which every single case was at, from the time of conviction up to the time of appeal. And you could have seen that the UNC was keeping tabs as the case progressed so that it gave them the opportunity to ensure that the time lines are met so therefore the law could have been carried out.

Where is the Attorney General? We ask the Attorney General: Do you have such a system? Can you tell us how many appeals have been completed in the Court of Appeal in Trinidad and waiting to go to the Privy Council? Tell us! But they will never tell us that. Instead they will come here and talk all kinds of things about, “We have this conference here and we have that conference there and we will deal with crime.” Not dealing with the problem; not implementing the law is the problem of the PNM.

As I say, the criminals are laughing at them because just last week or last month, 72 or so prisoners' sentences were commuted. They are laughing at you. They are laughing at your incompetence or your friendship; I do not know which one.

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

When this Government came into office, the same gang leader they are speaking about now, the Prime Minister went, not in the jail, not at Balisier House; he went to Crowne Plaza and he elevated the gang leaders to community leaders.

Mr. Dumas: Your brother Mark said that we killed them.

Mr. S. Panday: When he went there, what did he go to talk to them about? Did he take his Attorney General? Did he take his Minister of National Security? Did he take anybody to advise him? Instead he went in the dark like a criminal himself, like one of them, and he started to make deals with the criminals and many people are saying that he begged them to cool it and he will run something. So he really went there to share the patrimony of this country with the bandits and the criminals! You sow the wind and now they are reaping the whirlwind. That is what they did!

Madam Deputy Speaker, do you remember Mark Guerra? You must remember Mark Guerra. Mark Guerra was with them in Couva when the Member for Couva South told them that, "I cannot guarantee your safety in Couva." They did not bring the police, you know. The PNM in their campaign, brought the bandits, Mark Guerra, the criminals, down there. [*Interruption*]

What the hon. Prime Minister did, he was talking of making legends and martyrs of the gang guns. That is why you cannot deal with the crime. This was the outcome of the Prime Minister's Government rewarding criminal kingpins, by feting them and awarding with lucrative contracts, making them toll keepers to the wealthier programmes, such as the URP and then the CEPEP.

Do you remember Herbert "Scrub" John? You must remember Herbert "Scrub" John. He was one of the persons whom the Prime Minister feted at Crowne Plaza—now deceased. He was the bad man; he was the criminal; he was a member of an organization. He was there with the Prime Minister in 2000. He made thousands of dollars in the URP. You want to deal with the criminals? That man from the URP bought a Lexus, cash; he put a Jacuzzi in his apartment. He was able to go to Balisier House with his children to introduce them to the Prime Minister. That was the closeness of this Government with the criminals! That one was killed recently.

Do you remember that the criminals were campaigning with the PNM? That same Minister of National Security, ask him about Holastic. Do you remember Holastic, who went and terrorized people in Ecclesville not to come out and vote?

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The next thing, he got a big contract, but he went the way of the others; they killed him. His house is the big house going up in Bristol on the right side; a beneficiary of the largesse of this country!

The PNM encourages the crime, even two weeks ago when they had people in the square breaking the law with their PNM jerseys and the Government itself breaking the law! So with that kind of example, one wonders why the crime rate is high? We are now telling you how the crime rate is high. One of the reasons is that the PNM Government is too close to the criminals and, as such, the criminals have no respect for them.

All the talk he talked here today, you know, he has not touched a fundamental point. He spoke about leadership; leadership in the model police stations; leadership at various levels. I ask the PNM today: What about leadership at the top of the police service? You are talking about leadership downstairs. Whom do you all think you are fooling? What about leadership of the police service? And that is the appointment of a Commissioner of Police. One of the reasons the police service is not working, although so much money is being spent on the police service, is because of the political interference by this PNM Government in the police service.

This Government does not care about crime once it has its way! They do not care how many people get killed, but they want a Commissioner of Police to suit them. That is why all this nonsense the Minister spoke about today, does not hold water. The Prime Minister had a veto under section 70 of the Constitution where he could have blocked anybody he did not want as Commissioner of Police. We thought that we will help solve crime and we thought that we should move away from service to meritocracy. So with the general package of legislation we said we must get the best person for the job and they pretended to say, "Yes, that is true."

We amended the legislation and when we did that, we said: "Let the Police Service Commission do its job. The Prime Minister must not interfere with the appointment of a Commissioner of Police." Hence the law was changed and the Police Service Commission was given the power to do a selection and they did it according to law; according to regulation 166. They did it according to law! They spent a lot of money and time. Then the law was they will send the recommendation to the President and then the President will refer it to the House and we could debate it, so the best person will be granted the job.

A law which they passed—not we passed the law—and which we supported and when it came to the House, do you know what they did? They exercised the same veto, because they felt they did not get the man that they wanted. Although

experts from Penn State University and other expert organizations carried these interviews, they did not want the nominee. Do you know what they did? They scuttled it because they did not get somebody who could do the dirty job for them. That is it.

9.10 p.m.

That is why the police service cannot work, because they are interfering with the police service. Madam Deputy Speaker, they made all kinds of excuses and the Prime Minister, the engineer of this travesty on the society, ran away from the country to some Caricom meeting and left the dirty work for the Member for Diego Martin North/East to do.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you would be ashamed to hear the arguments he used. He said we are not against the nominee proposed; we are not against that at all, we are against the process. The process is not good; the man is good, but the process is not good.

If the process is not good and it throws up the right man, why not go with the right man? They did not want him. It was said that he is 47 years old and not known to the PNM and they may not get him to do their dirty work. Furthermore, in five years time, he would be 52, still working and if you are out of office, he may lock “all yuh” up. They had to get rid of a young man whom they believe would not do their dirty work.

Why then did you vote against someone whom the Police Service Commission interviewed? All of you voted against it. Are you happy for what you did?

Mr. Dumas: Yes.

Mr. S. Panday: Then you are shameless. [*Laughter*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, we spoke of moving away from seniority to meritocracy. Hear the argument they will use against him. He is 47 years old; he does not have the experience. They tried to belittle the person recommended. “From all the information I have”, that is the Member for Diego Martin North/East speaking, “He has not managed a major field division of the police service. I think I need to put on record the seniority list in the police.”

So the same *raison d’être* when we passed the law to put the best man there, in their argument against him, they were arguing against their own law. I want to put into the record the seniority list for the police service.

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“In the police service, there are 15 executive officers at the immediate top, coming from the Commissioner of course. There are deputy commissioners, 12 assistant commissioners.”

And he went on and said—we are talking on the budget. He said this person was more than 20 down on the list. He was number 26.

So they came and all the money they were spending in the police service, all the millions of dollars, because of the political interference, the police service cannot work. That is the point I make. You all have been interfering and lo and behold I am disappointed in the Police Service Commission to have veered away from the principle in law that speaks about meritocracy and go back to seniority. Is it that they are weak? Did they get the message they were sending? Were they under pressure to put the man you all wanted?

We ask the question: How can you accept that? If he was a member of the executive just under the Commissioner of Police and the crime rate increased as time went on, did you not expect it to increase after you put him there? Something is wrong. You all are up to something. It could not be, if you are deputy commissioner and the crime rate is increasing, then you are supposed to be advising the commissioner to put you as Acting Commissioner when the Commissioner goes. Something is wrong. All the money that is being spent; all the courses that are being given come to naught because of the wickedness you are doing. We ask the question today. Is it payback time?

There was a commissioner of police named "Guy" on the voter-padding case who wanted to harass UNC people. Voting padding was a fraud matter. They did not go to the head of the Fraud Squad. They took the head of the Homicide Bureau, to hunt voters while the murder rate was increasing. Is it payback time for brutalizing the UNC?

Not a single case has been resolved. That is why the police service cannot work and the police service will not work because you are interfering with the police service. [*Desk thumping*]

We ask you here tonight: Why do you behave the way you do? Madam Deputy Speaker, you will remember when they voted against the recommendation from the Police Service Commission. What did they say? They said they would redraft the regulations immediately and come back to the Parliament because we cannot leave the leadership of the police service in limbo. What have they done? They have taken the regulations and thrown it away. One would have expected—

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. S. Panday: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. Up to today, one would have expected that as we went on a month's recess, that the regulations would have been drafted and brought to the Parliament as a matter of urgency to deal with the leadership of the police service. Up to today they have not dealt with the issue of the regulations so that we can have a Commissioner of Police. Is it that you have a plan? Do you have something up your sleeve? Is that why you asked the Acting Commissioner to say that crime is going down? Is that why when the hon. Member for O'Meara/D'Abadie spoke, she said that the Acting Commissioner is doing a fairly good job? Is it that they are making way for an extension because the Acting Commissioner will be due for retirement in December? Are they making way to keep him there because he has brutalized the UNC? Is it payback time? The question is: If you want crime to be solved, you must give certainty to the leadership of the police service. You cannot come here and give all kinds of airy-fairy talk and say you will deal with crime.

