

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Monday, September 29, 2008*

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

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

1. The Administrative Report of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation for the period October 01, 2006 to September 30, 2007. [*The Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education (Hon. Christine Kangaloo)*]
2. The Annual Administrative Report of the Diego Martin Regional Corporation for the period October 01, 2006 to September 30, 2007. [*Hon. C. Kangaloo*]

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, as usual, during the budget debate, all questions on the Order Paper will be deferred.

The following questions stood on the Order Paper:

**Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago
(Details of Travelling Allowance)**

- 198.** With regard to the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago, could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs state:
- (a) whether the Corporate Communications Manager and Interim Chief Executive Officer receive a travelling allowance;
 - (b) if so, how much?
 - (c) whether these officers have access to use of the company's vehicles in their private capacities and if yes, why? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

**Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago
(Details of Salaries)**

- 199.** With regard to the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago, could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs state:
- (a) whether there is a system in place for the increase of salaries of members of staff; and
 - (b) was this system applied to in the case of the Project Engineer, Mr. Sheldon Weekes? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

**Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago
(Details of Posts and Vacancies)**

200. With respect to the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago, could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs state the number of posts and names of the posts which have become vacant since his appointment as Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

Questions, by leave, deferred.

MOLESTATION OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

Mr. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj SC (*Tabaquite*): Mr. Speaker, by letter dated September 18, 2008, I sought your leave to raise a matter of privileges of the House. On September 18, 2008, I also indicated to you that since I sought leave to be out of the country until September 22, 2008 and further sought leave to be out of the country, to give me the opportunity to present my application relating to privileges on the next date that I would be present in the House.

The matter of privilege concerns the assaulting, insulting, molesting, abusing and menacing of Members of Parliament who belong to the Opposition whilst they were coming to the House of Representatives on Friday, September 12, 2008, to participate in matters to be dealt with by the House at a sitting that afternoon.

These acts were committed in the precincts of the House and in the vicinity thereof, by persons who were allegedly organized by the Government and its political party for the purpose of showing support for the Prime Minister against the Opposition's Motion of no confidence which was to be debated in the House of Representatives that afternoon. Members of the Opposition were verbally abused, molested and insulted by members of the crowd who were assembled as stated above. They also blocked Members of Parliament whilst they walked towards the Parliament. They even used obscene language against the Members of the Opposition.

By letters dated August 24 and September 08, I had written to the Prime Minister in which I informed the Prime Minister that I had information about these threatened actions. The aforesaid conduct, actions and/or inactions have brought and continue to bring the House into disrepute and I respectfully submit that they constitute a prima facie case to be referred to the Committee of Privileges and I do so move.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we are all cognizant that section 55(3) of the 1976 Constitution bestows on the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and its Members the same powers, privileges and immunities that existed in the United Kingdom House of Commons in 1976.

Erskine May, at page 75 of the 23rd edition of *Parliamentary Practice*, defines privilege as:

“...the sum of the peculiar rights enjoyed by each House collectively as a constituent part of the High Court of Parliament, and by Members of each House individually, without which they could not discharge their functions, and which exceed those possessed by other bodies or individuals.”

At page 128 of the same text, May defines contempt as:

“...any act or omission which obstructs or impedes either House of Parliament in the performance of its functions, or which obstructs or impedes any Member or officer of such House in the discharge of his duty, or which has a tendency, directly or indirectly, to produce such results, may be treated as a contempt even though there is no precedent of the offence.”

The Member for Tabaquite has sought to make the case that one of the most basic privileges of Members of this House was infringed on Friday, September 12, 2008. That is, the right to freely go to and come unhindered from the precincts of this Parliament where Members perform one of their more crucial functions as Members of the House. The Member for Tabaquite quite correctly draws reference to the House of Representatives Act which, in 1953, ascribed penalties for the breach of certain privileges and immunities, and which still remains part of the laws of Trinidad and Tobago.

In recognition of this basic privilege which is based on the pre-eminent claim of the House to the attendance and service of its Members and their right to be free from obstruction, intimidation and interference in carrying out their parliamentary duties and functions, section 10(a) of that Act prescribes a penalty and summary conviction for any person who assaults, obstructs, molests or insults any Member coming to, being within or going from the precincts of the House, or endeavours to compel any Member by force, insult or menace to declare himself in favour of or against any proposition or matter pending or expected to be brought before the House or Committee.

The Member claims that Members of the Opposition, as they tried to attend a sitting of the House of Representatives on the afternoon of Friday, September 12,

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2008, were verbally abused, molested, insulted and even blocked by persons from a crowd which assembled in Woodford Square.

Although the Member for Tabaquite did not provide any specific examples in raising this matter of privilege, if indeed Members of this House were in any way harassed on their way to the precincts of this Parliament, then undeniably a breach of parliamentary privilege may have occurred.

As such, I rule that a prima facie case of breach of privilege has been made out by the Member of Parliament for Tabaquite and refer this matter to the Committee of Privileges for further investigation and report.

I do so rule.

APPROPRIATION BILL

(BUDGET)

[Third Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [September 22, 2008]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Dr. Keith Rowley (*Diego Martin West*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If I was a younger man I would have been confused at this point in time, but as they say: age brings reason and experience can guide. I have been around this House for a long time and I know that from my history, when I am on the south side, I look north and talk to the Government. As a former Member of the Opposition I have been on the north side talking to those on the south side, where from the government you talk to the Opposition. Today, I find myself talking to the Government on the north side, to the Opposition on the south side and belonging to the Government on the north side. What I am going to do is talk to the three sides of the triangle. In that way, I may get some order to my confusion.

Let me begin by congratulating the Minister of Finance for presenting a budget to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, in the Parliament. It is good to see that we have young people who have come into the political arena, joining is the maelstrom of politics in this country and one such person has had the opportunity to present us with a budget. I want to heartily congratulate the Minister of Finance.

I want to repeat a comment I made publicly, before this opportunity to speak on the budget. It is a very ambitious document of intentions and it also poses a number of challenges. I want, on behalf of my constituency, the people of Diego

Martin West, to deal with the challenges that we face in the context of the budget, as presented in the House. Then I may go on to one or two other matters in the short time available to me.

There was a time when I could raise these matters elsewhere. I raised them here in the context of an issue that the country has to face, notwithstanding the best intentions of those in office. Whether it is the PNM, UNC or NAR, we have this problem. Those of us in Diego Martin more than ever, are experiencing the outcome of this particular problem. It is the problem of implementation. I would say, today, to my colleagues on the other side that if we stop now, make a commitment to implement half of the things that we are committed to as of today, and get half of those things implemented, then we would have moved this country significantly forward. However, it does not go like that. Every year we are required to come and talk about what we would be doing in the coming year and invariably we are piling more and more.

In Diego Martin West, take my own case, where as Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West, I went to Victoria Gardens to a meeting one night in 2000, I think it was, and I had a very stormy meeting with the residents. I had to take the opportunity to say to them: “If the position that you are taking is the one that you are standing by and that is the basis on which you would vote, then I do not expect that you would vote for me or the PNM, because we have taken the decision to build for the people of Diego Martin West, a secondary school in the Westmoorings area. I do not know if you know Mr. Speaker, but the Diego Martin West constituency is the only constituency in the country that does not have a government secondary school. Some constituencies have two or three, but because of the geography and the layout of things, Diego Martin West children go elsewhere, Port of Spain, Diego Martin Central and certain other schools, but the decision was taken to have one in Diego Martin West and the people of Victoria Gardens were objecting to that.

I, as a Member of the Opposition in this House, fought for the Mason Hall Secondary School when the UNC decided—Trevor Sudama, Minister of Finance, notwithstanding what the Parliament says—that it was not going to be built. It took Motions and questions from the PNM in the opposition to get that school built in Mason Hall. If I could do that then for the Mason Hall School, I guess I could do the same thing for Victoria Gardens. As of now, six years later, that school has not been built and we must take responsibility for it. It is a matter of implementation.

We have a new Minister and a new Government. I am hopeful that, notwithstanding all that has happened, the new Minister—I have had

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conversations with her, in 2009 we would commence and complete, in short order, the construction of the secondary school that has been earmarked for the Westmoorings/Four Roads area. Six years in anybody's book is a long time. Clearly, we have a problem there.

10.15 a.m.

I have confidence that the Minister will cooperate and that the Government will see this not as a new project, but one that is very late.

Mr. Speaker, it is the same thing with the Carenage Police Station. The officers walked out of that police station and left the area defenceless in a crime wave. They have been coerced to go back into the station. There is a site and this Parliament has approved monies year after year for a Carenage Police Station, and I do not know why the police station is not being built. However, recently, I was shocked when I met with the Commissioner of Police on this matter. In the meeting, he called his aide-de-camp who came forward and said they do not know anything about this project and they are going to look into it. Now, something has to be wrong in the system.

As a Member of Parliament and as a Minister of the Government I went on that site with the police. I have been there with all the people who are involved and I was given the assurance that the project was going to start in short order, and then now I find myself on the south side of the Parliament to be told that they do not know anything about this, and they are going to find out what is going on. Carenage Police Station is a priority; it is not a new project. It is a failure to implement, and the Government must take note of that.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, the general western area of Diego Martin is the most sought after area for occupancy in the country. There are also young people growing up in the area and starting their own families and so on. The population growth in the western peninsula is amongst the highest in the country. The result of that is that 10 years ago, we had a not so satisfactory water supply system and with every passing day and with every house being built in the area the situation is getting worse. So, five years ago, people who were getting water three times a week are getting it once a week now. Persons who were getting water for the entire week are getting it now two days a week, because there is a shortage of water in the western peninsula. That is a priority and it is not a new project.

Again, working with the Minister involved over the period of time, implementation issues arise and it is getting worse to the point where today in Diamond Vale—even though we have made one or two changes in the system—where there is an industrial estate, there is one factory complaining that they are paying

\$20,000 a day to bring water into the factory so as to keep production going and to keep people in their jobs. When the water is not available people are sent home. That is what is happening, because there is a shortage of water in the Diego Martin area. That is a problem that has to be addressed as a priority. The Government has indicated that the way that we are going to solve that problem is by way of desalination, and I hope that the desalination plant does not take as long to come as the Diego Martin Highway improvement and, once again, we have an implementation issue there.

Traffic jams now start at Movie Towne to get into Diego Martin. It starts at 3.30 p.m. and it goes until 7.00 p.m. and we know what the solution is. I have been on site there with the Minister and the drawings are there. All that has to be done to relieve and remove that problem in Diego Martin that happens every day is the building of a few hundred metres of the Diego Martin Highway which had not been built for the longest while. Every day I am hearing that it is about to get started—I am talking to the people who are responsible. The bottom line is that I have seen no action to acquire the strips of land to get that work done.

Recently, when I was at the Ministry of Housing, we made provision for the highway because the drawings were shown to us. So, if we have drawings and traffic jams starting at 3.00 p.m. until 7.00 p.m. and we cannot get it done, then something has to be wrong within the system for which you all must take responsibility. All I am saying is that I am trusting that now I am on the south side that we are going to get that done, because we know what has to be done. It is not putting man on the moon. I am hearing that we are not having that kind of confidence in our local contractors or whatever contractors, but what contractors do you need to build a quarter mile of highway?

The people of Diego Martin, which is a PNM stronghold, have been very patient. This has been there for umpteen years, and it is not because of the lack of representation. I have heard some people say that the reason you do not get things done in your constituency is because of poor representation. I can tell you that is not the reason in Diego Martin West. There must be some other reason, and it has to do with implementation issues within the Government system. I am bringing this out in the public domain now, speaking from the south side of the Parliament, so that everybody would know that there is a solution and we will see what the response is.

The solution to the Diego Martin traffic problem is to construct the missing south to north link of the highway from Victoria Gardens to Crystal Stream. The drawings have been lying in the Ministry of Works and Transport for God knows how long, and they have surfaced a couple years ago. The current Minister of Works and Transport and I walked that road and I was given the assurance that it

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was going to start in a matter of months, and it is two and a half years now and it has not yet started. This is not putting man on the moon. The people of Diego Martin are patient.

Many years ago when I went to live in Diego Martin—I am talking about the mid 70s—the highway ended in Westmoorings. If you go from Westmoorings to Carenage, you will meet poor quality housing along the main road, and the reason being for all those years the Town and Country Planning had taken the position that no approvals would be granted for property owners to develop along that stretch of land, because that stretch of land between Bayshore and Carenage is earmarked for the road expansion or the dual carriageway creation.

I have lived there half my life. I have harassed this matter for years, and I am talking about it now. Yes, you can say that I was a Minister of Government, but the bottom line is that I did not go there to have a shovel and a hoe. The steel is still sticking out there from 25 years ago or more for the road to go to Chaguaramas.

Three months ago, I was the happiest person in the world. I was told that the consultant was in discussion with the Ministry of Works and Transport to determine the terms of their engagement to get this project started. A few weeks later I am hearing about a causeway to Chaguaramas. I am asking the Government to tell us in this debate and the property owners along there who for all those years were told that they cannot develop their lands, because it is for road development, has that decision now been officially taken? Is it that the land development along the roadway is no longer there and people can go and develop their properties and no road is going to pass there for the extension of the highway to Chaguaramas, because we have taken a decision to go forward with a causeway or is it just that a causeway is being thought about? If this is so, I would really like to know—I think the Government should tell us what is the economic consideration between the construction of a causeway and acquiring property and using the Government's own property to get that road built from Westmoorings to Chaguaramas. I would hate to want to think that I would end my political career and there is a two-lane road between Bayshore and Chaguaramas.

Every Sunday evening—God forbids something happens in Chaguaramas—you cannot get out. It takes hours to get out and at Carnival time it is the worst. Chaguaramas is the partying area of the country and you cannot get in and you cannot get out, and we know what the solution is, and it is just not being done and now we are hearing about a causeway.

I am saying that it took us 35 years to move from Westmoorings to a cancellation of the project along the road, and I do not want to think how long a causeway would take. Is it that given the present approach and efficiencies and personnel we are going to get the causeway? These are discussions that will continue until it is done. I am not talking here about the conclusion of a debate, but we are opening the debate on these matters.

In my own situation, I have much time now to pay attention to these matters more than I have had before. I am raising these examples to indicate the kind of bottlenecking that we have in our system. I am sure this is not only in Diego Martin West, but this is something that is happening to us as a country, and we need to take careful note of it.

We are building a sporting complex in Bagatelle, and it made the news last election. What kind of system are we using? The foundation was built and the contractor has probably moved from the site and grass is growing there. There is some kind of arrangement in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs where you have to build the foundation and only then you have to begin to deal with the super structure. If you go there now, you are going to see the sporting complex and the community centre in that same way. I do not know if that is how it ought to be done, but I trust that in 2009 these things are not going to happen.

Mr. Speaker, I occupy a fairly unique position in this Parliament in that I have had the opportunity to serve for a long time. I have served in the Ministry of Planning and Development, the Ministry of Housing and the Ministry of Trade and Industry. I was the Minister responsible for putting together the Vision 2020 document, and I left the Ministry of Planning just as that document was being finalised, and the new Minister actually brought the documents forward, but the work in putting it together was done largely under my time under Mr. Lok Jack's chairmanship where we had a multi-disciplinary group bringing together the country's talent for Vision 2020.

Vision 2020 was an 18-year programme, and 2020 is an arbitrary date. It could have easily been 2021, 2019, but we chose 2020 which is 18 years from 2002. It is now six years since that programme has been on the way. One of the things about Vision 2020 is that it was meant to have yardsticks to measure our progress along the way and it was meant to give us milestones along the way. So, it would have been nice if after six years, which is one-third of the period, we were in a position to look at the totem pole and say where we are with respect to Vision 2020 on the various aspects of national development. I am not sure that clarity exists. I am also of the view that the term Vision 2020 is being used as a

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panacea. People just throw the term out and say Vision 2020, not really being able to identify with the structure of the totem pole.

In the housing programme where I had some involvement, we were operating against a target of 10,000 houses per year. We said that after 10 years we would have built 100,000 in the national community. That was targeting and you could measure it, and we reported to this House every year. The last report we gave before the last election in 2007—I think the figure for that year was 8,224. I look in the budget document here, and I see reference is being made to 32,000 housing starts.

In November last year, we reported 26,000. If we are now reporting 32,000, it would have meant that we would have started 6,000 houses in the last fiscal year. My understanding is that is not so. I would ask the Government before the debate is over to have the relevant Minister tell us where these 6,000 houses started in the last fiscal year.