When the issue came up before this Parliament, we asked the Government for resources to do investigations to make an informed contribution as it relates to the appointments of a commissioner. They said: "None for all yuh. Nothing for you all!" You all want to run the Government from the Opposition. Tell us what you want and we will do it for you. We are smarter than that. We are giving cat no butter to look at.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you can bring whatever you want into the police service—whatever advancement you want—once you do not deal with corruption not on the inside, but on the outside of the police service. The Minister spoke and never once did he speak about a mechanism to deal with corruption. We have information where a man was given a 12-year jail term for trafficking in cocaine. He got 12 years hard labour.

A senior police officer used to visit him and buy doggy bags. You cannot carry food inside; you have to buy it at the jail. So buy a doggy bag and give him; and made statements to set up the man. He came out in 2005 and by 2008 he was a millionaire and this same police officer was seen cutting a ribbon, fraternizing with a convicted drug trafficker and all the policemen were upset.

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The drug trafficker is smarter than the big man; he took out the photograph with his wife and his mother in the photograph. Lo and behold, some time later, the drug man was advertising his goods and look here! [*Holds up pages of a newspaper and points to a photograph*] The big policeman cutting the ribbon of the business of a known, convicted drug dealer.

When we are asked to help to deal with corruption in the police service, you all—and the Prime Minister is the Chairman of the National Security Council. I am sorry he is not here tonight. I would ask him: As Chairman of the National Security Council, were you sleeping on the job so that there are top policemen riding shotgun with known criminals? That is why crime cannot be solved, regardless of how much money you put into it.

When you come here this evening and you talk the way you talk, we say that the PNM should have known; if not, the Prime Minister should have known and the Prime Minister must be held responsible for senior police officers riding shotgun with known, convicted drug men. [*Interruption*]

A serious matter and we must give him information. To get us killed? Never! The PNM is riding shotgun with the criminals and that is why they have no respect for you all and for the rest of the police service.

9.35 p.m.

The other one—[*Interruption*] No!

Mr. Dumas: What is the date of the publication?

Mr. S. Panday: You all know about it.

Mr. Dumas: I want to get the date and the name. That is parliamentary rules. You are using a document. You are showing a document.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Princes Town North, if you are referring to a document—yes, it is okay.

Mr. S. Panday: They have money. They know about it. Do not give it to them.

Madam Deputy Speaker: All you need to do is just refer to the document.

Mr. S. Panday: Corruption in the police service.

Mr. Parsanlal: Madam Deputy Speaker, we still have not gotten the date or the publication that is being referred to.

Mr. S. Panday: All this money “yuh spending”. I want to let them know—[*Interruption*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: If you are referring to a document and you are reading from the document, then you must say which document you are reading from. If you are using it, fine. If you are using the document, you know that, okay.

Mr. S. Panday: I am so crafty, I did not read from it.

Mr. Parsanlal: We crave your indulgence. The Member quoted from an article. He pointed to a photograph that was on the newspaper. We ask that he cite properly the article that he is reading from.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, the document that you referred to a while ago, are you giving a reference as to where that document was from, the name or whatever?

Mr. S. Panday: It is a local newspaper. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Parsanlal: The name and the date?

Mr. S. Panday: I think when we ask you all for money to do the investigation, you did not give us. I spent my money for that and “I eh giving yuh an if yuh want—”

Corruption is so rampant in the police service. I want to let you know— [*Interruption*] I would give you the next one—that the last examination for promotion of sergeants in the police service was corrupted. The papers were leaked before the exam; leaked in the police service. When you talk about policemen being happy, there were people who were undeserving. They were given the exam paper. Do you want it? I would give this one to you if you want. “Yuh doh want it? Ah have it. Look de exam paper here!” It was leaked. There were 10 questions on the exam paper, with three minutes to answer each one. People who were given the paper—the paper was sold and some were coached on the paper. When they went to write the exam, the officers who should not have passed, passed the exam. Look the exam paper here. You are talking about the police service going from place to place? How could the police be satisfied, when they know that they worked hard and other people passed and that there is corruption on top of the police service? This is the exam paper. “Look it here!”

When the promotions came out, the people who knew police work were not promoted and those who do not know the work were their seniors. Most of the people who were not promoted were acting sergeants and they were put back at corporals. When they decided to let “de fellas who pass de exam do de work”, do you know what they did? Although there was no vacancy in the establishment in the police service, they promoted them and gave them the thing because they

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made noise and because we raised it. When I came here with that they asked how I got the paper and that I should go to jail. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Dumas: Who said that?

Mr. S. Panday: You said that on the last occasion. That is why the police service cannot go anywhere with all the millions you are spending. We cannot go anywhere because of the corruption in the police service. What have you done about it? If you do not deal with these fundamental questions, then all the things about model station—they were people from the model stations who were bawling and crying that they were cheated. [*Interruption*] That was not the name of it?

I have a document here where they said that the prison officers' exam had to be postponed because the paper leaked there too. This is national security. This is not a joke. If you really want to deal with national security—the Prime Minister is sleeping as Chairman of the National Security Council. He is the one responsible and we must hold him responsible for everything that is taking place.

There was a senior superintendent by the name of Chandraban Maharaj who made serious allegations about corruption in the police service. I could not get information from him, but the station he went to gave me a CD and I transcribed it. He complained about corruption in the police service. Do you know when he complained about corruption in the police service, this Government did nothing? Do you know what they did? He was saying that there is corruption which touches the heart of the public service. He spoke about 70 kilogrammes of cocaine which went missing, not from a truck, but the property room in the station. He said that he wants to speak, but he would not speak to the local senior officers because they are involved in it. He said: "I would speak, but I would speak to a foreigner, preferably the Scotland Yard or the FBI." They sent a local man to deal with him. When the local man, I think it was Woodley, went there, he said: "Two years now you doing an investigation into the 70 kilogrammes of cocaine that went missing, you cannot come up with a report yet, why yuh come for? I eh talking tuh you. I am not speaking to you." He made scathing remarks.

As a responsible citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, there are serious national security matters that are involved and hence I will break it in public. I am asking the Prime Minister—"if yuh want tuh know", I would give it to you. He spoke about certain matters such as \$176,000 being stolen and the person was charged. The then Director of Public Prosecutions, no reason, entered nolle pros. Information is missing from the Sangre Grande Court, nothing. A quantity of

cocaine was missing from the Morvant Police Station, nothing. Gun lodged at Mayaro Police Station disappeared, nothing. Official firearms missing from several stations in Trinidad and Tobago, outstanding. If the gun is leaving the police station and the bandit is committing the crime, is the bandit covered and protected?

9.35 p.m.

It says that cocaine went missing and millions of dollars in cocaine were discovered when a man was ploughing his land in South. It was brought to the station and no one was charged. All the cocaine disappeared and they put newspaper to fill up the bag. These were serious allegations that were made, not by a civilian, but by a senior superintendent. Today, we ask the PNM: What did they do about it? They are protecting their guys.

He said that there was the Firearms Interdiction Unit and there was an operation branch in it, and when they hit the road they found more guns than at any time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, and lo and behold they went and touched a big man. They went with a search warrant for him and he called the commissioner, but this Chandraban Maharaj is fearless.

He went on holidays, and the moment he came back out they disbanded the Firearms Interdiction Unit. The leadership of the police service disbanded the Firearms Interdiction Unit. Do you know what? They transferred the officers and they merged the Firearms Interdiction Unit with the Organized Crime and Narcotics Unit. Do you know what they did? They disbanded the unit and transferred the officers. They sent one to Toco, one to Sangre Grande and one to Princes Town. They scattered them. This is what the leadership of the police service is. You cannot touch the big fish.

As a matter of fact, I am going to tell you something now. The same week the Firearms Interdiction Unit was disbanded, they had information that a shipment of 27 AK-47 Super Assault Rifles was in the country and, at that point, they disbanded the Firearms Interdiction Unit. Nobody went behind those firearms thus far. So, the blimp is flying, SAUTT is there and the 360 degree radar is there, so where are these guns? We should not allow those guns to be outside.

So, when I realized what was happening, I asked a question in this House as to whether the Government intends to establish a commission of enquiry—hear how the Government is involved in it—to investigate the allegations made by Superintendent Chandraban Maharaj of corruption in the police service, and if the answer is in the affirmative, will such an enquiry be held in public or the findings made public.

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Hear what that Minister who comes here today and talk about money being spent in Ministry of National Security had to say:

“Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. In response to question No. 21, in November 2007, Supt. Chandraban Maharaj made a number of allegations against members of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, including that of corruption. These allegations, though very grave, have not to this date been particularized by him...”

They are putting all the obstacles in the way and this is a Cabinet Minister talking.

“who had promised since 2007 to prepare a document containing the requisite details for delivery to the Commissioner of Police’s office by December 03, 2007.”

That was in this House.

“Supt. Chandraban Maharaj has since retained the services of an attorney...”

Given the gravity of the allegations and the public concerns that have been generated, the hon. Minister of National Security sought the advice of the Attorney General...”

Who is now an ambassador.

“the Director of the Special Anti-Crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago (SAUTT) and the Commissioner of Police...in determining how best to proceed in the matter. Hon. Members are advised that while the Commissioner of Police awaits the details of the allegations as has been promised since December 03, 2007, discussions are ongoing as to the way forward. No decision has therefore been taken as to what mechanisms will be employed in this regard.”

We are in 2008, and this was in November 2007. Did the Minister of National Security and the Prime Minister do anything to set up an enquiry to deal with corruption in the police service? It continues:

“I have indicated that...we are not in a position at this time to determine how we will proceed. I understand what the hon. Member for Princes Town North has said...”

Dr. Gopeesingh then said, why do you not put a foreign officer if he has no faith in the local officer, and there was no answer.

Madam Deputy Speaker, they have spent \$4 billion toward the Ministry of National Security, do you understand now why crime would increase? The PNM is encouraging it. [*Desk thumping*] The PNM is a part of it, and the Minister came

here and talked about SAUTT. SAUTT is outside the police service; SAUTT is a mongoose gang which is responsible for reporting only to the Minister. I ask you to read page 123 of the Draft Estimates of Expenditure and you are going to see that for salaries for the entire police service and so forth the sum of \$663 million was allocated, and he boasted about that this evening.

Madam Deputy Speaker, under “transfers” on page 145 of the Draft Estimates of Expenditure, you are going to see that SAUTT is not under the police allocation, but it is under the Minister’s allocation and the sum of \$384,791,300 was allocated. Madam Deputy Speaker, SAUTT has been given half the amount of money that the entire police service is getting.

When one looks at all the reports and documents, nowhere in the document is it telling you how SAUTT will be spending the money. It is a secret mongoose gang for the Minister. Why did the allocation for SAUTT not come under the police service? SAUTT is not a part of the police service; it is a mongoose gang which is responsible to the politicians and they intend to use that to harass opponents of the PNM; not to deal with crime. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister said a constable gets \$5,000 and officers who go to SAUTT are being given \$5,000 as an extra allowance. How is this thing working? Let us know! As a result of that, there is a conflict between SAUTT and the police. The police are complaining that they are not getting any resources and they are giving all to SAUTT. That is why there are no vehicles and no resources in the police service and that is why the police cannot perform.

Madam Deputy Speaker, my friend, the Member for Tabaquite, will give you the other aspects on how to deal with crime.

Ms. Kangaloo: Is he coming?

Mr. S. Panday: He is going to come. Do not be afraid. Do not try to “mash up” this party. The first step in dealing with crime is putting the police service on its right foot. Give them the resources; give them the manpower. [*Interruption*] They are talking foolishness about 500 police officers. If you divide that figure by three shifts you are going to get 120 police officers per day.

We are saying to give the police service the resources and give the police service the right leadership. Politicians must not interfere in the police service and make sure that SAUTT does not interfere with the police work. [*Desk thumping*]

In addition, there are other things like closed circuit cameras; computerization; raising the morale of the police service which has been diminished by the presence of

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SAUTT; changing the law; responsibility for parents for the juvenile; training for police officers; and the setting up of a praedial larceny squad, all these things can be added to deal with crime. After two hours, the Minister of Finance went to page 34 of the budget—this is to show you how they are interested in crime—and there was a half page or 23 lines. That is how the Government treats with crime. That is their admission of failure. When we hear the Minister today, we feel that the Opposition has to move forward, because the people are depending on us to deal with crime, because the Government cannot deal with it.

Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education (Hon. Fitzgerald Jeffrey): Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you very much for inviting me to make my contribution to this very important budget debate. As a neophyte, I am thrilled, because I know that out of the mouths of babes and sucklings this Parliament well draw strength. [*Desk thumping*]

This 2008/2009 budget, like all our previous budgets, must be seen in the context of Vision 2020. Each budget is a significant milestone on our way to our destination to developed country status on or before the year 2020.

Just to refresh our memories, Vision 2020 espouses that on or before the year 2020, Trinidad and Tobago will be a united, resilient, productive, innovative and prosperous nation with the discipline of caring, healthy, happy and well-educated people built on the enduring attributes of self-reliance, respect, tolerance, equity and integrity.

Every patriotic Trinidadian and Tobagonian would like our country to achieve developed nation status on or before the year 2020. As a matter of fact, we wish we could achieve that now. We know that we have challenges, but those challenges are not beyond us.

This evening I listened to Members on the opposite side, and apart from my good friend, the Member for Mayaro, not a single positive comment was made about the budget and that is a sad indictment.

My dear friends, we should not be too dismayed by what has happened. We know that their leader, the Member for Couva North, on several occasions, has said that the duty of the Opposition is to oppose; the duty of the Opposition is to make the Government look bad. I thought this was a joke, until I went into the *Hansard*. I want to read it because we are going to understand why the Members

on the opposite side have been operating in this way. On Monday, September 04, 2000, this is what the Member for Couva North said. He was the Prime Minister then:

“Mr. Speaker, democracy will cause the Opposition to oppose whether the Government is doing something good or something bad, something right or something wrong and whether it is in the national interest or not.”

This is a sad way to think in a developing country.

We all remember a few years ago a so-called artiste told his adoring fans to mash it up, and do you know what they did? They mashed down the fence. It seems as though some Members on the other side would really like to mash up our country.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the time is right for us to understand that this is serious business. We are not a developed country, we are a developing country, and we have to be careful when we make comments in this honourable House.

Last year, I was the principal of a secondary school, and I am going to be very careful, because I know that young people are looking on and we need to ensure that we send the right signals. We are supposed to promote developed nation status; constructive criticisms, but certainly not destructive ones.

I listened to the Member for Siparia who said that our leader lacks humility, gentleness and frugality, but that is a joke. When we look at our leader and Prime Minister of our economy, we have GDP increasing from \$55 billion in 2001 to \$152 billion in 2008. We see that our Heritage and Stabilisation Fund is US \$2.46 billion; we see that our foreign reserve is \$8.5 billion. We are talking here about reserves for over nine months. We also see what is happening with our tourist arrivals and so on. This is a leader who really knows about saving for a rainy day.

We know that our leader is not spendthrift. We are spending the funds on education. What better place to spend the money? If you look at GATE, health and what is happening in the secondary school system—recently, we heard about the scholarships and so forth and that is a prudent way in which to spend our money.

Madam Deputy Speaker, they talk about the question of lacking gentleness and humility, but then I wonder what about their leader. Their leader left this country and went abroad and tried to discourage investors from coming and investing money in this country; their leader told their supporters to engage in civil disobedience; their leader told his sugar workers to take their heavy vehicles and block the highway to create chaos; their leader was the one who reneged on

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the Crowne Plaza Accord; and their leader was the one who turned the table with the Caribbean Court of Justice.

9.55 p.m.

My dear Deputy Speaker, we can see here that if we are talking about two leaders, one is chalk and one is cheese. [*Desk thumping*] I want to take the issue of crime because I heard the Member for Princes Town North make some comments and I was wondering if he took note of what his bigger brother, the Member for Couva North, said. I want to just go back again, if you would permit me, to read a few comments made by the Member for Couva North dated September 04, 2000:

"The battle against crime is a long and bitter battle... The Government cannot do the work of the Police Commissioner or of the Police Service Commission as far as recruitment, discipline and training are concerned."

When I listened to the Member for Princes Town North, I was wondering what script he was reading from. I continue:

"But, Mr. Speaker, the struggle against crime involves more than just the police vehicles. It involves a change of culture in the country. In Trinidad and Tobago there is a propensity to lawlessness...

Crime threatens every single person in the society and we are particularly vulnerable given the designs and the connections of international drug trafficking cartels and their money laundering networks...

Fighting crime also involves creating job opportunities..."

I am saying with our unemployment below 4.5 per cent, it has to have another reason. I want to just make three other comments. Looking at the *Newsday* dated November 20, 1997, page 14:

"Theodore, TT already a lawless society.

Trinidad and Tobago is not heading towards being a lawless society, we are already there. A call to the National Security Minister, Joseph Theodore, who said yesterday that jailing criminals was not the answer. You put them in jail and more coming. I have said being in jail is not the answer. The Minister admitted that the country may have reached a stage in its development where there was no solution."

That was 1997, who was in power at that time?

I want to read another one, *Trinidad Guardian*, May 28, 1997, page 8, the Commissioner of Police, Noor Kenny Mohammed and this is what he had to say:

"One of the reasons why there is this gap between citizens willingness to come forward might be that they do not have confidence in the police at the present time."