My understanding is that all the time in the Ministry was spent investigating who did what and to confirm what was said before. I do not know where the 6,000 houses were started in the last fiscal year. Prove me wrong! Stand in here and tell us the locations for the 6,000 houses. The document is saying to us 6,000 houses in the fiscal year, and we are on target for our projected 8,000 per year. So, 6,000 and 8,000 are not the same. We were doing 8,000 in the public sector and 2,000 in the private sector to get our 10,000. If you are reporting 6,000, it is also probably fictitious. Even that does not measure up and, therefore, against the nature of Vision 2020, if we are looking at the totem pole, we must be accurate.

When we did the formulation of Vision 2020, global inflation was under 4 per cent and the global growth rate was 5 per cent. Inflation was not a major consideration when we formulated our pathway. Today, the average inflation rate in developing nations is 8 per cent. Trinidad and Tobago has just reported a 13.5 per cent inflation rate, and that should be of concern to us. I can tell you that if at the time we were formulating the pathways for Vision 2020, inflation and the threat that it poses to national development and the global concerns surrounding inflation was the case, the management, control and the elimination of inflation would have been paramount in our quest to attain the targets of Vision 2020. The experts who worked on that programme would have understood the threat that inflation places and poses to those who understand it very clearly. Vision 2020 is meant to build for us an improved quality of life, and it is not just as some people glibly say that the Government is building tall buildings. That is a trite way of looking at things.

10.30 a.m.

It is an overall improvement in our quality of life, and there is nothing that more effectively and directly threatens our quality of life in this country like the threat of inflation, because if you put aside something when you are a young man and as you are approaching to become an old man, as I am today, and you are facing a period of inflation, you begin to worry. What I have put aside? Will that take me through? Is that enough. Because if inflation is taking away 10 per cent every year, or even 15 per cent, then in short order what I have put aside will convert me from a comfortable middle-class person to a pauper, notwithstanding whatever else the Government does.

An understanding of that will prevent Government spokespersons from speaking about inflation as though it does not matter. Approaching 10 per cent inflation and you get a comment from the top of the Government that the sky is not going to fall in. It does not do anything for the confidence of those who hire you to do their jobs, and it causes concern for people like me who are about to enter retirement, because 15 per cent inflation is the biggest enemy to my quality of life. For the thousands of people in this country who live on a fixed income, those pensioners, those who are barely making ends meet, whatever is happening outside of their control, where their dollar is worth 15 per cent less as at December, and next year 15 per cent less, and the next year 15 per cent, that is the threat to their quality of life.

I am sure there are those who will do well in an inflationary situation, but the vast majority of persons, especially persons on fixed incomes, and I will tell you worse than that, the persons representing the working class, the unions, they are looking on. Very soon, the next issue in this country is going to be the unions demanding wage increases to match inflation and we get into an inflationary spiral.

So, it really bothers me when I hear Government spokespersons speaking very glibly and dismissively of the inflation threat. I have colleagues who speak like that and my advice is, inflation is the most serious threat being faced by the people of Trinidad and Tobago today. Vision 2020 is an arbitrary deadline which can move forward, it can become 2025 if we want to, but we do not have any choice with inflation, the pill for inflation is—you know what it is? If you get into an inflationary spiral, the cure for it is recession, and worse probably stagflation, where you get stagnation in the growth of the economy and inflation to go with it.

If it is that the Government is taking the position that they are not listening to what—do not listen to me, I am not an expert, I am just a man from North who is standing in the South now. But the bottom line is this, the Government is an

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employee—that is how I saw myself in Government—hired by an employer, the people, and if the people are saying that they have a problem it behoves the Government to at least treat the people's concern with some respect. [*Desk thumping*] It behoves the Government to do that.

So, when last year the budget was predicated on a \$50 oil barrel, that generated a certain amount of revenue for expenditure, and that expenditure was done throughout the year, we were being assailed by many saying that Government expenditure is driving inflation. That is what is being said by the experts of this country. Externally, if you look at the Bretton Woods Institutions documents, you will see what they are saying about that. We may know differently, but there needs to be a debate in this country, not a dismissive response.

I was very surprised, Mr. Speaker, when I saw that the oil price against which the budget was predicated, was \$70. That tells me that the Government intends to spend all that is earned on \$70 a barrel. In other words, notwithstanding all that was said last year, notwithstanding all that happened last year, notwithstanding the quick movement of inflation from 7 per cent to 13.5 per cent, the Government is saying, spend and be damned. In other words, the Government is taking the position that inflation is not a problem; we can break it because we can fix it later. I do not agree with that, and I am simply exhorting my colleagues on the other side to revisit that position. Inflation is not to be trifled with.

Insofar as inflation generates high interest rates, it is going to affect the business sector. The business sector is not going to be disposed to investing and creating the jobs that we are talking about keeping and establishing. Then of course, the Government could say, well we would fund the economy. That is not what Vision 2020 expects. That is not what we expect to happen in year seven, eight, nine or 10 in our approach to 2020. Read what we expect of Vision 2020 and you will see that the Government taking over the economy is not it. If conditions are being created where the private sector is concerned, where their confidence will be damaged, where the public's interest will be threatened by inflation, then if we are to be true to Vision 2020, the Government needs to check its course.

There is a story that was told in Mason Hall when I was a little boy, about a frog outside on the Main Road at the Methodist Church picking up insects and the Moriah bus was coming, and the frog heard the bus coming you know, and the frog said, "Meh nar move, meh been dey here fuss," and the frog blew itself up into its biggest size and stood there, and the Moriah bus just kept going, and the squish of the frog was heard all the way up to where we live in Mason Hall. I do not want to think

that is the analogy we want to follow. The threat of the sound of the inflation bus is loud in Trinidad and Tobago, and it must be listened to by the Government.

I will be very happy; I will be the biggest mouthpiece for the Government; I will be the biggest defender of the Government, when the Government takes a position that yes, we understand the threat of inflation and we are taking these actions to deal with it, and it is a priority. Right now I cannot say that this Government thinks that inflation and its threat is a priority. Look how quickly we moved from 7 per cent to 13.5 per cent. What examples are we following? I hope it is not the example of China, whose inflation has moved in a similar pace, but the Chinese growth rate is also very high but now around the world the concern is that China is about to be exporting inflation to people like us. Inflation is not to be trifled with and we want policies here that will tell us that inflation is viewed as the serious threat that it poses to us.

Mr. Speaker, when we did Vision 2020, we picked about 14 countries and among those countries were Iceland, Ireland, Chile, Uruguay, Bahrain, Malaysia. It was not that we wanted to pattern Trinidad and Tobago to become like any one of those countries; it was to draw from certain experiences of those countries and to use those experiences to craft Trinidad and Tobago's format and its final form. So, we picked Bahrain as a small oil producing nation; we picked Chile as a country that had crossed certain borders and became a modern exporting country and so on, note that we had a dictator running Chile, but we picked the Chilean economy. So it is not sensible to say because we picked Chile we are advocating their Allende approach for democracy. We did not pick Bahrain because we are advocating their kind of governance. So, that is why I am a little concerned that insofar as we picked Malaysia, the example from Malaysia that is being highlighted in our current circumstances where certain issues have come to the fore, is PETRONAS.

I have heard the Prime Minister, on more than one occasion, put up a spirited exposé on PETRONAS and indicate—I could be wrong, if I am wrong I hope that later on in the debate I am told I am wrong—that maybe the thing that we should be looking at is operating like PETRONAS. PETRONAS is a Malaysian oil company, one of the largest in world, but there are two things PETRONAS is famous for: one is oil and gas and the other is corruption. When it is advocated that the PETRONAS model is something we should admire, it causes me concern, especially when we have Malaysians operating in Trinidad and Tobago against whom serious allegations have been made in this very Parliament, and those allegations have gone unanswered. [*Desk thumping*]

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So, while we are talking about unanswered allegations against Malaysian companies operating in the public sector in Trinidad and Tobago, we have the head of the Government leading the charge for Vision 2020 advocating to us that the PETRONAS model, where you have some plenipotentiary powers given to people in there to do as they please, is what we should do to get our development done. I reject that out of hand! [*Desk thumping*] I reject it!

It is a dangerous model, because PETRONAS, PMEX and PDVSA are three state companies that we should watch with a "coki-eye". I told you PETRONAS is famous for oil, gas, and corruption. PMEX in Mexico was a state within a state and it took serious trauma for the people of Mexico, political, social and otherwise, for the Government to break PMEX. PDVSA next door to us, seven miles from us, in Venezuela; It is alleged that they tried to overthrow the elected President. At one time—I was in the Cabinet—when Caracas did not have gasoline and PDVSA, in cahoots with other people denied gasoline to Caracas. We had to take a decision in our Cabinet to send gasoline to Caracas, so they could have gas and the President stayed in office in Caracas—PDVSA, another state company. So, when you are being told about the PETRONAS model, I simply say that was not any of the thinking in Vision 2020, and if Vision 2020 is remodelled then we should know.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say something else too. It is for the benefit of my colleagues and for all of us. I was in the Government and I know the Government means well, but in our party documents—and I am quoting here from our manifesto, and I know all my colleagues on the other side at some time would have read this document—the first paragraph of the "Conclusion", I am reading from the PNM manifesto. There is a certain handsome gentleman in the back with the old time glasses. This was before the new glasses, before the new haircut, and this is when I was there. [*Laughter*] Young colleagues, all of whom have my support, read the conclusion:

"The excellence for which we strive is not just in the results but also in how we do things."

I want to repeat that.

"The excellence for which we strive is not just in the results but also in how we do things."

This is a party manifesto, pledged to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. So, if you hear the public saying that they have a problem with how you do things, what

they are saying to you is, "we have got a problem with your commitment in the manifesto. And it goes on to say:

"For this to be done, for this world-class image to be achieved requires a Government with character and a determination to do what is right and just at all times."

That is the commitment that we made to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We also have another commitment in this document; this is the 2000 manifesto, "A New Age, A Bold Vision, A Brighter Future". I will take you to page 14; as a result of what was going on with my colleagues who are now on the South side. When we were on the south side talking to them on the north side, we saw the need to restore certain things, and in our manifesto, we said we have:

"Measures to Restore Integrity, Honesty and High Moral Values in the Society."

It goes on to say:

"The PNM will:"

Hear some of the things that we said we would do:

"Re-establish clarity, public accountability and transparency in the legal, regulatory and institutional framework."

We commit by manifesto to clarity and public accountability. I go on now to the principles and integrity for persons in public life.

10.45 a.m.

Page 11, bullet three, section IV: This is "Principles of Integrity for Persons in Public Life and Those Exercising Public Functions." That means all of us, especially the Government—It says:

"The decision making process should be transparent and open to scrutiny. The public has a right to know how public institutions apply the power and resources entrusted to them."

If that is so and if you are keeping in step with this requirement, under what circumstances are my colleagues telling the country that you cannot tell them who you give scholarships to? [*Desk thumping*] And you cannot tell them who you paid their money to, how much money you paid to a lawyer? You are required by this document to do that. [*Desk thumping*] It is a requirement! I want to read it again:

"The decision making process should be transparent and open to scrutiny. The public has a right to know how public institutions apply the powers and resources entrusted to them."

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I will tell you something. When I was in the Cabinet, certain imps took the position that the Government will not answer a particular question and I objected and the question was answered. As soon as I left the Cabinet you come and tell the country, “We cannot answer”. I am saying, that is a violation of the principles of integrity in public life. [*Desk thumping*] And it is a violation of our party manifesto position. It is a violation of our party manifesto position, page 14, where we are committed—this is a contract with the people, committed to clarity, committed to public accountability. So, let us not squander the PMN’s inheritance on short-term arrangements to suit certain people.

I am of the PNM! I am the PNM! When I stand up, I defend the PNM. That is why when I heard my colleague from Siparia talking about attacking the Hyatt Regency Centre and Conference Rooms that is political convenience you know; political convenience, hoping that we do not have any memory. Mr. Speaker, you would have heard the Member for Siparia talk about what we are building the Hyatt Regency Centre and Conference Rooms for and who is going to go inside there? Would you believe that that project was a UNC project? The Hyatt Regency Centre and Conference Rooms; that was a UNC project [*Interruption*] but because of problems with the procurement arrangement which would have put the benefits in the hands of the private sector at the expense of the public—I was the Minister of Planning and Development that took a note to the Cabinet to stop it and to restart it in the way it has been done. [*Interruption*] I will tell you!

So, when you come here now and make a case against the building of the hotel because you do not know who is going to go inside there, that is political nonsense! Nonsense, because it was your project! I had Kamlal Mankee as a Permanent Secretary, evaluate—and the Mankee report should be there in the Ministry of Finance, and the Government may want to make it public so you could see what was going to go there in the first place and why the Cabinet stopped it. The basic project was sound and it is being executed now and if there are procurement issues now as there were then, then we have to treat with the procurement, not the basic need for the project or the project itself. Let us focus on where the problem is, and that brings me to the point of procurement.

Mr. Speaker, if there is any issue in this country that is exorcizing the public, aggravating the public, is the absence of a proper procurement policy in the Government and the Government will take note. [*Desk thumping*] The Government will do well to eliminate the public aggravation, remove the *jhanjat*, remove the fertile ground for allegations, some of which may have no basis at all, some of it may have. But the bottom line is, this will continue and it will get

worse, because everything the Government does, involves spending money. It was Seaga who said: "It takes cash to care"; the PNM said: "We care" and we are spending large sums of money at this point in time. How could we be doing that under questionable procurement procedures?

This Government of which I am a part—this Cabinet—we understood and agreed that what would have been done is that we would have had a proper, well-established, well made known policy on procurement in this country, so nobody could get up and say that what the Government is spending is being misspent and so on. It reached as far as a White Paper which was laid in this Parliament. I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, I have never been pleased and I am not pleased now, because I have issues with certain areas and certain people. It really rotted my gut that the White Paper that came to this Parliament as the Government's response to the requirement for procurement, that that White Paper went to UDeCott where it has died. While it has died there we are still spending billions of dollars without letting the public accept that we have procedures in place to protect their interest.

UDeCott looking after my procurement process? When it was raised as it was a few months ago, a Minister of Government said it shall come back to the Parliament in two weeks. This is the longest two weeks. It has not come anywhere near here. We were given an assurance and this brings me to the point again to my young colleagues; Ministerial statements must mean something. You cannot get up in Parliament and say something as a Minister of Government and then dismiss what you say after as though you never said it. That destroys the parliamentary institution, it destroys the country's institution, it destroys you and it creates suspicion. Suspicion!

Mr. Warner: Tell them.

Dr. K. Rowley: I have paid a great price for standing up for what I believe in. It is the only way I know it. I do not expect any favours. I do not want any favours. All I want is for my country to become the best it can become. [*Desk thumping*]

When I was recruiting Orville London into the PNM, he said to me—

Hon. Member: And Tobago East too.

Dr. K. Rowley: Yes, I recruited Tobago East as well. [*Laughs*]—that what will make him join the PNM and get involved in the politics of Tobago is the following: "I do not want my children to have to depend on who is in office to decide what they participate in, in this country." That is what caused Orville London to join the PNM and to get involved in the politics of Tobago, and I dare say for the benefit of the people of Tobago.

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I do not want a system to prevail where it depends on who is in office. That is why I took careful note of a comment by our Prime Minister last week Friday in Woodford Square, where he told the people gathered there—among them the least fortunate of the country, URP, CEPEP and similar types. I took careful note of the statement, “And if the leader falls, all fall.” That is not the PNM way, and it should never be like that. When Dr. Eric Williams came to Tobago, my grandfather took me to a political meeting. My grandfather and his colleagues were supporters of APT James and they voted for APT James, but by 1957, the federal election, they voted for James again. What changed them for being staunch APT James supporters to staunch PNM supporters were the policies and programmes that Dr. Williams put in place; that converted me from a barefoot schoolboy in Mason Hall, creating the opportunity for mobility from the backwaters of a village to where I am today in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. Policies must supersede individuals in office. [*Desk thumping*] So PNM leaders must not tell people that your future; your meal, depends on me being in office. It cannot be that.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Diego Martin North/East and others in the House for the extension. I am saying that the PNM—forget the UNC, the NAR, there are so many parties that come and go—is in a class by itself. [*Desk thumping*] The PNM is a national institution and it must not be [*Interruption*] that persons who access public policy programmes will do so only because of who is in office. It cannot be that! It must not be that! That demeans and diminishes the PNM in this country. I am still on the subject of procurement.

We are spending billions of dollars and there are all kinds of people from all over the world who will come to us—carpetbaggers coming to fill their bags, if we allow them to—and that is why when I heard the allegation that was made by my colleague from Tabaquite about Sunway—a contractor from Malaysia building the MLA tower—I took note. Because I had seen before a print from the Internet where this company was talking about Trinidad and Tobago, and let me tell you what they were saying—I have two printouts here. One says. “Quarrying is again a sweet spot for Sunway.” And the other one is “Building path.”