And that was when? 1997. Who was in power then?

"This is what is happening to the police service; every day almost it is being compromised by policemen who are inefficient, arrogant and criminal in their dealings with members of the public."

1997, the PNM was not in power at that time. [*Crosstalk*] *Newsday* 2002, page 8:

"2001, most murderous violent year in TT's history"

That was in 2001, but we know what is happening my dear Members of the Opposition. We already saw the trend started since in 2000. So, 2001 what we saw was the crime started and my dear Members of the opposite side we can draw from the fact that when the UNC took government, what did you do? You stopped the OJT programme. Remember? You disbanded the Civilian Conservation Corps. You run down youth camps; you run down JVC; you run down John Donaldson Technical Institute; you run down San Fernando Technical Institute. What happened that time? In other words, there were many people who normally would have been in an institution, who are now out on the street. [*Desk thumping*] So, you better be careful when you are making those inferences.

I think enough is said about this crime situation and I want to look at some comments made by the Member for Siparia that shook the daylight out of me. She was talking about "make work" training programmes. Before I go there, I want to put something on the record, because you see last week or week before when we had the no confidence Motion, that was phase one of the struggle for power; today is phase two when I heard the Member for Siparia. Just for the record, and I am glad the Member for Chaguanas West is here because he might be able to shed some light. In the *Newsday*, Saturday, October 29, 2005, page five:

"Panday days numbered as Opposition Leader"

Let us read. This article is written by the reputable Ria Taitt. I have great confidence in the Member for Chaguanas West, I do not think he would tell any lies here. I quote:

"And Warner recalls in discussing the list of persons who might succeed him in office, when mention was made of Kamla Persad-Bissessar and Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj, Panday's response was very negative.

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Warner recalled that Panday said some of most negative things about Kamla Persad Bissessar, now one of his staunchest supporters. On Maharaj, Warner recalls, Panday saying that Maharaj would succeed him over his dead body.

He added that in a private meeting with himself, the late Arnim Smith and Roy Augustus, Panday exact words about Maharaj were: 'I will use him, massage his body parts and then spit him out.'

Warner said if Maharaj felt that by talking nice about Panday he would give him power, he (Maharaj) was making the mistake of his life."

Therefore, when I heard the Member for Siparia tonight making her campaign speech, I got worried and I said listen, I think I better advise my dear friend from Siparia what is in the kettle. I do not want to spend more time on those issues, but for us to look at technical/vocational education from this Government.

One of the most innovative measures from this Government is under the re-training programme, where we have the rehabilitation of prison inmates. We try to rehabilitate prison inmates by teaching them skills and at the same time helping them with life skills. So far, we have had 107 prison inmates who have been trained, and we expect that figure to increase in this coming year. We recognize that all of our citizens will not be doctors, lawyers, engineers and scientists, some would be craftsmen. Therefore, we are looking at this thing quite seriously not in terms only of quantity, but we are also thinking in terms of quality of our trainees and training programmes.

We have what is called the National Training Agency (NTA), a body that is geared towards quality in our programme. That National Training Agency is extremely meticulous in terms of programmes that are offered to our trainees, and I just want to give an example. Let us look at the MuST programme, one of the most successful training programmes in this country. For someone to get on to the MuST programme there are a series of tests that they must undergo, but more than that you have what is called the quality of the centre. The quality of the centre is extremely important.

What has happened in the whole quest of the National Training Agency, the MuST programme execution unit has to ensure that the centres that they are going to use for the training programme meet particular standards. Systems must be in place; programmes have to be properly organized and what is going to happen is, the NTA is going to go and look at the place to see whether or not the standards have been met. What happens after that? We have what is called the training instructors or the assessors. They too must be trained; they too must have their

qualifications, and we have what is called the internal verifiers. The internal verifiers also have to ensure that the assessors follow the procedure outlined in the programmes. What is going to happen? You have what is called the external verifiers who will come after and periodically make checks to ensure that the programmes are being followed according to the instructions laid out.

At the end, the evaluation is done by the external verifiers, and it is then and only then, after all this procedure has been followed and the trainees meet the requirements, they would be able to get the Trinidad and Tobago National Vocational Qualification, what is called the TTNVQ. This is surely a sign that it is not a matter of quantity, but quality of the programmes. We also have what is called the Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR). There are people who have no certificates, but they would have gathered experience and knowledge hands-on with somebody.

10.10 p.m.

We in this great party, we in this great Government believe that that person should be helped. So under what you might call the CEPEP arrangement that person is brought in, he is assessed and if he meets the criteria he is awarded the TTMVQ. We also have in place the Trinidad and Tobago Apprenticeship System and that is another occasion whereby we try to ensure that we cover all our grounds in ensuring that we widen the net to capture as many trainees as possible.

We have the life skill component of the training programme. Every single programme has a life skill component. Some of the topics that have covered the life skill component are increased self-esteem and self responsibility, encourage self development and emotional intelligence, develop critical thinking and decision-making skills, discourage indulgence in high-risk behaviours, develop strategies for stress management, cultivate good health habits and support personal well-being, foster harmonious and interpersonal relationships in society, develop positive social skills, develop self sufficiency and self reliance.

The curriculum modules are based on six teams and each module has several units. The inter-personnel relationships deal with self-esteem and self improvement, value clarification, goal settings and time management, wellness and self-care, drug education, heritage, interpersonal relationships, parenting, gender and relationships, human sexuality and sexual health, maintaining interpersonal relationships in the community leadership, financial life management, money management, savings and investment, entrepreneurship, managing the environment, the socio-economic environment and understanding the physical environment.

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Madam Deputy Speaker, when we spoke about the Vision 2020 document, we talked about the quality of individuals we would like to see, and therefore we can understand the value of the life-skill components in all our training programmes. I dare say, when we look at those who are engaged in criminal activities, very few if any at all come from those training programmes that we have. So, we are assured that we are on the right track with our training programmes.

Mr. Warner: Unlike you.

Hon. F. Jeffrey: Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to just put this on the record of this honourable House that from July 2004 to the present time, over 14,000 trainees graduated from the MuST programme. July 2002 to 2008 on the OJT programmes 48,000 persons, [*Desk thumping*] and one wonders if the UNC was in power what would have happened to those 48,000 persons? Retraining, 2002 to 2008, 7,381 trainees; YTEPP, 2002 to 2008, 38,267; [*Desk thumping*] HYPE, 2002 to 2008, 7,371; and if you look at what is happening in 2008—let us go through—MuST 2008, 6,400; OJT 2008, 7,955; retraining 1,698; YTEPP 4,411; HYPE 1,040. When you add it up, 24,543 trainees. [*Desk thumping*]

This number will continue to rise because as I speak there are many youths outside there who are looking to get into those programmes. We know that these programmes are indeed very successful, so much so that many of our trainees could hardly complete the programmes, the “employers and them” grab them. If these programmes were a waste of time employers would not have been clamouring for them and those programmes would have stopped a long time ago. The fact is, those programmes keep mushrooming all the time and employers keep coming for our trainees so we know that one of the success stories of this Government is the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education in those two programmes. [*Desk thumping*] I want to urge Members on the opposite side, enough is enough—

Hon. Member: Sit. [*Laughter*]

Hon. F. Jeffrey: The Member for Mayaro started a nice comment here this evening and I want to ask on the other side, people outside are watching us, let us stop the theatrics. You know sometimes we play for the cameras and so on, let us forget that. Let us think about Trinidad and Tobago. Vision 2020 is something that we must all embrace together. We must all embrace together. [*Desk thumping*]

My good friend from Chaguanas West, when we have football, we come with our red, we think Trinidad and Tobago and we support Trinidad and Tobago. Well, we want to see here tonight, on both sides of this House [*Interruption*] that

we come together as one and ensure that we work assiduously to ensure that on or before the year 2020 we become a developed nation.

Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Nizam Baksh (*Naparima*): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on September 30, 2009.

Let me first take the opportunity to congratulate my colleague, the Member for Siparia, for that wonderful response—[*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Singing for your supper.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Not at all.

Mr. N. Baksh: The theme of this Government's budget here is “Shaping our Future Together”. Let us appreciate that while the Government wants to shape our future together, we must understand that this Government is not listening to the people of this country for which it is supposed to be working. So, I see a difficulty right away of how we are going to shape this future together.

For the last couple of years when I was part of this budget presentation here I always observed there was a hype prior to this delivery of the budget speech, this year in particular, I have seen that we have lost that hype. When I listen to the people on the street the comments they were making with regard to this budget were all negative. They saw nothing in it for their development and for the upliftment of themselves and their families in this budget. When I looked at the attendance in the public gallery on that day, I myself was disappointed because I know from previous years there used to be a long line and people had to be turned away on a budget day. This year the public gallery was half filled. [*Interruption*] Nobody was interested.