There is a Mr. Yau—in this one—who was doing an interview—it might still be on the Internet—and he was saying, what wonderful business his company had attracted in Trinidad and Tobago and how things were going so well in Trinidad and Tobago and that they expect it to go even better, and he talks about something here. He was asked about the sustainable earnings from Trinidad and Tobago, and he made reference to a quarry contract that they had in Trinidad and Tobago where they would produce a million tonnes and they have a lock-in arrangement with the Government to purchase that million tonnes and so on.

In the discourse between the Member for Diego Martin North/East and the Member for Tabaquite, the Member for Tabaquite said—quite incorrectly—that local contractors were not given the opportunity to bid. The Member for Diego Martin North/East said—quite correctly—that you were wrong, local contractors were allowed to bid, so there was nothing wrong with this. That is not the issue. The issue is this, and I am putting a question to the Government now and I await the answer. The terms and conditions that were offered to the local people when they bid, are those the same terms and conditions that Sunway ended up with? If they were not, then I would want you to explain to me why is it that local people were put at a disadvantage, if they were? When you look at what is being said, local persons were told they had to build a plant with a capacity of one million tonnes, the Government in the first three years will guarantee to take 400,000 tonnes from you, in year four they will take 100,000 tonnes; so you will have to go to the market and sell 600,000 tonnes or 900,000 tonnes along the way. Is that the same things as Sunway is saying here on the Internet that they have a contract to sell to the Government one million tonnes a year? Is that the same thing? Because if I have a contract to sell one million tonnes, a lock-in contract with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, I must be in a much better position to quote against a man who thinks that he is only going to sell 400,000 for three years and 100,000 for one year after, but he has to put up a plant for one million tonnes. I would like the Government to clarify that before this debate is over and only then would we know that that discourse that took place between the Member for Tabaquite and the Member for Diego Martin North/East was in fact for the benefit of the public and the proper information is out there as to how we have procured.

11.00 a.m.

Another thing that concerned me while it was being raised in the House that Sunway bought a three-week old company that they received from UDeCott, a \$367 million contract, where procurement immediately becomes an issue—because I will tell you, I was the Minister for UDeCott and I left it there in

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writing, in instructions, that for the Government campus, no contractor who did not pre-qualify should be considered. So I was shocked when I heard here, either the irresponsibility of the Member for Tabaquite, or the Government having to answer as to under what circumstances would a three-week old company be even considered, far less to end up with an award for any dollar, far less \$367 million. Under what circumstances? Because there were ministerial instructions—and unless another Minister gave a countermanding instruction, the instruction I left there stands even though I am out of the Cabinet, out of the Government, out of the picture, out of the frame. So, unless the Member for Tabaquite was irresponsible in making up an allegation, and of course, the public's right to hear, it is not there.

You see, that allegation was made in this Parliament, and to date, UDeCott has not answered, the Government has not answered, and spokespersons for UDeCott spent all their time trying to bad talk Rowley. I am not relevant in this matter, what is relevant is this, Government procurement. This is a Canadian document, because the jurisprudence to deal with the Government procurement inform our situation here, Canada is the yardstick. *Regulating Procurement* by Peter Trepte, again I am talking—Mr. Speaker if you are to put a label on this discourse of mine today, I would prefer if you list it as a “Conversation with my colleagues,” that is the heading. Because I expect that many of them have not had the exposure to be able to appreciate what is happening and what I am talking about, so I am directing them to the text.

In the introduction of this book, *Regulating Procurement*, permit to read, Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of my young colleagues who are managing our affairs:

“...in a democracy, elected officials are directly answerable to the electorate, the unelected bureaucracy is not subject to such accountability. Given the extensive powers delegated to this body of unelected officials, the question becomes one of ensuring that they comply with the policy objectives of the elected officials who are themselves accountable to the electorate.”

So how then could I hear from a Minister of Trinidad and Tobago that we cannot tell UDeCott to respond to allegation or to say anything about an allegation that you awarded a contract to a three-week old company?

In other words, if UDeCott chooses to answer to answer, if they choose not to answer, I cannot do anything, but I am the Minister. This is not how it is supposed to be. You are accountable and you cannot hide behind unelected bureaucrats, and if any answer is required from UDeCott, then you get it and you give it. That is

what is here, procurement; regulating procurement. I find it shocking that a state enterprise could have an allegation like that made against it and choose to say nothing. I will tell you one thing though; I set the tone in here.

When I was sitting on the north side and Ganga Singh was on the south side making allegations against me, I stood up there during his speech. Before he was finished, I said what I knew of it and what the truth was. It took five years for the truth to be substantiated, but at least, I had a response right then and there. Today, I have to hear about approximately \$360 million contract given to a three-week old company that was sold on the same day to Sunway and not a word from my PNM government, which disgraces us. I will support the PNM; I will stand by the PNM; I am for the PNM; I am PNM, but I am not supporting that.

Mr. Speaker, what was worse, as we spend our billions—I am not going to be laughed at by Mr. Yau. It was Michael Manley who said that our money passed through us like a dose of salt and every time we hear that today, we cringe. Mr. Yau is on the Internet and he is laughing already. Hear him talking about Trinidad, where "We have an MOU to construct highways other infrastructure projects and hotels. I have to go on the Internet to find out that Mr. Yau and Sunway have an MOU to construct highways and other infrastructure projects and hotels.

Question No 1: Which highway; which hotels; which resort; and how come Mr. Yau has this MOU and Mr. Yang does not have it, Mr. Ling does not have it and I do not have it? What procurement procedure gave Mr. Yau this inside track, that he could be telling the world that he has an MOU?

Today, I am calling on the Government to make that MOU public, so that we could see what Mr. Yau has or he does not have and who the MOU is with, or of course, it could be that Mr. Yau is lying. But when I came back from Ireland and I saw in the papers that a Sunway contingent came out of the Prime Minister's office and a statement was issued after from the Prime Minister's office, that Sunway and the Government had discussions about what they are doing and further contracts and deals will follow, I cringed because I was in the Parliament when allegations were made about Sunway buying CH Development and while there was no answer to that allegation, Sunway is in my Prime Minister's office.

I was a candidate under George Chambers and I will tell you one thing, in George Chambers days, Sunway could not come up the Whitehall step; and in Eric Williams days, when allegations were made against O'Hollaran, I can show you no instance where Eric Williams provided a shield for O'Hollaran and Prevatt. Today, I am hearing Sunway going to the Prime Minister's office and

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leaving, followed by a release, that further deals are to come and they are talking about an MOU. How did this MOU come about? Did Sunway come and ask for an MOU and it was given to them, in which case, who else can get one? Did the Government call Sunway and give them an MOU, in which case who else are you going to call? Who signed this MOU? Who is it between? That is not a procurement procedure which will prevent the country from thinking that corruption is rife in this Government. That is the basis on which allegations will be made, and in politics, perception is better than fact, because facts have a finite boundary; perception has no boundaries and every one of us will be tainted if this is not fixed and if procurement procedures are not put in place, that can stand public scrutiny.

Today, I call on this Government to change its course. I do not accept that we have to go down that road to develop Trinidad and Tobago. I do not accept that. It is a point of view that requires serious analysis and at the end of it, I am confident that it will be rejected. It is not now we are rejecting procurement processes BOLT, design build, all of these things are opportunities to do things differently and you can use the whole basket of things. You can go by open tendering, selective tendering, but there is one common thread that must run through every time regardless of which system you are using for the project, and that is, competition and transparency.

If there is no competition and no transparency in the system, then the process is faulty. So to talk about that you are going by the way of BOLT and you are going by the way of paying the holder at the end of the contract, that is not an expression of an understanding of what is required. Because whether you pay upfront or you pay at the end, pay you have to pay, and if you are paying at the end, nobody is going to bankroll us until the end and we get the cost of money for free. It is the process by which you end up paying at the end that you have to look at, and those processes must be known to the public.

Mr. Yau is here talking about doing a million tonnes, as against local persons who may not have had the same arrangement, but then he goes on to say that: "We expect to win more contracts both local and foreign, especially in Trinidad and Tobago." What contracts did they win in Trinidad and Tobago? The CH contract? Sunway did not bid. CH Development bid and got the contract according to the allegation and Sunway ended up with CH the same day the contract was awarded. So, what is Mr. Yau talking about, we expects to win more contracts; he expects to do more deals like that in my country. So I could be laughed at by Malaysians when we had money, we got ripped off. And then, he talks about construction, highways, hotels and resorts, but then he goes on to say, when they

asked him about his earning prospects, he said, "Our construction division is not exposed to building material increases, as new contracts have cost escalation clauses." Is that what we are following? Is that going to be the arrangement with Mr. Yau and Sunway? Is that available to local contractors, cost escalation clauses? And he goes on to say that "our overall margins will therefore remain healthy," come hell or high water.

Is that what the Cabinet is supporting? Is that Trinidad and Tobago's procurement policy to spend our billions? It cannot be. I have given too much of my time to sit quietly and allow this to happen, unchallenged. Today, I challenge that and the debate must now start, so at the end of it, we must know what we are doing with our billions. I have two children growing up in this country and they are at university now.

My friend from Diego Martin North/East—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Ramnath: He is your friend?

Dr. K. Rowley: "Doh" get in our business—has a habit of "crying down" local contractors. They say I am the mouthpiece for local contractors, I am proud to be the mouthpiece for the local contracting fraternity. They elected me to represent them. I will represent them and I am also a citizen who takes pride in Trinidad and Tobago. I do not subscribe to this situation which is being said that local contractors cannot do anything. Is that why the Diego Martin highway is not being built because local contractors cannot build it? We have always had foreign contractors in this country assisting with our programmes, but local contractors have distinguished themselves here and abroad, and any policy that says we are going to ignore the local architects, the local contractors, the local quantity surveyors and the local fraternity, that is not development.

Development is having pride in your own people, so that when my children come from university, they can be appreciated and respected and given the opportunity to develop their own country. That is what it is all about. So when I hear that local people are not good enough, and therefore, we have to go for foreign people, I have a problem with that, because first it is construction, tomorrow what, doctors, nurses, manufacturers, IT providers? we are never good enough and then somebody else? Let others say that. That must not be the discourse from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

We are there to defend local interest not foreign interest. And if I am called a mouthpiece for the local people, yes, I am the mouthpiece for the local people. What does that make you, who say that foreigners must be used all the time. Am I

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to say that you are a mouthpiece for foreigners? I am not saying that, but I am saying how does the argument develop. We need to maximize our local input and augment it with foreign participation; it cannot be a denigration of local effort to justify what we are doing. If that is what we are doing, then we are so far away from Vision 2020, that we might as well never have drafted that document and embarked on that course. Never have, because Vision 2020 talks about developing a people and having pride in a people, and getting the best from those people done by those very people for themselves and generations to come. So, what am I hearing that local contractors cannot do this and cannot do that, and then foreign contractors walking around in high offices and walking away with deals and MOUs.

It begs the question, who invited whom? Who organized that? Did Sunway ask to see the Prime Minister or the Prime Minister ask to see Sunway, or somebody organized it? That is normal, people see the Prime Minister all the time, but then you walk away with a document saying you have deals to come and you are boasting to the world about margins that you will make the best in the world, it makes me think that I could be at risk and my country could be at risk. It just makes me think because I think—Mr. Speaker, I have a degree or two or three, what do degrees do? It caused me to be able to think, critically.

11.15 a.m.

I have always, in my adult life, been encouraged not to accept what has been put before me; if it was not so, I might have been a UNC supporter; I might have been an NAR supporter. [*Laughter*] I looked at the landscape; I read the documents. I appreciated the fundamental documents of the PNM, assessed them critically and took a decision to be a member of the PNM, and took a decision to offer myself for office in the PNM. That is a decision which arose out of critical thinking. I do not intend to stop now. As George Umbala Joseph would say, it is in my nature.

While we are denigrating local contractors, I took note, again, of my colleague, one of my favourite Ministers, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, recently representing the Prime Minister at a function in South where this platform was being commissioned. She said:

"Speaking on behalf of Prime Minister Patrick Manning, who was unavoidably absent, Christine Kangaloo, Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, said 'the completion of the Poinsettia is another case of the decision by Cabinet to ensure that local content be used in all development.'"

If that is so, and there are benefits to be had by following a policy of local content, on one hand and on one day we are being told about the benefits for development with respect to local content in the energy sector; Government policy being aggressively pursued, results being had.

This platform being built in Trinidad and Tobago was built at a higher cost than if it was built in Texas, but Government policy said, "We build it here because there are benefits to be had for the development of our people." If that is so in the energy sector, how come it is not so in the other sectors? Why the discourse on local contractors that they are not good and they "cyar" do it and we have to do it to please foreign contractors, and unless we please foreign contractors, local contractors get nothing? How come? I wish I do not hear again, from any Government spokesperson, an attack on the local contracting fraternity, be it architect or whoever. If there are problems with the project, then deal with that problem and those involved in that project. It cannot be a broad-brush about the capability of the contracting fraternity.

When I was the Minister of Planning and Development, we authorized and initiated and the Ministry of Works and Transport took IADB money, and we as a country—understand me clearly—we, on our way to developed country status, started to build a piece of road from O'Meara to Santa Rosa, five years ago. My fault, your fault, his fault, whosever fault it was, as a country we have not been able to construct a piece of road from O'Meara to Santa Rosa. Grass is growing on the foundation right now; there must be a problem with that. I do not think that requires foreign contractors. It is now being said, "It is because it is being done by local contractors." In which case I would say it is because of the mismanagement of the contract on somebody's part. It is not a local/foreign thing, because Comlisa Lain was a foreign contractor doing the highway to San Fernando. We were in the Opposition and had a lot to say about what went on with Comlisa Lain on the highway, under the UNC. They were a foreign contractor. So a foreign contractor does not guarantee you success on a project. It is how the project is managed.

My name has been called all over this place about the Scarborough Hospital. The other day I heard the Member for Tabaquite making his contribution and my colleague from Diego Martin North/East told him, "He drinking bush water for people fever." It is me he was talking to, because my name has been called with the Scarborough Hospital. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, I have been to that site twice; once as Minister of Planning and Development I went there with the President of the IADB to kick off the project, because it was an IADB funded project, under IADB rules for tendering and IADB approved award. I went there, I made my speech that I hope it would be done on

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time and we were looking forward to it. Ever since I was a boy of eight years old, when I went to tease the neighbour's dog, the dog bit me at the back of my leg. "I took dirt and put it in de hole and go home and sleep. Three days later, I could not walk; I was hospitalized in the Scarborough Hospital. I was eight years old then. Since then there was talk of the Scarborough Hospital being unfit and had to be rebuilt. I was very happy as the Minister to initiate the project for the construction of the Scarborough Hospital. I left it there with the Ministry of Health.

The next time I went to that site was when I was home in "meh" house when the then Minister of Health called me and said, "I am in Tobago, I want to pass by the hospital; yuh want to go?" I said, "Yes, I will come with you. He and I went to the site. At that time they were in the foundations, they were just beginning to build the super structure. Immediately, on listening to what was going on between the contractor, the consultant and the client, we both agreed that there were serious problems with this project, right then and there.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I have one regret, and I carried it for a long time. It was my intention when I came back to the Ministry of Planning and Development to write a letter to the Ministry of Health pointing out what we discovered that Sunday at the Scarborough Hospital. I did not do it, because in my presence was the Minister of Health, and we both understood what the problem was then and where it was threatening to go. The end result is, as of today, that project has the label of being the worst managed Government project ever. It is a management problem. It was mismanaged from the beginning, and the Ministry of Health was not without blame in the matter.

Of course, you know the easy thing is: Call my wife's name, call my name, put me in "police hand", all kinds of foolishness. The bottom line is that the people of Tobago have not got their hospital yet, because it was a management issue.

I would like us in this country to have the kinds of debate from which we can benefit. We spend too many decades personalizing things. We would also politicize things, because it is politics that provide us with the management choices. Individuals hold high office; some hold low office, some hold no office at all, but the bottom line is that the issues are always going to be there.

There are those who felt that the day Dr. Eric Williams died the PNM gone, "PNM finish, "PNM dead". That was not so; Dr. Eric Williams was a man, and the time of man is finite, but the issues remain for the persons who survive.

I know that many of the issues I have raised today would be proper cut for some people, upsetting for some, but they had to be raised. If discussion and

discourse come out of it, then I would have had my morning well spent. I would be happier wearing this Balisier if our Government operates, not as a government by announcement, but a government by discourse and disclosure. I will be happy. I would be the loudest voice supporting the PNM. There are those who believe the Government must not do anything, unless it comes to Woodford Square and hold a town meeting and get everybody to agree. It does not go so; that is the other extreme. The Government has to govern, but there are conditions under which the Government should govern.

Mr. Speaker, I want to end on this note. I want to end with a quotation from the PNM, an address by Dr. Eric Williams, September 29—October 01, Fourteenth Annual Convention. Dr. Eric Williams had this to say, and I want my younger colleagues to take this in the context of all that I have said, all that is being said, what is being done and all that is being done, and think of Dr. Williams in Chaguaramas in 1972 when he said this. He was talking about—certainly not Sunway and Malaysia and UDeCott; he was talking about a situation for the people of Trinidad and Tobago in the context of colonialism:

“...the Caribbean was the happy hunting ground of pirates and buccaneers, who went about the place plundering and ravaging and building up their private fortunes, sometimes to end up, as one notorious case in Jamaica, in the second highest post in the metropolitan-controlled colony.”

Ask yourself if any of this is happening today or if the table is set for this to happen.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kelvin Ramnath (*Couva South*): Mr. Speaker, I want to say, at the outset, that I do not wish to get involved in a family dispute here this morning. [*Laughter*] I recall when I returned to this Parliament, the Member for Diego Martin West warned the Parliament that half of the Front Bench had one foot in jail and that by Christmas the others would have followed. I do not wish to make any conclusions with respect to some of the matters that he raised this morning, except to remind him that the cemetery is scattered with the bones of those who defy their leaders. [*Laughter*] In the case of the Member for Tabaquite and myself, we did have a period of reincarnation. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Maharaj SC: There are exceptions to the rule.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I do not know what fate lies for the Member for Diego Martin West, but it was very interesting to hear his comments.

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Let me first of all extend my congratulations to the Member for Siparia [*Desk thumping*] for a brilliant contribution, which I read, but did not see, did not listen to, because of my absence from the country. In reading the excerpts of the speech in the week end newspapers, I could not help but feel that the response to the budget was a response on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, particularly the underprivileged people. It also demonstrates that we have the competence to respond in the absence of our leader. I am quite sure you would agree that any one of us on the Front Bench would have done an equally good job. So in answer to the question posed by the Member for Diego Martin North/East about who is our leader, I just want to let him know my leader has always been, and will continue to be, the Member for Couva North, the hon. Basdeo Panday. [*Desk thumping*] We will settle the issue of leadership when the matter arises.

Mr. Imbert: "Dey throw yuh out de UNC."

Mr. K. Ramnath: It is no business of the Member for Diego Martin North/East to be worried. It is as a result of his participation in a conspiracy to get rid of the Member for Couva North in this House, who was wrongfully suspended, that he is not here with us today. [*Desk thumping*] Perhaps, you should consult with the Member for Arima who shares my views with respect to how modern Parliaments operate. She just came back from a visit to Canada sometime ago. She would inform you, as I was informed when I visited—I happened to have lived there for quite a while myself—that there is no limitation to the use of electronic equipment, except when a Minister is answering a question. He or she cannot refer to computer messages. So maybe we would learn from that; maybe the Deputy Speaker will so inform the Members of the CPA at some time.

I cannot help but comment on the behaviour of this bombastic, pompous, arrogant, self-righteous Member for Diego Martin North/East, who in his vitriolic and vituperative manner, [*Desk thumping*] sought to discredit the contribution. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Now, you are using some very strong adjectives against the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East. You are capable of better than that. There is a Standing Order which talks about abusive, insulting and offensive language. Always remember, two wrongs do not make a right.

11.30 a.m.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Mr. Speaker, I was hoping that if I had descended to his level, you would have pulled me up, I did not know that having advanced the discussion—but his contribution was about dotishness, foolishness, nonsense,

quack, and for a senior Minister of Government to characterize the three-hour contribution of the Opposition in such manner, it is clear that he had nothing to say. In fact, the end of his speech amounted to nothing.

Here is a Minister of Government in the debate on the expenditure of \$50 billion for fiscal 2008/2009 discussing everything except the work of his ministry. I am sure Ministers were instructed to speak about their ministries, how well they performed over the last year and what they intend to do in the coming year in their response.

The Member ended up with a dream, and having nothing to say said:

“I dream of driving from Valsayn to Mayaro on a highway, and I dream of going to Point Fortin on a highway, the extension of the Solomon Hochoy Highway, and I dream of going to Mayaro via Rio Claro.”

There is something to be gained from that, and that is, he is a dreamer, a non-performer. The Ministry of Works and Transport is at its worst today, and you do not increase the price of gasoline to reduce the traffic jams in the country, you get rid of the Minister of Works and Transport for his incompetence. [*Desk thumping*] Not a single metre of road was constructed on the highway to Point Fortin. Six years ago the highway stopped at Golconda and those of us who live in the South can bear testimony to that. That was a project that was touted by the Minister of Works and Transport as being a priority project. Then he had the dream of having a toll highway to Princes Town and we were going to have it constructed from San Fernando to Princes Town and it would have been toll imposed. I go to Princes Town quite often, and I have not seen the beginning of any highway to Princes Town.

We were told that there will be the extension of the Churchill Roosevelt Highway that would end up somewhere in Manzanilla on its way to Mayaro and nothing has been done. He boasts of building a West to South ramp from the Churchill Roosevelt Highway to the Princess Margaret Highway, the first phase of a multistorey project that is incomplete, and after six years all we are seeing is the construction of part of the ramp. That is his great achievement as Minister of Works and Transport, but he has a lot of achievements in insulting people, he is very competent at using words to describe people as nonsense and foolish. And it is very typical of his behaviour as an ex-colonial product, very typical.

I wanted to say more but having regard to what you advised me not to say I will just be calm. But more than his attack on the Opposition, is his grovelling to the Leader of the PNM as if he has now conceded to the request of reparation for what his ancestry has done to the indentured labourers of the slaves when they brought them to this land. [*Desk thumping*] And he believes that by grovelling to the Prime Minister he would be forgiven.

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Mr. Speaker, we should be hearing something about the water taxis. They bought three boats out of Italy which were in a deplorable condition for those who saw them. I have first-hand knowledge of what the conditions were from the people who went there, and the agents for the boats said it was the easiest \$10 million they had ever made. All they had to do was go to Italy because the deal had already been consummated.

Do you know what is interesting? Very likely you would hear that they do not deal with agents, but the people who sell deal with agents because that is how they were located in the first place and these agents operate in a similar manner with respect to the purchase of buses from Brazil and other acquisitions. I am saying to you here today, to this House and the country that that Ministry of Works and Transport is one of the most corrupt ministries in this country. [*Desk thumping*] If only to measure the performance of the ministry, the Prime Minister should have an investigation into it.

[*Hon. C. Imbert stands*]

No, I will never give you an opportunity to intervene when I am speaking, you have been very rude and hostile and discourteous.

So he had an opportunity to speak about the plans for preventing flooding in Macaulay, Diamond, Windsor Park, Caparo and all these areas and never uttered a word about Government's plan, and the reason for all the flooding that took place has to do with the failure of his ministry to adequately clean the rivers and drains that take water from the Central Range into the Gulf of Paria. All the agricultural plantations were destroyed as a result of the flooding; the Solomon Hochoy Highway was under several feet of water and not a word from the Ministry of Works and Transport and the Minister which would indicate to the population that this would never happen again.

I could give you a litany of woes with respect to the failure of the ministry to perform. And I read in the newspaper where Minister Enill condemns a plan to hike taxi fares. You raise the price of gas and expect the taxi fares to remain constant. Tell the rich people, the Chamber of Commerce and the businessmen that they must not raise the price of their goods when prices of input increase. The day after the budget was presented, taxi fares went up.

Now there is some campaign to start talking about RON and MON, motor octane rating, that you could now drive your cars with 91 and 92 octane if you were with 95 and greater octane. And I ask where can you buy super gasoline in Trinidad? You have to go to the fishing depot to find regular gasoline, you cannot

find it in the regular gas stations, those pumps do not operate again, nobody buys super gasoline they all buy—

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for Couva South for giving way, but I have to tell him that I am enjoying his very convenient shift from regular to super. What are you talking about, regular or super? Let us know please.

Mr. K. Ramnath: There is a plot to create some distraction here. If it is convenient to switch from super to regular, why were people not buying regular gasoline?

Mr. Manning: There is no regular on the market, that is super.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I am talking about 91 octane, that is super. In my days, when I used to buy gas it was regular and super; now it is super and premium. What I am saying is that when you go to the gas station you are not going to find any pumps with super gasoline.

Mr. Imbert: I filled up with super yesterday.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Well you are an exceptional case; you probably do not pay for gasoline anyway.

The point I am making is that for a Minister of Government to say that people should not raise their taxi fares because gasoline went up is the most idiotic thing I have ever heard. They depend on gasoline to drive their cars so they can transport people and make money.

Minister Mariano Browne said “we made mistakes, but it was not corruption. So simply making the point that there is a situation in the country where the poor person—When the statement was made by the Member for Siparia that the budget is for the rich, that is nothing but the truth, because all the measures in the budget will affect the poor person in this country.

I was very disappointed when I came. I arrived very early this morning because I was expecting to see CEPEP and URP workers in Woodford Square and I enquired from my colleague, the Deputy Chief Whip, whether on the day of the presentation of the budget the square was filled with “Red T Shirt People” and he said no, they did not show up. So it must be an indication that they realized the budget had nothing for them, so they abandoned the PNM and their great leader, who the Member for Diego Martin West indicated that if he falls, the country will fall.

So there is nothing for URP, there is no guarantee of regular work, no pension plan, no medical plan for them and when the question was asked why they are not paid the minimum wage, the Prime Minister said they do not work eight hours,

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and yet he summons them to Woodford Square, and the maiden voyage of 75 new buses that came from China was to Woodford Square bringing URP workers from all over the country. Now they had their way with respect to the no confidence motion, they say we do not have to do anything for you anymore. When the Chief Whip moves another no confidence motion they probably will congregate again.

Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the small man has nothing to benefit from this budget and the details have already been provided. But you see there is a dangerous trend with respect to this Government's performance.

11.45 a.m.

This weekend I was doing a lot of reading. I read an article by a columnist named Dr. Keith Rowley in the *Newsday*: "Paying lip service to matter of ethics and integrity". It is something I recommend to hon. Members to read, because, you know, I am happy he is behaving now as a convert; he was one who always, sitting on the other side, talked about the Piarco Airport and jail and he was always criticizing the Opposition for "thieving" and so forth. All of that was based on the fact that the Integrity Commission, because of its bias, sought to have charges proffered against the Leader of the Opposition which resulted in him having to face the courts of the country, only to realize that he almost became a victim of the conspiracy by members of the Integrity commission. Do you know what was interesting in this matter? He said:

"I did not have to wait long for the answer to my concern because soon after, in another report, the press asked former Chairman Gordon Deane to reflect on his tenure as the person in charge of the Integrity Commission up to recently. To my total shock and abject horror he replied saying 'I had fun.'

This is in a situation where in the face of written law and paid advice from eminent Senior Counsel, this Chairman preferred the path of causing baseless allegations to be formulated against me, a Minister of Government and a representative of the people, and his Commission facilitated the transmission of a secret report to the Director of Public Prosecutions, with a view to having me prosecuted.

This was the source of so much 'fun' that as far back as June 2006, certain high level personnel in the Government, of which I was a part, knew and was advising others that I was history."

Gordon Deane is the same person who was having fun in trying to get Panday behind bars in the prisons of this country and the Government rejoiced. They had fun, just as they are having fun with Calder Hart now. They had fun with Gordon

Deane. And the trend I am talking about is this trend towards maximum leadership on the part of the Prime Minister; a dangerous trend alluded to by my friend from Diego Martin West. You get rid of the Leader of the Opposition, not because of being Leader of the Opposition but being leader of a major constituency in this country.

When the PNM lost the election in 1995, they took an oath, “never again”; and then in 2000 they lost again and they saw themselves in a hopeless situation. In 2001, we had an 18/18 situation and the President at that time on the basis of moral and spiritual values—at least he claimed so—appointed the current Prime Minister to be Prime Minister of the country. From then on the campaign was to destroy the Member for Couva North. So they shut down the sugar industry in the most indiscriminate manner, without any basis for doing so; any economic reason, and I will come to that in a little while. They shut it down to spite the supporters of the UNC; they shut it down to spite Panday and to destroy him and then they proceeded to have fun with Gordon Deane and others, to lock him up!

So if you do not agree with them, as the Member for Diego Martin West currently has a problem with them, you also organize to have some fun with them, because the matter of the role of Calder Hart and UDeCott in this country is not going to end here today. A lot will be said and a lot of people will be implicated.

The trend continues on the basis of some baseless accusation by a man who made a deal with the former Attorney General to have land sold back to HCL. The Chief Justice was summoned and was told, “If you do not resign I will lock you up.” The Chief Justice said the Prime Minister told him so publicly.

Mr. Manning: He did not say that.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Yes. That is what the Chief Justice said.

Mr. Manning: “I will lock you up”?

Mr. K. Ramnath: You know, it is a trend of destroying the institutions of the State, of destroying the systems, of talking on one side of the mouth about procurement and so on, and on the other side you are violating all of the institutions and all of the procedures.

Then you close down Caroni (1975) Limited because “we have to spite these people”. They have no right to vote for the UNC. Then the war turns inwards, as we have seen beginning today, when the Member for Diego Martin West openly said the things that he said today, quoting the Prime Minister in Woodford Square that, “If I fall, the party and country fall.”

Mr. Manning: The party and the country fall?

Mr. K. Ramnath: The party and country will fall if you fall.

Mr. Manning: Who said that?

Mr. K. Ramnath: Ask the Member for Diego Martin West.

But, you know, as I am quoting and so on, let me just—when I saw this pathetic figure called ANR Robinson—I served under him for a little while and I realize once you come from the PNM, you have this autocratic stand. They have all of Dr. Williams’ bad habits and none of his brains. Clevon Raphael, interviewing former President Robinson in the *Guardian* on Sunday, September 28, said:

“Your Excellency, in retrospect, are you sorry that you selected Mr. Manning as prime minister during the 18-18 impasse?”

[*A brief contemplative pause*] No. I think it was the thing to do.”

I do not think he said, “I think it was the right thing to do”, but he said “I think it was the thing to do.” Mr. Raphael continues:

“Even though he has been under severe criticism for a number of things he has done or said, you still think he was the better choice?”

He said:

“I may have been surprised...at some of the things that he has done, but I can’t say I regret the decision to appoint him Prime Minister.”

You know, at this time of his life he should have apologized to the country, but you can see he is just ashamed to come out and say the truth. Clevon Raphael said:

“Which of his actions has surprised you?”

[*Gently tapping his right knee*] I was surprised he got rid of the most experienced persons in his Cabinet and possibly the most competent.”

And Raphael:

“Rowley...?”

Robinson says:

“And Valley. I was surprised. I was also surprised that he brought in so many new persons into the Government.”

He did not say OJTs. This is the former President, that “I was surprised”. And Raphael said:

“What problem do you have with these new persons?”

He said:

“Clevon, you see new persons would not have had the experience of those who had been there for some time...They would have had more confidence in their positions.”

I am just doing this for academic reasons; it does not change the price of anything. But you know, up to today the elder statesman would not have the decency to say, “I made a mistake and I robbed the people of Trinidad and Tobago of a UNC government which they deserve, having gotten the vast majority of votes in that 18/18...” [*Desk thumping*] It appears to me that the PNM does not really come out of you PNM, you know. Mr. Speaker, I do not know if you are still in the PNM, Sir.

So I began to ask myself, well—

Mr. Manning: That is the kind of comment that you gain nothing from—nothing.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I ask myself, well, how is this budget really going to affect the people of Couva South? If you look at the newspapers you will see bandits from outside Couva locked down Couva. I do not know whether the Prime Minister reads the newspapers or he cares. They have robbed everybody in Couva, including the former PNM candidate. Every day somebody is being held up. In front of my house in Couva where the mosque and the Hindu mandir are situated, someone was held up two weeks ago. A 75-year-old woman, Mrs. Ramdahin, on Nelson Road, preparing for a pooja, they entered her home and took \$10,000 in cash; they took jewellery; they sprayed her with ammonia. You are talking about a 75-year-old woman!

The article goes on to talk about all that is happening; that they come and they hide out in the Couva housing development. That is where they hide out. You see the danger of taking people from all over the place and relocating them, people who have difficulty adjusting to the communities under the pretext that you want to have—what?—multi-mixed communities, all result in the importation of bad habits or habits inconsistent with the people who have lived there all their lives.