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: Channel 11.

Mr. N. Baksh: Channel 11, [*Laughs*] only 2 per cent of the population. [*Interruption*]

After our contributions on this side, what you are going to see is the pieces of a puzzle being put together and that picture is going to show the mismanagement of this Government in this country here today. This is what we are going to show by all our contributions.

When you want to develop a country—and we are talking here about First World status by the year 2020—a very important ingredient in this Process, in my

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view, has to do with the services we can offer to our citizens of this country. Citizens who are entrusted with the responsibility to administer and deliver service to the people of Trinidad and Tobago seem to associate their duties and functions with the inherited qualities of slavery and indentureship. It would appear that the shackles of slavery and indentureship are so deeply engrained that centuries and decades of years cannot make a dent of change.

I put the blame squarely on the supervisors and those who are responsible for ensuring that the front runners do their work. I allocate even greater blame on the PNM Government because eventual responsibility rests on their shoulders. For too long we have turned a blind eye on the quality of service, on the daily insults and punishments that are inflicted on the humble law-abiding citizens. We have reached a stage where like Barack Obama we must say enough is enough. [*Desk thumping*]

We cannot continue to disregard the call from citizens for quality service in every phase of governmental activity. I want to tell the PNM Government that service should at all times reflect quality performance, quality relations and quality disposition on the part of those rendering the services. Service must at all times reflect high quality commitment, service must reflect caring and dedication to the cause of humanity, service must be prompt and urgent and service must enchant and delight recipients, service must reflect professionalism, those rendering services must be equipped with the skills and expertise relevant to the particular service. Only when the PNM Government could focus on service delivery; only when they could ensure that services they deliver have these components we could say that we are on the road to developed status. As of now developed status is a myth.

I would like to spend a few minutes in identifying some of the ministries and departments where our citizens are treated with dignity on a daily basis and I name a few of those: the Ministry of National Security where at police stations throughout Trinidad and Tobago citizens visit on a daily basis to make reports; where police officers on the beat on the highways who interface with members of public treat them cruelly, speak to them harshly and with open arrogance; and Immigration Offices where citizens are required to obtain machine readable passports, and this evening we heard the Minister of National Security giving some information on the progress that they are making with regards to the machine readable passports.

I want to contradict some of this information submitted by the Member for Laventille East/Morvant on a question in this House here. Just to give the arithmetic in this here, she said that 425,000 citizens have the unexpired non-

machine readable passports and the deadline for renewing these is December 31, 2009 and they receive on a weekly basis 2,300 passport applications for renewal. According to my arithmetic here you need to produce about 1,400 passports weekly and this is based on 24 workdays per month and 288 days per year. If you minus a few holidays and you consider the two months—November and December—you have a total working of 316 working days to process 425,000 passports. As I said, you need to process 1,345 passports per day to meet the demand and at the rate you are going it is going to take a couple of years to fulfil this deadline. So, what are we going to do? Are we going to wait till we have a crisis situation come December 31, because internationally by April 2010 we need to have these passports available? If we recognize this problem then we should take immediate action to rectify the problem, because this is certainly a problem.

He spoke about this number at TTPost. I could tell you that is a nightmare. I have had people in my office calling this number for several days and then they were only able to get access once and when they did get access they remained on the phone until they were passed on to several persons and then it became blank again; got cut off. So, I would like anyone on that side to call 669-4677, and I could make my phone available for that to see if they could get access to this number here. This is really a difficult situation that we need to rectify. Another ministry where we speak about service is the Ministry of Legal Affairs where citizens are required to obtain computerized birth certificates. This is also a problem. When you go to get your passport they are asking you for the computerized birth certificates, when you go to access the Conditional Cash Transfer Cards (CCTC) you need to produce this.

To get this new birth certificate you have to provide the information on the old birth certificate. They have identical information and I cannot see why you cannot use this old birth certificate while you are taking time to get the new birth certificate. *[Interruption]* It is important because this is creating a serious problem.

Another thing I have discovered and a constituent brought this to my attention that very often when you go there you get minor mistakes in it with regard to your name on the birth certificate. Do you know what they tell them there? Go and swear an affidavit to whatever information you have wrong there and get it corrected, rather than correct the birth certificate with the information that you submitted to them.

Another ministry is the Ministry of Works and Transport and this has to do with the licensing offices where citizens are required to renew their driver's

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permit and transfers of vehicles. Also the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment, where citizens are required to submit applications for housing and housing grants. They complain that when they go there they are frustrated, there are long lines, long hours of wait even to get the forms. Very often they are told even without investigating their forms and so, that they are not qualified. Another department is the National Insurance Board where citizens are required to apply for NIS pension and other benefits. Also the Elections and Boundaries Commission offices where citizens seek the Identification Cards, also the Ministry of Finance, revenue offices, VAT offices, income tax offices, stamp duty offices, Government pension offices—that is the Comptroller of Accounts.

The only one of these offices where citizens are greeted with a smile at present is the Government Employees' Pension office. People say when they go there they are greeted with a smile and they are given information where to go, but there is a problem with regard to the processing of the information at that section there. The Ministry of Social Development where citizens seek Senior Citizens Grant, public assistance, disability grants and the CCTC smart card assistance.

10.30 p.m.

People complain that when they go to those offices—like the smart card—they have to fill out a form with approximately 60 questions. They are treated very harshly and crudely and very often they are told even before the forms are processed, that they do not qualify. They are shouted at and are treated in a discourteous manner and this is something that needs to be addressed, if we want to achieve this 2020 world class or first-class status.

I also make reference to the various health centres where people have to wait for long hours to get treatment, and very often doctors are not available at these health centres. I am sure my colleagues here would focus on some of these when they are dealing with their shadow ministries.

Madam Deputy Speaker, billions of dollars of hard-earned taxpayers' money are expended on social programmes, and the results are positively not commensurate with financial and human commitment. This Government said that they spent \$34 billion in their social programmes since 2002—2008—a massive sum of \$34 billion—but can we say that they are reducing the number of families in poverty? The answer is no. They are unable to say the number of citizens who have been weaned off the programmes, as against the number that is added daily to the programme. I am sure the intake exceeds by far, the number of those graduating out these programmes.

As a matter of fact, I am satisfied that Government social programmes are based on a false philosophy. This Government is simply throwing huge sums of money in social programmes and no serious effort is being made to get the recipients out of poverty. I will prove that later with some of the figures that have been provided in the PSIP and the SSIP data. I am satisfied that this false philosophy of Government has placed this country in a very dangerous position. This Government has created a monster and I would like to call upon them to reconsider the extent of dependency that they have inflicted on the population. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, this Government prefers to bring foreign labour for the construction industry with high wages and special privileges, while they fail to provide the level of skills needed for our own citizens. They prefer to provide them with low end jobs and low end wages, effectively creating a dependency syndrome for its own political objectives, for example, September 12, 2008, at Woodford Square. PNM's clandestine agenda is to keep the poor citizens of this country as hewers of wood and carriers of water.

I want to look at the administrative cost of social programmes. If a study is done on the administrative cost of social programmes, I am sure that the figure will run into billions of dollars. There are more than 100 social programmes run by approximately 10 to 12 ministries. In some cases, one ministry such as the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education has dozens of these social programmes, each equipped with its own administrative structure. Is it not possible that one board and one administration could be established to oversee all these programmes? One could just imagine the quantity of savings that would accrue. Of course, this idea may not be considered because PNM must provide more jobs for the PNM family. This Government is not competent to run social programmes. The population is conditioned to believe that Government's administration of social programmes is really intended to reward citizens for political support.

We have to get rid of this mentality and scourge. The PNM boasted about economic growth and this is a pet subject of the Prime Minister, ignoring at all times the more pertinent factor of human development growth. [*Desk thumping*] I note that all these training initiatives provide a stipend for beneficiaries, apart from this, the institution concerned would have committed much expenditure on an annual basis for the capital goods and recurrent expenses. I am sure billions of dollars have been spent on these training initiatives and yet skills are not self-sustaining, and in fact we continue to depend on foreign workers.

As a country, this Government has failed us in preparing our people to meet our needs for vocational skilled workers. I would like the Minister concerned to

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inform this House, why we still cannot satisfy our local demands. Let me advance the reasons for failing in this area. In most cases, the period of training is completed and there are little or no formal instructions, and as a result, no marketable skills are acquired. This is a management problem as it is a usual case with the PNM. They commenced many activities without proper planning, and as a result, initiatives are destined for failure.