So it is now a hideout for the criminal elements that they are exporting from their constituencies, to come to the South and Central and to attack and destroy the lives of innocent people. People who have been the victims of retrenchment at

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Caroni; people who have been fired from Caroni and who have no employment, are now facing the wrath of the criminal elements that they export.

I ask myself, how is this budget going to affect them? I want to say that I admire the work the police in Couva is doing. They are working extremely hard. But there is a phenomenon in the police force. Three people show up for work every shift. One cannot remain in the station for two to go out; two cannot go out and leave one in the station and one cannot go out alone, so nobody goes out. But I know for sure that since certain transfers took place and the Assistant Superintendent—I feel confident to call his name, Mr. Premchand Ramdath—came there, there have been a lot of arrests.

But they have no vehicles. Every time I call him, I say: “Superintendent, what is happening?” He would say: “I have to get a car from Brasso”, and “I have to get one from Gran Couva”, or “I have to borrow one from Freeport. A country with a \$50 billion budget does not have enough vehicles.

Last year the Minister of National Security said they sent back some \$45 million, or even more than that, because the Ministry of Finance and the Minister of Finance were very tardy in terms of making releases to the National Security. So what does the budget have to offer these people in Couva? People in Couva cannot get any NHA houses. I have written hundreds of letters to Minister Rowley and now Minister Dick-Forde, begging in some cases for neediest cases to be considered and instead of trying to help them, they are proud to go with their mongoose gangs from the Ministry of Housing—LSA—headed by some retired geriatric, a fellow called Osley Francis—and I make no apologies, you know. I sat with the Minister and he was rude to the Minister.

12.00 noon

He said, “I have to follow the law. Francis “talk” about following the law. Do you know what I asked him? I asked him, “Why do you tie a chain to somebody’s house and pull it down with a four-wheel drive? He said, “That is the only way I can prevent them from squatting. On the last occasion the Prime Minister stood here and said that we are encouraging squatting and lawlessness.

They cannot provide housing. He admits that 25,000 houses have been provided but the demand is over 100,000. They will go in the most remote parts of the country and pull down the houses. They do not care whether people have been living there for 100 years, 20 years or five months. They refuse to follow due process. We have a matter in the court. The court has issued an interim injunction and said that you must follow due process. We would be appearing before the court. The counsel is the Member for Siparia leading others.

You will hire “de fella who yuh doh want to release how much money yuh pay him. What is his name? Douglas Mendes. “De fella collecting millions and millions. He could buy super premium gasoline, if there is something like that. Regular is 86 octane. When I go to the pump in America I usually buy the cheapest gas.

The point I am trying to make is that the budget offers no hope for these people; none for URP, CEPEP and ex Caroni workers and squatters. When the Member for Siparia says it is about rich people, she is criticized. They come and begin to nitpick about a \$300 pension. Electricity rates have gone up. Everything is going up. It is \$10.89 for one litre of reconstituted milk. I have to transport grocery items at times. That is why many children in the country cannot have milk to drink. I will leave those things.

I want to talk about the petroleum sector. I tell you, Mr. Speaker that first of all it was stealing the elections; secondly, it was getting rid of the constituency of Caroni (1975) Limited; thirdly, it was about jailing the Leader of the Opposition and fourthly, it was getting him out of the House of Representatives.

I want to talk a little about the oil industry. Trinidad and Tobago produced a total of 24.7 million barrels of crude and condensate during the first seven months of fiscal 2007/2008, according to the *Review of the Economy*. These 24.7 million barrels of crude mean that our production of crude oil is now at 125,000 barrels a day, the lowest it has been since 1978. The former Amoco/BP production fields have almost disappeared. We are talking about declining oil production. According to this report it registered a decline of 8.6 per cent as compared with the figure for 2006/2007. The decline was mainly due to production challenges—that is the terms they use nowadays—at the greater Angostura oilfield and diminishing recovery rates from Trinidad and Tobago fields which are now quite mature. At a time when oil prices are at their best that oil producing countries could ever hoped to have seen, the production of oil in Trinidad is declining. The reasons given by the Government are very flimsy. They make no sense. All they say is that production has declined.

During the period October 2007/2008, the refinery throughput at Pointe-a-Pierre declined by 1.1 per cent to 150,000 barrels a day. A total of 2.6 million fewer barrels was produced offshore in the current period as compared to the same period last year. Take 2.6 million and multiply it by US \$100 and you would get an idea of the kind of revenue losses we have had. You know what was very interesting is that although wells were drilled, they could not have been produced because production facilities were not there to receive the production. Prices are high; the production is there but the facilities are not there. You ask yourself: How can a government tolerate such a drastic reduction and do nothing about it?

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In the *Supplementary Public Sector Investment Programme*, page 20 states:

“...The company drilled five (5) new wells. One (1) well is in production and the remaining four (4) are awaiting production equipment. An amount of \$34.1 million is allocated for the quarter ending September 30, 2008.”

I want to refer to what is happening at the refinery level. An EPC contract was awarded for \$192.5 million and it increased to \$427.9 million. For the catalytic cracking unit, a contract was issued for \$905 million and it increased to \$2,191 million. For the fluid catalytic cracking unit, the contract price increased from \$905.5 million to \$2,191 million. The isomerization unit increased from \$475.9 million to \$616.7 million. The continuous catalytic reforming unit (CCR) increased from \$1.3 billion to \$1.6 billion. Offside utilities—*[Interruption]* Let me finish. You were chatting all the time and not listening. You must learn to listen. I will explain the question you were asking.

The offside utilities project increased from \$809 million to \$1,725 million. The desulphurization and aromatization unit increased from \$945 million to \$1,018 million. The world’s gas to liquid plant project (GTL) increased from \$634 million to \$850 million. The increase in cost for the upgrade of the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery is now \$3,434 million. I have not heard anything in the budget about what we are going to do about the situation. If the Prime Minister will listen having asked the question—*[Interruption]* you do not hear; you are gossiping. *[Laughter]*—\$3.43 billion—*[Interruption]* “He doh have car so he doh need gasoline. He cyah provide cars for de police.”

The cost of construction has escalated enormously all over the world. If you listen you will be educated. The cost has increased. I have no doubt. I understand that very well. We will be borrowing \$700 million very shortly. *[Interruption]* I still work as a senior manager of the petroleum company.

After borrowing \$700 million, our borrowing limit would have been exhausted.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I hope that you will allocate some injury time.

Mr. Speaker: I just did that.

Mr. K. Ramnath: When we would have borrowed \$700 million to finance the upgrade, we would have reached our limit, unless we get government guarantees. I do not think that the company wishes to go to the Minister of Finance for government guarantees. At the same time, we are carrying a labour force of 5,800 persons, some of the best paid people in the country. Production is declining; cost is rising and I have not heard a word about how we are going to deal with this problem. We have a problem of dealing with an industry that does not have the capacity to raise money on the market because it would have exhausted its limit. I thought that the budget presentation would have indicated some steps that would have been taken to the national community. At this time, in order to have a viable refining industry, we need to have a margin of \$8. Below \$8 we are in deep trouble. I can give you the figures when you invite me for tea some time. If oil prices were to go below \$100 a barrel, we would have serious problems in the exploration and production division.

We have not been able to do the development drilling that is necessary to increase oil production. At the present time, it is extremely difficult for the exploration and production division of Petrotrin to even spend the money that was allocated because of financial difficulties as a result of these escalating prices. I am saying to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance that you need to have a rescue plan. You have said nothing about these difficulties. You are dealing with a viable industry and very important to Trinidad and Tobago. If you look at the figures published in your Supplementary Public Sector Investment Programme you will see that the profit after tax is not sufficient to finance many of these projects over and above the borrowing.

12.15 p.m.

I want to suggest that serious consideration be given to adjusting the supplemental petroleum tax or windfall profit tax on Trinmar's operation to the level applied to land operations if we are going to encourage further exploration and development. I suggest that if we do that we will be able to expand our production facilities in order to produce wells that have been closed as a result of lack of those facilities.

I suggest that we proceed to encourage more local input in production. In fact, the joint venture and the lease operatorship programmes wherein private individuals have invested money in some of these stripper oil-producing wells have been extremely successful because you do not require a huge labour force to

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produce a barrel of oil. Nothing is being said. Perhaps the Government is waiting for the board of Petrotrin to negotiate with them, if a crisis were to arise, and say that they need something to be done about it and that the industry is in pretty bad shape.

I do not want to go into the benefits of the upgrades, the isomization and so forth, I understand how important it is. We need to produce high octane to blend and sell to the extra regional and international markets. [*Interruption*] In case you need to be educated on that, I will spend some time with you on it. We need that.

Do you know why we need that more? We need that because the PNM administration lost the market in the Caribbean. We lost more than 60,000 barrels of oil per day. The PNM realized that they had failed the Caribbean leaders and they are now trying a new thing of having a political and economic relationship with Gouyave, Bequia, Young's Island and so on. If you had the acumen and sagacity that a leader should possess, we would never have lost that market, whether Chavez or his father was head of Venezuela.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Couva South is being at his provocative best this afternoon. He knows, and everybody knows that in the PetroCaribe arrangement of Venezuela, no discount is given on the price of fuel, but major discounts are given on the payment terms, conditions that could in no way be matched by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, a country with a production of 115,000 barrels a day as opposed to Venezuela, a country with a production of 2.5 million barrels a day.

That is the fact. In fact, it is a credit to those who run Petrotrin, my good friend included, that they were able to foresee the developments in the making and take steps to upgrade so that we were in a position to access alternate markets and the company will survive.

Mr. K. Ramnath: You could have put that in the manifesto. In reality, as a result of the mishandling, the diplomatic faux pas, your failure to lead the Caribbean Community, you lost the market, Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, without whom the whole party and country will fall because CEPEP and URP have to keep him propped up at Woodford Square.

Whether Chavez produces 3 million barrels a day and we a 150,000 barrels, we have not only geopolitical, but a common history. It must not only be convenient to import people from these islands to vote for you under some pretext that you have a relationship to come and work and after they stay a while they can vote; you should have been exercising leadership in the Caribbean so that your colleagues would understand that something could have been worked out.

All this focus on Caricom has brought no benefit to us because you lost the market. Your cost overruns alone are \$3.5 billion just to upgrade the plant so that you could sell some of those products on the eastern seaboard of the United States. That is as a result of your failure to plan.

You must anticipate people. You have no choice but to anticipate them. Not because you rig elections in Trinidad and Tobago and you stay in power does it mean that the same thing happens in the Caribbean. They change governments there and when they do that you have a duty to make sure that the governments on those islands understand the role of Trinidad and Tobago.

What has happened to the oil facility? Are we still giving money to Caribbean neighbours who have a deal now with Chavez? I understand some of them are beneficiaries of our oil facility even though they are buying products from Venezuela. The Government has failed miserably, not only in maintaining the production of the industry, but also in terms of its marketing strategies. Do not blame the Petrotrin Marketing Department for that. This is a political issue.

I would like to find out what steps the Government intends to take to resuscitate the industry. How will you keep the 5,800 people employed at Petrotrin if oil prices were to drop precipitously over the next few months? It will be impossible. How will you deal with the drop in production that is now 125,000 barrels a day? We do not want to hear excuses about Angostura being a disappointment. You knew that early; there were many predictions and we saw a rapid decline, perhaps never anticipated.

But you have a state-owned corporation that cannot even produce oil from wells already drilled because it does not have the money to invest in production facilities. There is still a lot of crude oil available in Trinidad if it is managed properly and if the companies have the money to do it. The best place to find oil is where you have oil. You know that as a geologist even though you have not practised in 50 years.

I want to comment on Minister Enill's statement about natural gas price. He said that Mr. Basdeo Panday signed the agreement with Atlantic LNG for Train 1 and that the discussion was far advanced with respect to Trains 2 and 3. I am glad they will admit, in the winter of their political existence, that the UNC did not say: "Let us throw that in the waste paper basket because the PNM had started it. The UNC understood that it was the right thing to do and governments must do that.

You just do not scrap an idea because you were in opposition. The price negotiated was 90 cents per billion BTUs or 1,000 cubic feet. Gas is being sold

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between \$7 and \$9 a million BTU on the market and the benefit we get from that, of course, is taxation. But we do not get a benefit from the sale of gas to these companies because they are still paying 90 cents, except for Train 4, which the Prime Minister indicated had been ring-fenced and there is some special arrangement.

I see no difficulty in negotiating an increase in the purchase price of gas. I have said so on numerous occasions. We cannot continue to pay 15 cents royalty at the well head for a commodity that sells at \$9, \$10 and went up to \$12.

Mr. Manning: So you agree that it should be the Prime Minister.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Why you? Why does it always have to be you? You are taking up my time, you know.

Mr. Manning: The Member for Couva South should know—at least I think he should know—that certain things are dealt with at the highest levels. If he does not know that, then I do not know what he knows about the industry. I suspect he knows but is just trying to be mischievous as usual. If these things are not initiated at the highest level, they just do not happen.

Mr. K. Ramnath: You have a penchant for maximum leadership. You would not allow your Ministers to do “nutten”. I also want to warn him that Prime Minister Mahathir from Malaysia was a benevolent dictator. I visited Malaysia recently and had some discussions. If that model were to be applied here, it would not have the same impact.

Clearly, he is going the way of Mahathir, that is benevolent dictatorship. Benevolent dictators become full-time dictators. If you have a Minister of Energy and Energy Industries in Mr. Enill, let him do his work. When the time comes, if you have to intervene, you do, but the time is right now to renegotiate those contracts so that the people of Trinidad and Tobago could benefit.

Mr. Manning: How to initiate it?

Mr. K. Ramnath: The Prime Minister is behaving like a school master. I am trying to give suggestions to the Government that the industry needs serious leadership and that we cannot continue to hope that the price of oil and gas will be up.

I am very optimistic about the future of the industry. As soon as the American people have settled their difficulties and growth begins to take place, we are going to see oil and gas prices being very buoyant. I have no doubt about that. In a matter of three years we can benefit from the increase of oil and gas prices that

the world will see because inventories will not remain high. They have found no—*[Interruption]* You had your turn to speak. You have no manners.

There is a situation, if we are able to deal with the financial crisis in the world today, in three years we can sell products from our refinery at prices that are very attractive and beneficial to Trinidad and Tobago. They did not forecast; they operate by “vaps” and hope that something will happen. I am giving them the facts. There have been no major basins discovered around the world. The last one that was discovered is off Brazil. They have not produced from it as yet.

12.30 p.m.

There has been no major finds around the world—*[Interruption]* very major, 10 billion barrels. Given the world production capability at this time, if those financial issues are settled Wall Street, et cetera, Trinidad and Tobago stands to benefit from an improved upgraded refinery. We also stand to benefit from an aggressive exploration and production policy, where the Government must intervene at this stage and make sure that support is given to raise the money for us to continue our ambitious programme.

I am giving this advice free. We heard nothing in the budget speech. It is the same old story of coming and reading out the litany of woes; what they plan to do and how many workers they want to cut grass on the side of the road. It was a very disappointing budget speech. Unlike others who congratulated my friend from D’Abadie/O’Meara, all I can say to her is that I hope, if she retains the Ministry of Finance for another term, she would have learnt a lot and therefore would have dealt with the issue facing ordinary people like flood victims in the Pointe-a-Pierre constituency. They are being run out by bureaucrats from the Minister’s office. They have submitted their claims and nobody is assisting them. ‘If dey look like ah UNC, then nothing fuh dem. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Dumas: How does a UNC look?

Mr. K. Ramnath: I would tell you when I meet you in the tea room. We wanted to see if you are putting \$50 billion in investment or expenditure for the coming year so that there would be a general improvement in the standard of living and the quality of life of our people. You would have been putting money in order to diversify the economy. Diversification for them is taking natural gas and making urea and so on. When you ask the farmer in Trinidad and Tobago what is the cost of a bag of fertilizer, you would discover that a lot of that has to be imported into Trinidad and Tobago.

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Finally, because of the shortage of time, I want to suggest that we begin to look at alternative energy in the area of ethanol. The sugar industry—I just want to refer to a document that I picked up in Brazil when I was there. One tonne of sugar cane contains the energy equivalent of 1.2 barrels of oil. You are talking about biofuels coming from agricultural products such as sugar cane.

Caroni (1975) Limited's cultivable lands could have produced 1 million tonnes of sugar cane, not sugar. You are talking about 1.2 million barrels of oil equivalent. They do not know what I am speaking about. It is 1.2 million barrels of oil equivalent. We are talking about renewable energy. I would pass this on to you. It comes from Petrobras. You just met Petrobras.

Mr. Manning: I am now from there.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Yes, but you did not learn anything. One point two million barrels of oil equivalent at US \$100 per barrel. We are talking about an industry between \$2 billion and \$3 billion per year; not sugar, but sugar cane. We have an opportunity to learn from the technology that has been developed in these countries. They have been proven and that can benefit the people of Trinidad and Tobago. There was no basis to close down the sugar industry, except to spite the UNC. It is not too late.

Imagine a renewable resource providing us with an industry which can expand from \$2 billion to \$3 billion per year to unknown quantities. Brazil is doing it. Do not make any excuses about the availability of arable lands and quantity. Seventy-seven thousand acres of Caroni (1975) Limited would have produced 1 million tonnes of sugar cane and would have had a very viable industry. Today 25,000 people could have been employed in a full-time job in the sugar industry. Because of the lack of foresight and malice on the part of the Government, you decided to shut it down and you hope that forever the oil industry would have provided you with the income that would keep you in government.

For whatever it is worth, I want to commend the discussion to the Government, with respect to biofuels in Malaysia today, since he is such a follower of Mahterian and Petrobras.

Palm oil is being produced in very large quantities. They did not have a palm oil tree in Malaysia; they imported from Ghana where there were major plantations. Today they are able to have the largest palm tree plantation in the world, from which they are making bio-diesel and a lot of profits. You should follow that kind of leadership from Petrobras, not the leadership to give Calder Hart all the contracts and to give those Malaysian connections all the business,

Sunway and these companies. Learn from the benefit they have derived by utilizing their natural resources and alternative energies.

For whatever it is worth, I commend that for the Government for discussion—not a word in any of the documents about future plans for expanding the industry. I have a lot more to say, but probably next week I would continue to talk about some other issues.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting of the House is suspended for lunch. We would resume at 1.45 p.m.

12.37 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.45 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

The Minister of Social Development (Hon. Dr. Amery Browne): Madam Deputy Speaker, it is indeed a pleasure and an honour for me to participate in the budget debate 2009. Before I proceed, allow me to congratulate my colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance, on her historic presentation of this year's annual budget.

Our calypsonians have given us many quotable quotes over the years. I do not know if the Member for Mayaro has contributed, I suspect he has, to some of those quotes. There is one quotation that today I would like to commend to this honourable House, in recognition of the work of the Minister of Finance and that quotation is: "Woman is boss." [*Desk thumping*] She has done us quite proud with the presentation of her budget.

I would like to go a little further than Members opposite, in being kind to the contributions of others and to proceed to congratulate the hon. Member for Siparia for her presentation and response to the budget. I saw her in the corridors and commended her and would like to do so publicly. I do so largely with regard to her very alluring style of presentation and her manner. Some of the content may have been a bit disappointing to Members present. I thought it was akin to a very experienced midfielder dribbling down the field, exhibiting a lot of skills, but when you looked at the feet, there was no ball at all. It was a nice display, but the ball was missing. The ball I am referring to is the ball of content and meaningful contribution, but the style was very alluring. I salute her for that.

I want to go on to give a few words of commendation as well to our colleague from Couva South who presented just before me. I believe we got one of his very

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fine contributions this morning, which was quite a remarkable performance. It was very wide-ranging. I heard him trying to get the Member for Diego Martin North/East fired as Minister of Works and Transport. He is smiling a bit guiltily there. I thought he went very far in that regard.

I had the privilege of going to South this morning, to launch some quality customer service training for staff of the Ministry of Social Development. I was quite struck on that journey in seeing so many newly paved and asphalted black roads crisscrossing South and Central Trinidad. I actually got a little bit jealous. I want to tell the Member for Couva South, be careful what you wish for, it would seem that with regard to roads, you might be better off than maybe some others.

I also heard a very interesting statement that there was nothing in the budget for poor people, URP and CEPEP workers. I have always been very curious when the UNC refers to URP and CEPEP. It seems they have quite a love/hate relationship with that particular sub-population in this country. We know what happened before November 2007. There was a constant stream of diatribe and stigmatization directed against these individuals. They are called stone painters and—a very hurtful diatribe; really trying to stigmatize these individuals who, at the end of the day, are simply trying to support their families and their way of life; hateful as my colleague was saying.

1.50 p.m.

During the election there was a warm embrace extended, and we started to hear about terms and conditions and the welfare of URP and CEPEP workers, and now it seems that the shoe is on the other foot. There seems to be a lot of back and forth, and I am really curious as to what is their vision for persons at the lower rung of the socio-economic ladder. So, we need to be clear. If my humble recommendation could be tabled, it would be to avoid the hypocrisy and to ensure that we do not vilify and stigmatize these individuals, many of whom are simply trying to seek a better way of life for themselves and their families.

I was also very puzzled that a “jefé” from Petrotrin, a big boy with a lot of experience and, hopefully, expertise, could be so clueless when it comes to octane levels and the difference between super and regular gasoline and so forth. There was a very interesting dialogue between himself and the Member for San Fernando East which was very fascinating. It is said that when the elephants fight, the grass better watch out. So, I am going to stay out of that particular exchange, but I was made a little curious that one of our “jefés”, someone in whose hands at least part of our petrochemical future may be placed, was so confused and may

have confused the national population as to the difference between super and regular gasoline and the impact of the budget on both.

I want to say to the Member for Couva South that I am a very big admirer of yours. I certainly admire your style of presentation, the intonation and the very impressive mannerism, but in some of the contents I was taken aback. The area that I was quite sincerely disappointed in was the reference to the ancestry of the Member for Diego Martin North/East. It may have been tongue-in-cheek, and I suspect it was. My humble submission is that type of xenophobia and what could be interpreted as race baiting—reference to slavery and other things with regard to the Member for Diego Martin North/East—could have been avoided. That would be my submission. You attacked a very charming, pleasant Minister in the Minister of Works and Transport and perhaps. Maybe that could be avoided in the future. [*Interruption*] I knew I had your rapt attention.

There was much talk about petroleum and so on, and I am not really qualified in that area so I would not quite go there. I heard talk about investments in stripper wells and so forth, and I suspect the Member for Couva South is well qualified to speak along those lines.

Again, one thing that struck me, just in closing off on this particular segment, is that I thought I heard the Member for Couva South singing the praises of biofuels and recommending investment and focus on biofuels as a source of energy for Trinidad and Tobago. I do not know if that sentiment has been officially embraced by the UNC, but it certainly set me back considerably. To my knowledge, and from my own personal readings, the focus on biofuels has been largely responsible across the world for the increase in food prices and has been impacting on poor persons globally. I do not know why we would want to consider that type of focus and investment in Trinidad and Tobago. Again, the Member for Couva South is a leader in that particular field, and maybe in the future there will be some clarification as to why that particular area of focus.

I believe that the national budget for 2009 succinctly offers to the citizens of our beloved nation a further clarification of the road map that is being laid before us as we continue to shape our future together as one united country under God. I make no apologies for referring to Trinidad and Tobago as our beloved nation because all Members of this House and all citizens should look upon Trinidad and Tobago as our beloved nation, and we should be putting our shoulders to the wheel together. I certainly can speak for Members on this side of the House, and I suspect this is shared by some Members on the other side, that we love our

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country very deeply and very passionately. Even in the political discourse, I hope that deep and abiding love would not be lost. As a young lady once told me, it is nice when you say that you love me, but I also want you to show me that you love me. [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

I believe that in this year's budget is further evidence of the love that this Government has for Trinidad and Tobago—[*Interruption*] You would not know anything about that—including the less fortunate, the poor, the elderly, the disabled and all the other sub-populations that various speakers on the other side have claimed to espouse or embrace. We are going to get more into some of those details a little later on. I believe that there is ample evidence and proof, certainly in this year's budget, about that caring about the future of Trinidad and Tobago and all its citizens. Let me just quote some words that were used just this morning: "It is not just about what you say, but about how you do things." That is a manifesto promise, and there is ample evidence of that even in the commitments made in this year's budget.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this caring is not just in words but in deeds as well. This caring is shown in a number of ways, certainly by treating with the issues that affect our country the most, including the vulnerable amongst us, and this Government has been doing that with some degree of consistency. I will offer some evidence as I proceed with this contribution.

The caring is also shown in offering the national community a road map toward development. I do not think enough credit is given to the fact that we are one of the few countries in the developing world that has really sat as a nation and determined a specific road map to a more developed and higher way of life, and that in itself is a sign of visionary leadership and that in itself should be a clarion call to members of the national community. If we put our minds together and our shoulders to the wheel we can achieve great things.

The caring is shown by working hard to address some of the complex challenges that are still facing us. No one is fooling himself. This is not complete paradise and there are challenges in the social sector with regard to crime and other issues that confront this nation. Again, the caring is shown by applying ourselves and ensuring that we work hard to find all the answers to all the problems that face Trinidad and Tobago, just like every other country.

Caring is also shown by being very honest with the population when there are some answers that cannot be provided overnight. There are issues that will not be solved by the snap of a finger, but I do believe that the recognition is there that

this administration does care about all levels of our society. The election results of 2007 is testament to that recognition by members of the national community.

The caring is also shown by always uplifting the national interest, even above self-interest, above political expediency and above what might be convenient or easy at any given time.

Caring is also shown by recognizing that nation building is facilitated through nation builders—and not nation destroyers—those would seek to improve the psyche of our land as opposed to those who wish as a nation that we feel as bad as possible about ourselves. I am not going to point fingers at anyone in this House, but who the cap fits let them wear it.

I have formed a very strong opinion that there are persons in the national community who are trying their utmost to ensure that we as a nation feel as bad as possible about ourselves and I condemn them for this. [*Desk thumping*]

There are those who embrace and celebrate any statistic that can be used to show Trinidad and Tobago in a bad light. We saw some very compelling evidence of this in some of the early submissions, cherry picking through the data in any and every report—to try to glean any possible statistic that can be used to attack the national psyche and to throw this country into a bad light.

There are those who utter public prayers for the gloomiest year possible for Trinidad and Tobago, and there are those who pin every single possible problem on the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. The response to any scenario is not "what is responsible or what would be the most appropriate thing to say to the country in this situation," but it is "which Minister I can attack with this material." I wonder if that is the vision that some Members wish to take to the national community. They took one of the best budgets in the history of this nation, as it has been described by the hon. Prime Minister—and he should know, I understand he has sat through about 38 budgets. This budget is full of innovations and sweeping improvements in provisions for the vulnerable; full of hope and vision as far as we are concerned. They have listened to that budget and immediately showered the population with as much negativity as possible; an attack on the psyche of the nation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I have found their budget response to be a wicked and cynical melody that they have maintained since the hon Minister of Finance took her seat in this honourable House. I heard the Member for Mayaro whom I admire very much, use the words "when the demise of this country comes" in his contribution. That might have been a moment of sheer madness as far as I am

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concerned, coming from someone as distinguished as the Member for Mayaro. I do not believe that anyone is looking out for or expecting the demise of Trinidad and Tobago; certainly not any Member of this honourable House.

Clearly, there may be some persons who feel that the only path to power is through the conduct of a five-year attack on our nation's mentality and psyche. They ignore the good that is all around us and focus every day on the negative. Maybe a few members of the media could go along on that particular journey.

I have listened to all the contributions so far and the contrast could not be clearer. I note that with all the screaming about the Hyatt Hotel, there was a revelation this morning that it was the UNC government that wanted to build the hotel, but they did not have the capacity to do so. I was fascinated. We did not learn that from them. *[Interruption]* There are so many examples, but I am going to let other Members go more into them. The contrast is there.

One side clearly has a vision for Trinidad and Tobago and is rolling out a development plan that addresses critical areas like youth training and development, education, strengthening of the social safety net; improved infrastructure; investment in petrochemical and non-petro based portfolios, equipment and manpower; renewing of systems to improve national security and all the other important components of development. Many families have been improving their quality of life in this modern Trinidad and Tobago.

Many families have been realizing their true potential and many young persons are seizing the opportunities that are currently available and making better of themselves despite the smokescreen of negativity that is being thrown up on the other side. I can tell you because they approach Members every day referencing their glee at some of the programmes that have been rolled out and the way that they are transforming people's lives across Trinidad and Tobago and some of the statistics bear this out. I am going to speak a little more about that.

There is always a bit of shifting when the issue swings to poverty and there is denial again about any positive statistic. It is attacked and denied on the other side. I do not know, but maybe that is the role of the Opposition. *[Interruption]* I never had the opportunity—*[Interruption]* I do not see it that way, but I am not in your shoes. Those poverty statistics seem to be particularly attacked by the other side.

2.05 p.m.

I really want to refer them to some recent work done by the Department of Economics at the University of the West Indies, which looks beyond the 2005

statistics, which told us that poverty was dramatically reduced in Trinidad and Tobago and told us that between 2005 and 2008 there has been a continued reduction in poverty levels in this country. Obviously not fast enough for some persons, and to be frank, not fast enough for this Minister of Social Development, but let us be honest with the country and with ourselves. There is progress being made and there is work taking place right now to revise some of the systems and ensure that assistance is provided to the people who need it most. There is much commitment in that regard, not just political commitment but by the professionals in the social sector—Government and non-Government—to ensure that that transformation continues.

I am very curious, I have not heard it expressed as yet, what is the vision of Members on the other side. I listened to it in the contribution from the Member for Siparia, a presenter I have much respect for; I did not hear it, with all due respect. What is the vision on the other side? What is the alternative to Vision 2020?

Mr. Ramnath: Talk about your vision.

Hon. Dr. A. Browne: I just did. What is the vision? It does not seem as if there is any. That is my respectful submission. Is it about power for power sake? *[Interruption]* Is it the same as Vision 2020? I remember in the election there was a rush to embrace it. It is very interesting. I listened for it; I did not hear it, Madam Deputy Speaker. As for Vision 2020, first they attacked, and then they embraced it during the election. They almost claimed that they did Vision 2020 and there are all sorts of versions. *[Interruption]* During the election? Oh, absolutely.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Never embraced it.

Hon. Dr. A. Browne: According to one European philosopher, the truth passes through three phases, and the Member for Couva South probably knows this very well. Firstly, it is ridiculed; secondly, it is violently opposed; and thirdly, it is accepted as being self-evident. I suspect that is exactly the process the Opposition is going through with regard to Vision 2020.

I have commented on a few of the content areas on the other side, but I have refrained and will continue to refrain from personal attacks. I was very pained to hear several of them going before, references to who is the flavour of the month, who was a failed priest; I even heard about the grooming habits of the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, something about his eyebrows. What a bad example to young people in this country; what a terrible example.

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Madam Deputy Speaker, as a new Member, respectfully, I listen very carefully to what everyone in this House has to say, because I sincerely believe that no side has all the answers, no one has a monopoly on the truth, on what is right. The *Bible* offers us an interesting phrase: “We are members of each other.” We are members of each other, St. Augustine, think about it. We are members of each other within the national community.

So, the Member for Tabaquite is my brother; Cumuto/Manzanilla is my brother; Oropouche West is my sister; we are members of one another. I have not given up on every Member opposite quite as yet, hopefully there are still a few good men and a few good women.

Hon. Member: What about the Member for Chaguanas West? He is your brother?

Hon. Dr. A. Browne: The Member for Chaguanas West is my brother as well. I almost choked. [*Laughter*] Listen, it cannot be personal. One other point I will like to make while we are on the issue of nation building as opposed to nation destroying. I am very curious, I do not know if a light can be shed from any direction, when there is an opportunity to put country first and it is forsaken by Members of this House. To me the best or worst example of how a national community is viewed by some is the disdain that is sometimes demonstrated in supporting our national events and supporting our national fabric. I can give hundreds of examples but the most painful and recent was what I understand, the complete absence of Members of the Opposition from the recent welcome and celebration of our glorious and victorious Olympic athletes, who distinguished themselves with precious silver in Beijing, China. That my friend is very disappointing.

Mr. Ramnath: They politicize the whole thing.

Hon. Dr. A. Browne: That is why you stayed away? And from the national awards, that is why you stayed away as well? It is politicized. [*Crosstalk*] I was not invited to the welcome for the athletes, you know, but I went. I saw it as my business to be there as a supporter of the national fabric. [*Interruption*] You do not need to be invited, you are a member of the national community.

As I said, the call is for us to be nation builders as opposed to nation destroyers. One of the reasons I commend this budget is because it fits very well into the overall vision and transformation of the social sector. One of the key objectives is to ensure to the limit of our capacity that the welfare and future of all our citizens is enshrined and that all members of the national community are able to make progress along the journey towards development.

Let us not fool ourselves, this is not an easy task, it is not an easy undertaking, but it is a challenge that has been embraced and is being comprehensively addressed by our social sector entities such as the Ministry of Social Development; the NGOs that are working very, very hard, sometimes under challenging circumstances; and the wider pantheon of entities and agencies that comprise the social sector.