The actual training is not relevant to the work situation. In most cases, the quality of training is inferior, and indeed, substandard for the practical working environment. There is lack of coordination in respect of what is required and practised in the workplace, and the skills imparted in these training institutions. I have been reliably informed that the technology institutions where craft courses of the highest quality have been taught for decades have been discontinued. Contractors use these trainees as a source of cheap labour and provide no formal instructions, which is a prerequisite for evaluation. Some youths are more focused on their attendance for the stipend, rather than the skills training, and as a result, programme hopping is common. I want to read from the PSIP to make my point on this.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there is a long list here and what I have done, is really put together some information that they have under different sections, giving the number of persons in the programme and the amount of money spent. I am going to use a few from page 74, Table 6 (IV):

- The Adult Education Programme—they have spent \$8.5 billion and the number of persons trained, 7,275; cost per person is \$1,168.
- HYPE—they have spent \$40 billion and only trained 1,031 persons at a cost of \$38,797 per person. Extremely exorbitant.
- OJT—they have spent \$168 million to train 4,401 persons at a cost of \$38,173 per person.
- YTEPP—they have spent \$75,736,000 to train 5,624 persons at a cost of \$13,466.
- The GAP programme—they have spent \$16,434,000 to train only 642 persons.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

- The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)—they have spent \$35million to train 1,287 persons at a cost of \$27,195 per person.

This is information that I took from various parts of this report to put together to give this report.

- MILAT—\$6 million to train 98 persons at a cost of \$61,224 per person.

10.40 p.m.

- Community Education Programme, \$1.5 million to train 7,492 persons at a cost of \$2,002 per person.
- MuST Programme—which they talk a lot about—\$70 million to train 4,891 persons at a cost of \$14,312 per person;
- Non-Traditional Skills Training for women, \$4 million to train 400 persons at a cost of \$10,000 per person.
- Retraining Programme, \$21,088 million.

I did not give a breakdown on that.

- Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture (YAPA), \$2,100 million to train 317 persons at a cost of \$6,625.

This is one of the failed programmes as well.

Mr. Speaker, I was making the point that where millions of dollars were spent on these social programmes, there were no performance measurements with regards to their success. I would read from their own Social Sector Investment Programme where they have a tendency of just throwing money at all the problems, and when they should be giving reports on the success of these programmes, they confirm that they are just throwing money.

I will read a small section of it. They have a couple pillars, four or five pillars. I will read one of those pillars: Developing Innovative People. They had four programmes at an estimated expenditure of 100 per cent. I do not have time to put all those figures together, but they spent everything that was allocated for that programme. Four programmes spent more than the budgeted allocations, due to additional allocations. Three of these programmes are critical training. Two programmes are expected to spend 75 per cent of the budgeted allocation. Eight of the 16 programmes under pillar 2, that is, Nurturing a Caring Society, had an estimated expenditure of \$100,000. Two of the critical training programmes fell into this category. Four programmes spent more than the budgeted allocation due to additional allocation in fiscal 2008.

Pillar 3, Enabling Competitive Expenditure—NEDCO spent 100 per cent of its budgeted allocation and the Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture (YAPA) spent less than half of its budgeted allocation.

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Pillar 4, Investing in Sound Infrastructure and in the Environment—the National Social Development Programme was expected to spend just less than 100 per cent of its budgeted allocation. The point is that this Government keeps throwing money at all their problems, and we could see very little results. I made the point earlier that there are so many programmes, over 100, and we are not really seeing that they are taking persons out of poverty. This is the problem with us, we keep throwing money and we are seeing very little results.

I want to speak a little on the targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme. I would like the hon. Minister with responsibility for social development to note some serious complaints with regard to this programme. They have chosen to increase the Cash Transfer Programme when massive corruption has been identified. Is the Government condoning and encouraging corruption? Why not sanitize the programme before making the increases? [*Desk thumping*]

I have the *Sunday Guardian* of September 21—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: I am not sure if you listened to the entire presentation of the Minister of Finance, but I think it was quite clear, certainly to members of the national community, that the increases would not take effect until the client list is completely reviewed. That process is currently taking place. So your suggestion, while it sounds good, is already in effect. I just wanted to clarify that point; thank you for giving me the opportunity.

Mr. N. Baksh: I thought this was going to be in effect from October 2008? When I look at the strategies you have, I think you have some investigations going on, you want to do visits to homes. If you could tell us how many persons are recipients of this cash transfer, I could tell you how long it is going to take to complete that assignment. The way the PNM Government performs, it is going to take an exceptionally long time. I want to raise some other issues as well, but I thought that I would just throw that out from the beginning. There are other issues here.

There is a cadre of liaison officers allocated in these offices. They have been appointed by the Ministry of Social Development to check the authenticity of each beneficiary and applicant for this TCCP card. Let me tell you some of the problems and complaints we get from the clients who go to these offices. They report that officers say that they visit these homes, and they do their reports, but when they are confronted by these clients, they admit that they never visited some of these. This is causing a problem. So while you have officers there, you do not have proper supervision for and reporting for them. I know this for a fact.

I understand another problem is that they are given about 20 cases per week, and considering the number of applications for this assistance, it is taking some time to process. I understand it takes about six months before you visit and another six months at your Ministry before a card is issued. This is the information I got, that it takes a little while. With this minimum workload of about 20 cases per week, we are seeing that it is going to take a long time.

At the local offices as well, in the presence of members of the public, liaison officers shout and raise their voices and make crude remarks to poor and defenceless citizens who seek services from the offices. At their whims and fancies, liaison officers tell applicants that their applications have been rejected. When you are treating with persons at this level—this is why we say that the offices are not well equipped for dealing with clients. This has to do with all the social services. *[Interruption]*

Dr. Browne: I appreciate the value of what you are saying. I am not quite hearing the references or sources of the information you are providing, but I want to assure you. I know you are concerned about these matters, but a commitment has been given to retrain every single staff member of the Ministry of Social Development, from captain to cleaner and security, with regard to quality customer service. When I get the opportunity to speak, comprehensively I will address exactly how that training is being rolled out.

Bear in mind that anyone who approaches the social centre for assistance, let us say the means test is applied and if the individual does not pass it, there is normally a reaction of either disappointment, a cry of discrimination, et cetera. We need to ensure that the staff is properly trained, provided with the proper tools and that the means test is applied fairly to all citizens of this country. Your concerns are being well expressed, but I just want to assure you that these matters are currently being taken into consideration, including the retraining of every single staff member in quality customer service. Some of those complaints, we anticipate, would be decreasing.

Mr. N. Baksh: If you allow me to lay my complaints on the table. I am glad you agree with me that the issues I raise are of vital concerns to the persons we are dealing with on the other side.

One of my other concerns is that when persons are rejected, what recourse they have for making appeals. You ask about my sources, but I would not want to give the names of clients out there, but it is information coming from the constituents; this is the concern.

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I was raising the point about opportunities for appeals. Is there an appeal board?

Dr. Browne: You know the system; you know there is a system of appeal.

Mr. N. Baksh: I understand that as of now it is done at the local office itself. I need to know that so I could inform persons on the outside.

My colleague, the Member for Oropouche East, made a point that there was special treatment for certain persons. Persons are saying that people connected with the officers and they have their friends and relatives, get special treatment with regard to other members of the public. This is something we have to address. We have to do something about that. I am concerned about services across the board. While I might want to raise situations pertaining to my constituency, I am looking at services across the board.

You have flood and fire victims who go to these social services for help. When the officers ask for documentation, I mean, when somebody's house is burnt, the person is looking for immediate assistance, how could that person provide that? Each case must be dealt with on its own merit. We have to look at this aspect of it to see what assistance we could give.

I have a situation in the constituency where someone went to apply for this Smart Card. I understand that points are given on different headings; it might be housing, the facilities in the house, employment or whatever. I do not have the full information. I was giving the example about someone in the constituency, a woman whose husband left her with two children. For almost two years they could not locate the husband; there was no information on his whereabouts. This person went to apply for financial assistance. They have a very good home; they have a television and these kinds of things, but when you look at a housewife with no income, looking for some assistance—I understand that with the points system the house carries a substantial number of points. They were ruled out because of that. I want to know where the compassion in this thing is.

You are looking at the points system, but a person like this really needs some assistance; we have to, perhaps, review it, because we have to assist people. You want to assist poor and needy people in this situation. When people are looking for help and they are refused and they go in circles, they become very suicidal. This is something we have to look at.

In the Social Sector Investment Programme, again, you have two items; one is the CCTP with a sum of \$134 million. As far as I am aware, this CCTP replaced the SHARE Programme over the years. When I look lower down, I see you have an

allocation also for the SHARE Programme of \$5 million, and in 2009 you have a similar allocation of \$5 million. So maybe you could tell us later on about this SHARE Programme, what it is going to do in this programme.

10.55p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I want to look at national insurance. Since 1971, the National Insurance Act stipulated that self-employed persons should be enlisted in the programme and issued a National Insurance Registration Card; to date despite repeated calls by myself and others, the inclusion of these citizens has not been effected. At present, 18—20 per cent of the working population of Trinidad and Tobago is not covered by national insurance, and these are the self-employed.