We are in the process of upgrading our monitoring and evaluation, implementing visionary new projects and rolling out the policies and programmes that were envisioned and some were initiated before the time of this current administration, which we regard as vital to improving the status and welfare of all our people, no matter what their religion, ethnicity, background, geographic location or even political affiliation.

Whenever there is a complaint or concern—and I want to tell the Member for Naparima and I listen to you very carefully Sir, when you speak—expressed, I want to tell you there is a commitment and response on the other side to ensure that those complaints are well investigated. I will give you some examples with regard to the TCard. No one sits back lightly when a complaint or concern is addressed, but at the same time we need to be very careful when we stigmatize an entire programme—and a programme which I have demonstrated in a response to a question here is benefiting many of your constituents and you control the constituencies to a very significant extent.

So, I do not want, because of one or a handful of families that are being investigated now, a humble holder of that TCard, even as the client list is reviewed and refreshed, to be stigmatized as a smart man, as I believe there was some interpretation at least in the media. That is in no one's interest, because those individuals need to be free to apply that card towards the nutrition and welfare of their families.

So, it is just a call for a bit of caution and balance, even in throwing light on what might come to you. Something might come to you that would not come to me. Let us be careful not to stigmatize. I heard some of those phrases being thrown about and it could be very, very dangerous for the social sector.

It is really about renewing systems and ensuring that the social sector is modernized. We all do have to share in this vision. If it is just the Government alone with the vision for developed country status, we will get nowhere. The Government acting on its own cannot do it. The call is continuous to the national community to join with us and ensure that every citizen sets his or her sights on

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that vision for development, at the level of the family, the level of the community and of course, the level of the nation; that must always be highest in our mind. *[Interruption]* We cannot just throw blame willy-nilly.

If all of us commit to working just 10 per cent harder; spending 10 per cent more time with our families; littering 10 per cent less; driving 10 per cent slower on the roads; travelling around the world 10 per cent less; committing to the work that we have been hired to do by the electorate; being hostile 10 per cent less and 10 per cent less personal in our diatribe at times—Who the cap fits, let us see? I do not want to get personal—then tomorrow we will wake up in a better Trinidad and Tobago. I know the Member for Couva South believes that and I know he works 10 per cent harder every day at Petrotrin. I am convinced of that.

That is a vision of true development for Trinidad and Tobago, as opposed to a vision of, what was it, civil disobedience. I want to give you a quick example of an experience I had at cricket, Madam Deputy Speaker, on leaving a West Indies match at the Oval. There was a long line of traffic leaving King George V Park; there was a great deal of mud on the ground and so on. One gentleman, with three children in his vehicle, clearly used some newspaper to wipe mud off the feet of the occupants. My vehicle was behind his in the line and I saw a muddy ball of newspaper thrown out of the window on to the ground. So, I got out just probably very naively, picked up the newspaper, looked at him, shook my head slightly, returned to my vehicle and went about my business.

You know what happened after that? Apparently, there was a search within the car for garbage and junk, and thereafter out of every window came cigarette packs, et cetera. I just wish I had the licence plate to share with the national community. It was a disturbing moment. Before someone jumps up and says, well, that is why we need litter wardens, et cetera, I am just suggesting that that is evidence that the national psyche itself needs the caring embrace of all of us and will not benefit from any of the cynical attacks that continue.

So it is not just about talk of civil disobedience or discrimination, but how can we work together to change the behaviour and improve society as a whole. Values have nothing to do with socio-economic status. My grandmother was dirt poor and she raised 10 boys, all of whom benefitted from higher education without a cent from the State. That is the literal truth.

I see another excellent example of a bit of a different scenario in the *Express* of September 27:

"Overjoyed welfare kid cops scholarship"

I do not like to phrase "welfare kid", but the point is well made. This child is from Penal. So the Member of Parliament from that area I want to congratulate, the Minister of Education, I want to congratulate the family of this young lady and the young lady herself, Vidya Maharaj. A very distinguished young lady who has risen above—[*Interruption*] Do not miss the point, Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, please. I listen when you are speaking, do not miss the point.

I want to recognize that this is an example of a young person, a child who has risen above her circumstances, 14 years leaning on the social safety net and is an excellent example to the national community. I heard the Member for Mayaro talk about—I do not want to misquote him—a family in his constituency that complained that the bus service was not working efficiently, and therefore, they could not send their children to school. Immediately I began to get worried, because certainly, I would want to surmise that as a Member of Parliament, Member for Mayaro, ensured that some provision was made to address what I suspect might have been a need for some prioritization on the part of that family.

No matter what it takes, as I said, I have an example coming out of my own lineage and family that a single mother with 10 boys, with not a cent from the State, unemployed, selling mangoes by the road, ensured that every single one benefitted from higher education and they all progressed.

2.20 p.m.

We are in political roles and so on, but I think we also all are in an opportunity to address the national psyche and ensure that we take it. The development is not just infrastructural but it is also in terms of psyche. [*Interruption*] I know the Member for Couva South has the power to do it but maybe he has other issues confronting him at this time.

Mr. Imbert: Many.

Hon. Dr. A. Browne: Many other issues. So, I commend Vidya Maharaj to this House and to this country as an excellent example. I have undertaken an exercise within the ministry to find more of these positive examples, because we know they are out there, but the temptation, certainly from the media, is to focus on the negative. This would have been a wonderful front page. That is all I am going to say about that. A wonderful front page.

Mr. Warner: Did you write that?

Hon. Dr. A. Browne: I am commending her before this House, Member for Chaguanas West. [*Interruption*]

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Madam Deputy Speaker, there remains a great deal of work to be done in the social sector and we recognize that the Government has a central role to play. There are many strides being made right now within the social sector by the Ministry of Social Development in the realization and execution of its social sector mandate under the pillar of nurturing a caring society. *[Interruption]*

In this financial year the ministry has taken the strategic direction to realign service delivery much more in the direction of the client. We are not completely there, but the mantra that is going out to all of our staff and our agencies is that the client has to be put first. The client must be the focus of all of our efforts. That really is what would benefit our vulnerable groups. This client focus approach will emerge as a contribution to a transformed public sector. Already the resistance has been considerable, I would not even go into the details, but change is never easy and positive change is always needed.

I want to say a few words about poverty. Let us recognize that poverty really should not be a political football. Every country has confronted and will continue to confront the issue of poverty. It is a feature of almost every society on this planet. Even the mighty United States was humbled when Hurricane Katrina unmasked or unveiled very deep pockets of poverty that have proven extremely difficult to address. Notwithstanding these facts, this Government believes that our development will not be meaningful or sustained unless we establish and accelerate a trend towards decreasing poverty and providing the means for individuals and families to continue to improve their station in life, and I firmly believe that we are doing exactly that.

The most recent survey of living conditions 2005 revealed a poverty rate of 16.7 per cent and indigence at 1.2 per cent. This data as I said represents much lower levels compared to previous surveys. I refer to more recent work that shows that poverty continues to decrease in Trinidad and Tobago and we have to look at the rate of that decline and ensure that it is maximized to the best of our capacity. This is in contrast to countries like the United States and even New York City as a district where poverty levels have been demonstrated to be increasing.

So, all is not lost as some have been trying to say, but the Government is not satisfied with this scenario. We are not satisfied at all and it is our goal to further reduce the number of persons living in poverty in this country. We all know that this will not be achieved by just throwing money at people. That is really not the way. To this end, implementation of poverty alleviation programmes guided by a comprehensive strategy have been and continue to be very high on this Government's national agenda.

Complementary to the poverty reduction strategies has been the move to a more structured approach to the provision of social services to vulnerable citizens across the country. The European sponsored poverty reduction programme resulted in 15 regional human and social development councils which are established now throughout Trinidad and Tobago. These have enabled a much closer working relationship among public sector ministries and agencies, the business sector, community based organizations and NGOs, and therefore bringing into sharper focus the needs of our vulnerable citizens and also the resources to treat with their needs in a more timely manner.

There are many benefits of this programme including the regional micro-project fund which is an initiative targeting community based organizations seeking to deliver poverty reduction programmes within communities. As of June 2008 the regional micro-project fund has funded over 500 projects to the tune of TT \$15 million involving many hundreds of civil society organizations. Many of them right at the grassroots level and I want to emphasize across Trinidad and Tobago, in every geographic area. These projects encompass categories such as: agriculture; health; food and nutrition; information technology; culture; education; sport and life skills development.

I should also inform Member of this House that the other critical components of the programme have been put in place with regard to networking and engendering social and community capital, enhancement for ongoing monitoring of poverty at the community level. The civil society network was established to foster greater networking among the NGOs and CBOs themselves, so that we could facilitate the sharing of best practices so that poverty alleviation would continue. A research council was also established and its role is to continuously monitor the poverty levels and to analyze the household budgetary survey to determine changes in the nature of poverty over time in Trinidad and Tobago.

We are receiving extremely favourable reports from teachers, facilitators, care givers and parents across the country regarding the acquisition of critical skill sets and positive behaviour change by the beneficiaries that have completed the programmes funded under this project and by groups who have accessed the regional micro-project fund. This Government is really about empowerment and the positive transformation of lives of the citizens. Although the European Union funding of this programme has ended, these projects were so successful at the community level and the building of community spirit and the individual self-esteem in many cases that the ministry has requested and received a detailed proposal to continue funding of this community based poverty reduction programme and that proposal is now being reviewed by the Cabinet of this country.

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We on this side also recognize that food security and proper nutrition must never be denied to any member of our society. Based on this premise the targeted conditional cash transfer programme was introduced in 2006 to assist needy families in meeting their basic nutritional requirements through a debit card or the TCard. As you are now aware the Government has announced an increase in the levels of cash transfers to the amount of approximately 35 per cent in each category.

I have already responded to the Member for Naparima in that those increases would take effect only upon completion of the client renewal exercise that is taking place right now. But that is good news. There was talk that there is no good news in the budget for poor people—Princes Town North—is that not good news? [*Desk thumping*] “Aah, aah”!

Madam Deputy Speaker, we are aware that there have been challenges with regard to the eligibility of some of the past beneficiaries and a family that was highlighted recently actually comes from the constituency of St. Augustine where there were some anomalies. In this connection, I want to assure this honourable House that the Ministry of Social Development is currently conducting a client register update to review and verify all of the information we have on record with regard to existing beneficiaries of the TCard programme. At the end of this exercise we will be in position to ensure that only those households which meet the selection criteria will continue to be on the programme.

The list is being updated by an experienced and autonomous team based at the University of the West Indies and the process does include home visits and investigations to verify potential abusers of the programme. The bottom line is that those persons who improperly hold the card will be reviewed with regard to their future on the programme. The TCard is a social programme. It is not a political programme and this House has our assurance that approvals and rejections of applications are based on satisfaction of a means test.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Social Development has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. Dr. A. Browne: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and thank you to all my colleagues in this House for supporting the provision of time. We are talking about the TCard. By the same token we must recognize that expectations

and demands are very high for any social programme in any country. Some people who failed to satisfy specific criteria will sometimes immediately cry discrimination or rejection and so on, and that needs to be recognized as well.

Those who choose to view this TCard programme as merely a convenient handout I need to ask them to consider the words of some of the beneficiaries of the programme. One beneficiary said, “I have no problem with the conditional part of the TCard programme. I was able to do a craft course and now have a better chance to support myself and my family after I come off of the programme”; looking towards the fact that this programme is not going to be permanent or entitlement is not permanent and that persons will be graduated or transitioned out once they have the means to support themselves. Another one said, “At least now I get to buy more meat products, cereals and fresh vegetables. I can buy it to some degree in bulk, before I could not buy in quantity.” Another example said, “I can give my family more nutritious food, I am not worried anymore about being able to feed my children because I know they are eating healthy. I can buy food like milk, rice, flour, sugar, corn and beef.” *[Interruption]*

From the inception of the programme in 2006 over 27,000 persons— *[Interruption]* I am certain, Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, that there are persons who interact with you indicating how they have been benefitting from this programme. If they are not, I can give you the numbers of persons in your constituency who are receiving these cash transfers. If they are not telling you that I would question the level of communication within that constituency. I am certain—

Hon. Member: They cannot find him.

Hon. Dr. A. Browne: He cannot find them?

Hon. Member: They cannot find him.

Hon. Dr. A. Browne: No, I do not believe that. I would not believe that about my brother from Cumuto/Manzanilla.

From the inception of the programme in 2006 there are now over 27,000 citizens holding this card ensuring food security for over 100,000 persons to supplement other sources of income. So, let us not stigmatize every single holder of the card by calling it the “smart man” card.

This programme is modelled after the Chile Puente Program which is internationally recognized, and I know we had some reference to Chile earlier, but this is not in that regard. It is now moving into its second phase of the programme

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with a strong conditional component to really work with families through a number of very innovative social strategies to ensure that every single family that holds a TTCard is the beneficiary of targeted interventions. It is working with the young people in the family ensuring that they are participating in training and capacity building programmes. It is conditional. It is not an entitlement and by holding this card in the future you will be in agreement, you will enter a contract that you will participate in a number of programmes to ensure that at the end of the period the family is able to graduate, to transition out of a level of poverty.

As I said, we did not invent the wheel. We are leaning on some international best practice and examples of how these programmes are done elsewhere in the world. Do you know what, Madam Deputy Speaker, other countries in the region are now looking at us and leaning on us.

We just had a regional workshop here in Port of Spain where other countries have come—*[Interruption]* Yes, they would get examples of what to do, what not to do, et cetera. The point is the Caribbean coming together and learning from one another to address the common issue of poverty and that is just the way it is. So there are many other nuances of this programme and innovations but I would reserve those for a more comprehensive address of that particular programme.

2.35 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, another area that I would really like to pay some attention to, is the Senior Citizens Grant, and over the last fiscal year over 70,000 persons have received this particular benefit at a cost to the Government and taxpayers of over \$1 billion per annum.

As hon. Members would note, this Government in recognition of the needs of our seniors, has increased this grant to \$1,650 per month in January of this year, while at the same time raising the qualifying ceiling to \$30,000 per annum. But once again in the 2009 budget, the Government committed to heeding the voice of the people. We have increased the maximum Senior Citizens Grant by another \$300 to \$1,950 and raised the income ceiling once again, to \$33,600. These improvements must be considered within the context of the total social safety net that is in place for senior citizens and other persons.

I do not want to get into too much of a regional comparison, but I want to tell the Members here, that while we throw words around, get political and talk about a pittance and all the other adjectives that you tend to use when these increases are granted, there are two points. One, I personally, honestly do not think that the UNC is in any position or is in any way qualified to talk about assisting poor

people in this country because when they were in power, they did not put in place many of the programmes that exist now. [*Desk thumping*] And across the board, many of the programmes that they did put in place have been strengthened and increased under the PNM administration. So, any way you turn and look at it, I am really not convinced that you can speak to these issues with any authority whatsoever.

I just want to say in the regional context with regard to our social safety net, that this country is very, very well placed with regard to the rest of the region. Not that there is no resting on your laurels in the social sector, because we know we have much work to do, but when compared with Barbados, Jamaica, Guyana and all the other countries, whether it comes to senior citizens, the disabled, persons at the lowest rung of the socio-economic ladder, and all the other sub-populations, we have demonstrated as an administration and as a Government, that we care. Just look on Member for St. Augustine, those demonstrations will continue and they will continue to increase. That is just the nature of the People's National Movement. So, I just commend those efforts to you. I see you are paying very close attention.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we have a Division of Ageing, established in August 2003 within the Ministry of Social Development that is looking at the wider range of issues with regard to our senior citizens, senior activity centres in five areas, St. James, Maloney, Chaguanas, Rio Claro, Pleasantville and more to come. Three additional centres are to be established in this fiscal year, again, focusing because hopefully we will all get there one day, some sooner than others.

Another area that I would really like to focus on is the issue of disability. Again, we saw meaningful increases to the disability allowance and over 175,000 persons have been benefitting at a cost of over TT \$200 million. The grant has been increased to \$1,300 in an effort to bring additional relief to citizens with disabilities. And again, the advocates are doing their job, and if I am an advocate for the disabled community, of course, with any increase, any amount, I would say more is necessary. It is our job to continue to listen and interact with those advocates and to ensure that over time, these provisions are meaningful and sustainable, and that is really what was done. I want to commend the Minister of Finance, right at the get go in her tenure of responding to those signals and I am certain that her support for the social sector and the support of the Government, is something that really would not be questioned, and cannot be questioned.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there are other issues with regard to the disabled, focused on progress workshops. Looking at the national policy for persons with disabilities, we have been conducting these workshops with stakeholders across

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the country, looking at the gaps, looking at the achievements, involving persons with disabilities in the process in areas such as access to the built physical environment; information and communication; recreation, culture, sport and hospitality; inclusive education, training and employment; developments in standardization of sign language; publication of Access, a quarterly newsletter focused on the national policy of persons with disabilities: and we are now developing a local guide to recreational facilities and services for persons with disabilities. Again, there is a great deal of work taking place within the social sector; Government working with our partners to ensure that members of the national community are properly served, and that commitment continues.