Year after year I have been told that the inclusion of the self-employed in the system is rather cumbersome and difficult. I suggest that with full employment now, and the existing economic conditions, inclusion of the self-employed should be given priority.

The survey conducted by the NIB showed a high level of interest in acquiring insurance by self-employed. The self-employed should be accommodated and requested to pay quarterly, or that arrangements be made for them to make their contributions at any commercial bank.

I look at NIS benefits and the benefits paid out to dependants are generally inadequate. In 2005, the poverty line was identified as \$665 per month; in 2008 it has been widely reported that citizens with incomes less than \$1,300 per month are below the poverty line. I want to say that all NIS benefits to dependants are under the poverty line and I list some of them: survival benefit, child allowance, the present amount is \$400 per month; orphan allowance, \$800 per month; pension and widows, \$400 per month; dependant parents' pension, a meagre \$200 per month. Mr. Speaker, these people are way below the poverty level now and some action should be taken to bring them above that level if you want to get people out of the poverty syndrome.

At present, the NIS tribunal has a battle of 500 cases, so at least 30 cases are added each month. The tribunal deals with 10 to 12 cases per month, at this rate it will need more than three years to clear the backlog, not to mention the constant increases. The Minister responsible must do something to address this situation because the waiting time is increasing progressively and citizens are made to suffer for benefits for which they have contributed.

At present, the NIS Board has employed two part-time medical practitioners to examine claims which are pending medical review. This has not changed the

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waiting period. The board needs a full-time doctor to make a dent into the quantity of persons whose claims are delayed for want of medical review, and that has been happening since the inception of the programme in April 1972.

The income ceiling for Senior Citizens Grant has been increased by \$300 bringing it to a total of \$2,800. This ceiling is grossly inadequate, as a matter of fact; the UNC has decided to take old age pension to \$3,000 per month. Many citizens will not be able to benefit from the Senior Citizens Grant even with the \$2,800 ceiling and I will give you an example. The Minister in her budget presentation gave an example, and I will give an example here. A retiree who receives at present \$2,000 NIS benefit pension and \$650 pension will only receive \$150 Senior Citizens Grant and this is applicable to all the Caroni (1975) Limited workers. This is the amount they are getting as a pension, \$650; so if they apply for the Senior Citizens Grant, all they will be entitled to is \$150.

Mr. Speaker, this amount of increase is not worth the administrative cost that will be incurred because the processing, the application, the investigation and administrative cost will be far more than that \$150, not even considering the waiting time for that as well. I want to strongly recommend that no senior citizen should receive a grant of less than \$500 so whatever the situation, once you fall under \$500, you should make a minimum payment of \$500.

I listened to the provisions of the ferry pass and I want to ask what system will be used to provide the ferry pass. Where will it be available? Do you have to go where you purchase the ticket to board the ferry, or do you have to go to Port of Spain only where you would have to walk with your birth certificate or ID card? Will it be permanent like the bus passes? Will a single pass be issued for the bus and ferry? I think if you are doing that, then you should use a single pass for both the ferry and the bus. How many senior citizens do you anticipate will use this service? Because if you are calculating something you have to see how much money you are going to lose in that benefit to the senior citizens.

It gives me a good idea so that in my constituency I could organize a lot of senior citizens to have exchanged cultural visits to Tobago. I would advise my colleagues to do similarly; you know, excursions like the cultural programme we had in Woodford Square recently. Take them from village to village across there, and maybe we can ask for some residence across there where they can be housed for two to three days so we could have our cultural exchanges. This is something we have to look at.

I want to look at another serious issue. We are in the digital age today and very often when people go to offices, they have to get a form, they have to walk

with so many documents, if you miss something, you have to go back and look for it and it takes a long period. In this digital age of online technology, why can we not provide all the social services forms online so people can get assistance? If they cannot do it themselves, they have family or community members who can assist them to complete, and it goes immediately to the offices for processing, and then forwarded for investigation.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. N. Baksh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My concern really has to do with the very poor people in this country. I want to speak about the spontaneous settlers called squatters. This is an area of concern.

Mr. Speaker, I have reviewed the 2008/2009 Budget on housing and I have noticed that the poorest category of citizens whose need for housing is critical have been deliberately excluded from the housing programme. I am talking about citizens, or spontaneous settlers on state lands, very often referred to as squatters. At the time when the UNC was in office and the Land Settlement Agency was launched, the number of spontaneous settlers was estimated at about 50,000. I am sure as of today's date this number would have increased considerably.

Mr. Speaker, our citizens who are squatting are ranked among the poorest in our country, some of them have been occupying State lands for as long as 30 and 40 years, they have dependants who were born in these areas and they themselves built shacks and reside on these lands. Apart from being poor, the houses that these citizens have erected on lands which they have occupied are usually unplanned, inadequate, small and built from inferior building materials. The areas where squatting exists are cramped, crowded and are not provided with water, electricity, roads and drainage except in areas where services are rendered free of charge prior to election.

During the rainy season, these citizens live in muddy and flood-prone areas. The unemployment rate, the unskilled rate and the illiteracy rate are high in these communities. The hon. Minister of Finance has offered a range of goodies in the housing sector, none of which would apply to or be accessible to squatters. For example, squatters will not be considered for relocation in housing estates because

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they do not have the income qualification. They will not benefit from water and electrical connections, because they are not bona fide owners of properties and the Superintendent of Crown Lands has refused to endorse their applications to obtain this public utility.

I do not think that their plight will change since this responsibility has now been transferred to the EMBDC. They had not done it in the past because there is not regularization initiative. Squatters will not benefit from improved roads and drainage because there are no plans to regularize them similar to what the UNC had in place. They are unable to access the Home Improvement Grant and subsidy because they do not have security of land tenure. Squatting communities will continue to reflect squalor because there are no plans to regularize them and allocate a piece of land to them which they could use to build their family's future. Squatters are not considered important citizens by this uncaring and inconsiderate Government.

I want to make one or two recommendations for those poor people. I strongly recommend that efforts be made to regularize the tenancy of squatters so that these poor citizens may enjoy the security and comfort that others enjoy in our society. [*Desk thumping*] The necessary certificates of comfort will enable them to source housing subsidies and grants to improve condition of their houses. The certificates of comfort will also enable them to obtain water and electrical connection.

I look now at the children's authority legislation. Mr. Speaker, two of the Children's Authority Bills have been passed. The PNM Government has so far avoided the full package of Children's Authority Bills; in order to delay and avoid the children legislation they are bringing them piecemeal. This is deliberately done to delay issues so that the remaining four years of their term will expire and nothing will be done to address the problems which the nation's children face at present.

Mr. Speaker, I do not think that this Government is serious about addressing the abuse to which our children are exposed daily and the extent to which homeless children roam the streets of the cities. I do not think that the children will ever forgive them for inactivity.

In the budget debate of 2002, the then Minister of Community Development advised this honourable House that five mediation centres were established at Port of Spain, Cunupia, Point Fortin, San Juan and Couva and provided statistics to show that they were very effective and were not only mediating successfully, but expeditiously as well. The Minister said that the centres were reducing the

backlog of cases in the Magistrates' Court, in other words, the centres have proven very effective in resolving matters especially those among and between families, and that was an initiative of the UNC government.

11.10 p.m.

My concern, therefore, is if these centres are so effective and functional, why has this Government failed to introduce additional centres, especially in those areas where there may be a high concentration of matters that fall within the mediation group?

I want to touch briefly on crime. Within the past few years a sizable chunk of the national budget has been committed to the Ministry of National Security to address the spiraling increase in crime. The country has been informed of the millions spent on high-tech equipment to control crime. We heard that this evening again, yet we do not seem to have a handle on this scourge in our society. On a daily basis, murders are committed, most of which are gang-and gun-related.

I have been reliably informed that contraband trade is rampant in our country and the route through which a variety of illegal contraband is conducted. For example, it is widely rumoured that cargoes arriving at the airport take several hours from offloading from the aircraft to delivery at the various custom warehouses. It is alleged that during this period, undeclared goods are removed from among documented cargoes and that these goods are, in fact, arms and ammunitions. I raise this because it is a concern.

Within the past few weeks several groups of senior citizens have visited my office and complained about the inordinate delays that it takes the Food and Drugs Division of the Ministry of Health to approve a new drug imported into the country. They have reported that it takes more than six months for this department to convey approval for a capsule that has been converted into a tablet with the same name and same strength. They said that the delay has given rise to a range of contraband trade in drugs. At present a very lucrative, under-the-counter drug trade is being conducted with drug dealers from Latin America. Citizens are therefore exposed to purchasing counterfeit, life-saving drugs that could impose a threat to life and this is common now.

I want to talk about crime; the spiritual and moral values. I want to look here at another section that has been creating some problem here. When you look at the newspapers under the ads section, there is a section called "Personals"—and here I am talking about the spiritual and moral values. I would just read for you one or two of those ads and we could take what it means: "First-class adult

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DVDs—Satisfaction Guaranteed.” “Adult Toys; widest variety, lowest prices.” “Attractive Sophisticated Escorts, Foreigners, Businessmen encouraged.” “Accommodations free, escorts.”

I am speaking here about the moral values in this country and because of the increase in money—a lot of money is flowing in this country at this time so that you expect, while other things are coming, you have immoral activities growing as well. So if we are talking about spiritual and moral values, then we must address these situations. It is no longer hush-hush. You have advertisements on the newspapers now, encouraging people to go.

I would wish—and there are many numbers to each one of these—that you call and hear the responses you are going to get. They have others like: “Breast enlargement for females only.” There are others, but I would not want to go into those, but it is something that we have to address when we are talking about the spiritual and moral values that we are losing in this country.

My colleague has given a lot of information on the crime figures in this country. We are ranked fifth in the world with regard to the number of murders committed. We come after Colombia, South Africa, Jamaica, Venezuela—then Trinidad and Tobago. We have 370 persons per million—and this is the murder rate. In Canada, UK, Germany, Sweden, you have 10 murders per million persons; in Japan it is four murders per million person, and a little known country that most of us have never heard about, Qatar, you have one murder in two years—half a murder a year. So maybe we should encourage the Ministers to go across there and ask the Emir of Qatar what they do to keep down the murder rate.

Hon. Member: I was there.

Mr. N. Baksh: You were there? Well, next time you visit you had better bring some information for all of us to share here. The Minister of Finance, I understand, went to Kuwait—Dubai—so he could go to Qatar the next time.

Make a visit to Qatar as well.

I want to look briefly at Community Development, but before I do that I want to look at the list of social programmes. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr. N. Baksh: I am going to read some items in the 2009 budget memorandum from PricewaterhouseCoopers. Under the social programmes there are a number of issues from the last budget, 2007/2008 that were not undertaken: The establishment of a Children’s Authority; the National Counselling Programme—all these were

programmes that were promised last year and not achieved—the National Family Policy; the National Parenting Programme; the National Plan of Action for Children; Poverty Reduction Strategy; Social Services Delivery Agency.

These are some of the programmes where nothing was done or that some groundwork has started. So we hope the Minister will come and tell us about some of these programmes and not come and say that these are new initiatives for these years and you have the same thing being repeated.

With respect to Community Development, under the PSIP, the Community Development Fund in 2008, there was an allocation of \$14 million and \$11.6 million was spent for 83 small grants; \$2.8 million for 17 organizations—a variety of activities—\$2 million for the national pan technology and \$4.9 million for improvement to community facilities, which gives you a total of \$11.3 million. They said that they utilized all of the \$14 million. So I want to ask the question: Where did the other \$2.7 million go? Apart from this, the hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs must name the organizations that have benefited from the various grants and also tell us where they are located.

In 2008, \$41.4 million was expended on the construction of community centres, but all the information we got from the books and information provided in the Social Sector Investment Programme was that they have listed five community centres. In it they said that one community centre, Thicke Village, cost \$11 million. I want to ask the question: What was put in that community centre or what type of building was built in Thicke Village; what are the features of the centre? There is also no indication of the other centres they have built during that period.

In 2008/2009, \$55 million has been allocated to build 50 community centres. I have checked the documents and I saw that 25 will be built by eTeck and the National Commission for Self-Help will build 25 community centres. I want to know whether the mandate of the Self-Help Commission has changed, because they are to assist. Their premise was to help poor communities and to help in time of need. I see they are now given a new mandate. But when I look at the allocations in the SSIP, the Social Sector Improvement Programme, I see that in 2008 Self-Help got \$7 million and in 2009, they were allocated \$9 million. So I want to know how they are going to build the 25 new centres with \$9 million and how they are really going to get engaged in the construction of community centres. Is this one of those new companies you are going to have, to undertake programmes again?

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When I looked at the documents to see more activities of community development, there were a limited number of activities and they seem to put their premise on anaculture, and they claimed this to be a new initiative in the year 2009. If my memory serves me well, I recall that anaculture has been going on for a couple years now, so that it is not really a new initiative.

I also see, under “Repairs to Community Centre”, you are going to undertake 59 community centres for minor repairs; and for refurbishment, where you intend to change a lot of features in the community centres you have 135 centres. So I want to know whether we could really undertake this massive amount of refurbishment in these community centres—135 of them—and we have not seen any new centres listed.

I want to come to another issue here, the Community Development scholarships that we have heard so much about.

Hon. Member: File it as a question.

Mr. N. Baksh: You have not been answering the questions so I will take the opportunity to raise it here. The former Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs was responsible for this host of scholarships. I have no complaint with this Minister, but being the Minister in the seat now, perhaps she could throw some light on this. As I said, the former Minister was responsible for granting these scholarships during 2007/2008. This, you know, smells of corruption and favouritism.

I am sure that the current Minister was embarrassed to provide the information on the beneficiaries of the scholarships. I do not want to say that she is a part of the cover-up; I doubt. The hon. Minister must protect her own integrity. I have information on some of those recipients of the Community Development scholarships. I would not want to call the names, but I could say that they are people who are connected to the Ministry and some of them are friends and relatives of those employed in the Ministry. There are also three persons who were stranded in Georgia during that Russia/Georgia conflict who were also recipients of these scholarship awards as well, and those names were listed.

I just want to look at one or two constituency matters. I want to look quickly at the roads in the constituency. We always have to make protests; burnt tyres and so, before we could get some little action from the Minister of Works and Transport. I am saying that the little we are getting, there are other roads that are deteriorating at a fast rate. I have written to the Minister for a few roads and I hope that he will address it. I have also had the opportunity to attend several

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) meetings, with regard to two highways: the San Fernando to Princes Town Freeway and the Solomon Hochoy Highway extension to Point Fortin and La Brea.

11.25 p.m.

Always at the end of those assessments we are told that work will commence in a matter of days. These assessments were held two or three years ago. This has always been the case.

Another big problem in the constituency is water. There are areas in the constituency of Naparima where people get water once in two or three weeks. There is a system in WASA where you have to leave a recorded message. When you get to someone, they say they have your message and that there are turns to supply water. This is the major problem: very few responses are obtained.

I am bombarded with complaints from constituents with regard to water supply. Right now, in Cedar Hill, I have complaints from villagers who say that for three weeks they have not received a supply of water. There are other areas where they have never had a supply of water and we have sent requests over one year now. For 10 months now we have had a new government and for the last 10 months, there has been very little coming out of the Ministry of Public Utilities. There were helpful programmes there before. *[Interruption]* I have requests for water for Asya Trace, Massiah Trace, Carapan Trace and Maraj Avenue.

There was a house wiring programme in the Ministry of Public Utilities. I saw in the Social Sector Improvement Programme where a number of houses have been given up. For the last 10 months there has been nothing and people are asking for assistance. These are poor people who need assistance because they are unable to wire their homes. I would like the Minister to take note and see what assistance they can give to the poor citizens of this country. If we are talking about working together to improve our citizens, then we must do just that.

I would like to conclude *[Desk thumping]* by referring to the number of state agencies which the PNM has created within the past two years. The number is increasing so rapidly that I have lost count of them. I think this is another dangerous path that the Government has taken to circumvent the checks, balances and accountability which the public service practises.

This Government is not only creating a parallel public service, but it is creating organizations that could easily engage in corrupt practices. I am confident that the initiative is underlined with corruption. I am not convinced that these initiatives

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are intended to avoid the tediousness of bureaucracy because the PNM Government has still not delivered given all the new state agencies.

Moreover, I must admit that the UNC's plans to reduce poverty and develop a fair society still reigns supreme over all the social programmes ministered by the PNM Government. [*Desk thumping*] We still believe that the social services delivery system must be reformed; food prices and the cost of living must be controlled; the family unit must be strengthened; the Senior Citizens Grant must be increased to \$3,000 per month; and the NIS minimum pension must be \$2,500 per month. Water must be provided for all on a 24/7 basis.

I quote from the PNM's own Vision 2020 document. I leave them with their own quotation.

“The Power of Measuring Results

- If you do not measure results, you cannot tell success from failure.
- If you cannot see success, you cannot reward it.
- If you cannot reward success, you are probably rewarding failure.
- If you cannot see success, you cannot learn from it.
- If you cannot recognize failure, you cannot correct it.
- If you can demonstrate results, you can win public support.”

That source is Kusek and Rist, *Ten Steps to a Results-Based Monitoring and Evaluation System*.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, because of the lateness of the hour, I beg to move that the House do now adjourn to Monday, September 29, 2008 at 10.00 a.m.

Question put and agreed to.

House accordingly adjourned.

Adjourned at 11.31 p.m.