There are so many other issues, but I want to mention the issue of children. It is very, very important and I know that there have been continued calls from the national community to ensure that we place children at the highest level of priority. The Government certainly agrees with that sentiment and we aim to reduce the incidents of neglect and abuse, and facilitate the holistic development of all our nation's children, which are our future. There have been many references to the National Plan of Action for Children, which was approved by Cabinet in August 2006. There is also a committee that functions under the Ministry of Social Development, charged with monitoring the implementation of the NPA in this country. Current developments regarding the interest of our children include the imminent establishment for the Children's Authority, following the passage of the Children's Authority (Amdt.) Bill, 2008 and we know that several other Bills were also recently passed, and I thank all Members for their support in this regard.

I am pleased to report that Cabinet has authorized the acquisition of a specific property on Pembroke Street for the operations of the Children's Authority. A committee is now preparing recommendations to determine the membership of the board, as only two weeks ago the Senate's amendments were approved—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Ramnath: Calder Hart.

Hon. Dr. A. Browne: No, come on. I know you think he has a big heart—amendments were finally passed.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the care and support of our nation's children and families is at the heart of the Ministry of Social Development and the heart of this Government, and our children and our future are of utmost importance to us.

There are also very concrete plans for the issue of the socially displaced, and some achievements in that regard—maybe I should just skip quickly to the

achievements. We are doing a great deal of work with deportees who are met on arrival in Trinidad and Tobago as we hosted a major stakeholders forum focused on the issue of vagrancy and the socially displaced and took the unusual step of inviting the Member for Naparima to attend this forum because it is not just words, we believe in consultation.

Mr. Baksh: I did not attend.

Hon. Dr. A. Browne: What is that, you did not come? You sent a representative, that was a good idea and I am sure he reported back to you. We have completed the refurbishment of the Riverside Complex, the CSDP in Port of Spain to enhance living conditions of the residents; complete transformation in a very short space of time. If you speak to any of the residents there, you would recognize that they have recognized that there is a very warm and caring approach being extended.

The social work services extended at that facility have also been increased dramatically, and Cabinet has appointed an interministerial committee which has already identified all the critical elements of the strategy for removal assessment, treatment and rehabilitation of street dwellers. We have identified three additional sites for accommodation of socially displaced persons and have requested letters of interest from NGOs for the operation of these facilities. We are also conducting a survey—research is important—of socially displaced persons, getting their feedback as to exactly what are some of the gaps. We know there were efforts made in the past and I am not going to go into what the UNC did in their tenure with Miss Universe, we all know the story. But the point is, we need to learn from what took place and really try to do better. It is a very difficult issue and I think Members here are well aware of this and would not make light of those challenges. In every country, Japan, Western Europe, all the big travellers would know that, this is a current ongoing issue that challenges cities and societies, but it is one that we need to rise to the task at hand.

There is progress in so many other areas in the social sector: community mediation services—expansion there; now target St. Barb's and Laventille, recognizing that the social sector has a contribution to make, even in the crime battle and mediation is a very important tool. There were some ideas generated from the other side, but those have already been taken forward by some of my predecessors such as the Member for St. Ann's East, whose contribution I salute and acknowledge at this time, and now we are focusing on mediation as an alternative to violence. Talk it out, Mayaro, not fight it out. I know you could talk it out.

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Madam Deputy Speaker, so much work has been done across the board within the social sector: parenting support groups have been established, training programmes at the community level in anger management, building trust, leadership skills development, but so much more still to be done. But I assure you the commitment is certainly there.

Two thousand, seven hundred and twenty-four persons in the last fiscal year benefitted from these mediation centres and programmes, and that programme won the Prime Minister's award for innovation, "Making a difference to people"—the Social Inclusion Award. Certainly, I can tell you the professionals in the social sector will be returning to collect that particular prize, year after year.

There is a great deal of work in the area of public information and awareness as well, to ensure that the vulnerable citizens are aware of our services. That is an ongoing task, and even working ideally through Members of Parliament to ensure that persons at the ground level are aware of what is available and how to qualify for this assistance. So we have been doing brochures on child abuse and disclosure, using TPost to do mail drops and direct mailings to over 71,000 households, in this recent series and public awareness messages. We have been getting very positive feedback from members of the national community, who are recognizing that our focus is on showing some positive examples. Yes, you can be a good father; you can lime and be a fun Trinidadian and you can be a good father. Sometimes we use the negative too much and people do not feel that they can achieve these things. So, there is much innovation taking place in this regard.

I know there will be other opportunities to elaborate in terms of the social sector, really but what I would like to establish, is that there is a genuine commitment, from the highest level to the cleaners and members of security within the social sector to ensure that we do better, we rise to the occasion. And that change and positive trend with regard to poverty is not just a transient trend, but take that to the fullest extent of our capacity to ensure that our citizens do better. I think the budget has taken us another step in the right direction in that regard.

So there are many other things with regard to the way forward. Decentralization of the social services; we are bringing on staff. You talk about PR expenditure, it is not just PR; much of that expenditure is on human resource recruitment. If you look at the papers everyday, you would see the social sector and other Ministries bringing people on board, recruiting skills. There is much work to be done. Unfortunately, I am unable to give way. I have already gotten the signal to wrap up, I am sorry. You know normally I would. I mentioned the focus on quality customer service and much ongoing research, but for my part, I

really want to commend the hon. Minister of Finance, for the excellent work that she has done in bringing this budget before the national community, recognizing that there will always be work to be done in the social sector, but the budget really carries us some way forward in filling some of the gaps and ensuring that hope continues to pervade Trinidad and Tobago and not succumb to the attacks on the psyche of the nation that might come from various angles.

I would like to end with the words of an old Chinese philosopher:

Hope is like a country road. First there is no road, but if enough persons walk along a certain path, slowly a road comes into being, slowly a road comes into existence.

And I want to commend this budget, as a budget of hope for the people of Trinidad and Tobago and I ask the national community to continue to support your Government, as we develop our beloved nation together. I love my country; we love our country.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Jack Warner (*Chaguanas West*): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and thank you, Mr. Prime Minister for waking up at this time. I assure you, you would not regret it.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when I was a boy and that was many, many moons ago—[*Interruption*]

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

Mr. J. Warner: With you—I used to ask myself, if you had asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, I would have said then, a preacher or a policeman.

2.50 p.m.

I would have said so with a smile and a grain of salt, because, honestly, as a boy that was my ambition. When I became a parliamentarian, as I am today, it never crossed my mind that one day I would have been in this House, a hallowed Chamber, where in previous years we had so many erudite speakers and politicians. For having me here today, I thank the UNC.

When I became a parliamentarian, almost a year ago, and I came to this Chamber, I had a sense of nostalgia for the good old days; the days when we had lofty debates; the days when we had parliamentarians like Dr. Winston Mahabir whose brilliance and oratory, even today, remains unsurpassed.

Mr. Ramnath: Are you attacking me?

Mr. J. Warner: Not yet; I am attacking them.

Those were the days when you had Gerard Montano on that side; when you had John Donaldson senior, on that side; people like Kamaluddin Mohammed, Errol Mahabir; people like Dr. Patrick Solomon, Isabel Teshea. We used go home at night at half past eight and turn on our radio for the Government Broadcasting Unit, to listen to the debates.

Hon. Members: Now we have Jack Warner!

Mr. J. Warner: Look at you, parrots. [*Laughter*]

I do not want to forget that in those days the master of all was Dr. Eric Williams, whose speeches, even today, makes sense, whose speeches, I am sure, two-thirds of them have not ever read, far more listened to. Parliamentarians like Kamal, you would read about them, because their lives, their contributions in this House, were edifying. On this side, the Opposition side, you would recall such persons like Lionel Seukeran, who would talk for two or three nights. In those days you did not have limited time like now; two, three nights Seukie talking, and you go home to hear Seukie. In those days the village had about six radios, so we would assemble in one home, several of us, to listen to Seukie, Ashford Sinanan, Mitra Sinanan and the Capildeo Brothers.

In those days remember—you may have been too young then, but we had Arnold Thomasos, Mathew Ramcharan. In all of that, we had, of course, Basdeo Panday, whose contribution to this House nobody could challenge, [*Desk thumping*] nobody.

Then I have come here for the past 12 months, and I ask myself— [*Interruption*] for the past 12 months or so.

Mr. Imbert: Nine months.

Mr. J. Warner: You see how you trivialize a point. I have been here for the past nine months; for the past 12 months or so, and I ask myself why we have come to this sorry sight. The answer is simple; we have come to this sorry sight today because of one man, and one man only, Patrick Augustus Mervyn Manning, the Member for San Fernando East, the Prime Minister of this country.

Madam Deputy Speaker, do you know why? Because week after week this Prime Minister sits and allows the Member for Diego Martin North/East to trade insults in this House, not discuss issues at all, and that goes as debate. Eric Williams would

never have allowed that. The Prime Minister has allowed the bar to go so low, that sometimes I look at my colleagues on the other side and I see, of course, that they hang their heads in shame.

I was not here for the opening salvo of the Member for Siparia.

Mr. Imbert: Deliberately so.

Mr. J. Warner: I saw it on DVD over the weekend; my staff taped it for me. Following that, I saw the response from the Member for Diego Martin North/East. It was an insult; it was not what a debate should be about. I made the point, while I was listening to him—and he said such things as dotish and foolish—I asked myself, does the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin North/East not have a mother; does he not have a sister? When he attacked the Member for Siparia, he did not attack what she said, he attacked her person. If by chance he does not have a sister, he has a mother. If by chance he was untimely ripped, that is no reason for that low level of behaviour; no reason. [*Desk thumping*]

That was taking place while the Prime Minister of this country was grinning and egging him on. Of course, he, the Prime Minister, is aspiring to be the father of this nation. "You cyar even be de god father. You do not understand that these 19 young persons who you brought in here, who have to understand and have to learn and have to emulate the leaders on your side—who can they emulate, that guy? Him?" [*Mr. Warner points*]

I saw his contribution; I thought he would have given this Chamber an account of his stewardship for the last fiscal year, and tell us what he proposed to do for the year to come from the budget. What has he done about the endless traffic jams in the last year? What has he done about flooding, which occurs just by the threat of rain? What has he done for our iffy public transport system? What has he done for the clogged drains and rivers? What could he tell us about Jusamco that failed to pave the airport for \$38 million and then we give him a contract, to do the same job, for \$140 million? Must we not ask why? Must we not ask why?

Tell us about the water taxis, for example. Suppose the water taxis stall, can we push them? [*Laughter*] Suppose one springs a leak, must we all be swimmers? Tell us about that. Tell us who got the contracts for these taxis; would there be transparency and accountability? But no, he spends his time trying to destroy the Member for Siparia. I would tell you something, she left more dignified after he spoke than before he spoke. [*Desk thumping*] That level of crass behaviour should not be acceptable anywhere. For a Prime Minister to sit next to a speaker, his

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senior Member of Parliament, and giggle and smile, as I saw on my DVD, he was encouraging him to do what was wrong. [*Desk thumping*]

He told us about the national highway system, I said to myself when he spoke, "What is this?" A national highway system, he is building highways from Penal to Mayaro; San Fernando to God knows where. He is building a tunnel from Curepe to Maracas. What impact would that have on traffic jam to Port of Spain? So when you go from Penal to Mayaro on the highway, does it make the traffic jam less in Port of Spain? A highway is built based on the industrial activity in any one particular way. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Nonsense!

Mr. J. Warner: You could say nonsense, because that is the level of intelligence. You are the product of a failed education system; that is what you are. [*Desk thumping*] If that is what he wants, let him keep that, but on this side we would not take that from you at all; no way.

As I was saying, before I was rudely interrupted—[*Interruption*] Let him continue; that is the level of his intelligence.

You are building a tunnel from Curepe to Maracas. You would take away all the lovely scenery, Mr. Prime Minister. I checked Dr. Williams' book, that was the first thing he objected to with Dr. Capildeo. That idea was Dr. Capildeo's, and Eric Williams said that it was a foolish idea, because you do not destroy the scenery of the mountains and so on. And you come with this after 30 years? Tell us about that. But he comes here to attack the Member for Siparia and believes that because she maintained her dignity as lady, he could get away with it. She has us here to defend her, and we will. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Panday: All the time! [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. J. Warner: I decided that I would not allow most of my time today to be spent on what he has done and what he has failed to do, because, in a real sense, with 45 minutes, and 30 minutes more, I do not think that I should give him more than I have spent, so I will move on.

I move on to the next speaker, the Minister of Education, who I thought, honestly speaking, a very nice lady. I recall her babble when she spoke, and she rambled at length. I asked her to give way to make a point. She said, "I am not going to give way", but five minutes after she gave way to my colleague, Mr. Vasant Bharath. Thank you very much; at least, by the dint of effort she would learn that in this Parliament we give way.

I asked her to give way, because I heard her boasting about 257 scholarships that were published. I wanted to ask her, "Madam Minister of Education, now that the scholarships have been published, will that be the norm for other scholarships in other Ministries?" That was all I was going to ask you. Then on Saturday I saw somebody asked that in the newspapers, so I want to ask it now. I could sit for you to answer me. Therefore, would the Culture Ministry now tell us about the scholarships?

As we heard this morning from the Minister for Diego Martin West, we have a right to now. The public has a right to know. We here are the employees; the public is the employer. He said so this morning. You could laugh till you want, what he said this morning made sense, and I will come to that just now.

You talked about St. Joseph's Convent, Naps—golden girls; lovely I am happy for that; I am glad. But where are the golden boys in the Culture Ministry? Tell us who they are. How did they get scholarships? Who gave them? What was the criterion? How did they qualify? But, you see, we do not have the right to know, because that is not our business. Therefore, I said to myself, "Education is in trouble."

But worse yet, you know that you have a Prime Minister that governs this country by "vaps", by "vaps"; he wakes up one morning and he feels to change "X", and he changes "X". He says to you and your Cabinet, "Students who get First Class Honours will get scholarships to study up to PhD in any university, local or foreign. I said, "My God, look at madness now. The Minister of Finance comes here and parroted that same nonsense. Dr. Williams would never have done that. He would have sat and tried to find out from his research officers what the needs were in the short-term, the medium term and the long-term, [*Desk thumping*] and based on that, he would have come up with a plan to fund the education. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Prime Minister, you could never walk in Dr. Williams' shoes for education. You could give 10 PhDs per person, it is wrong. Madam Minister of Education, let us say that 40 students get First Class Honours in history; they go Finland to do a PhD, you pay for it; does that help us? Does that help the Caribbean? Let us say that 50 science students, who got First Class Honours, want to study aerodynamics in Russia and China; you pay for that, they come back here; does that help us? Then when they come here and it does not help us, you say that they could work anywhere in the Caribbean. The brain gain becomes a brain drain.

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3.05 p.m.

Do you know why you subscribe to it—because you cannot tell the Prime Minister that he is wrong. We know he is getting old, he does not have much brains now, but it seems of course, as if his brains one size fits all. So you all refuse to tell him it does not make sense. Tell him so.

I listened to the Minister of National Security and I said before and I will say it again; he is a nice man, but he is in the wrong ministry. He spent some time talking to us and I told him about the West End Police Station, a model station where at 9.30 p.m. on the Tuesday before Republic Day two policemen were in the station. So in case he did not believe me, I wrote him a letter officially on Friday afternoon because two policemen have to look after 30,000 people. What is the model? Two policemen? But that is normal throughout the country. If that is the model, let me show you a second model for a station.

[*Member holds up a picture*] Watch this, this is the Chaguanas Police Station, a next model. Watch all the wrecked cars there. This is the Chaguanas Police Station, a model station. Model for you and I went to this station on September 08, 2008 and took this picture, on September 09 all the cars were covered with a blue tarpaulin, on September 10, the tarpaulin was stolen from the police station. Do not ask me how. Then they started to move the cars one by one a week ago. [*Interruption*] “Son, if yuh doh know what yuh saying, keep quiet nah.” You are a Johnny come lately in this party, you know nothing about it. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Browne: You are looking for a son.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, we must remember that in referring to our colleagues there is an accepted practice.

Mr. J. Warner: I am very happy, Madam Deputy Speaker to withdraw it. I have sons who are better off in any event. I withdraw it. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to show you again. This is the model for a country with money, and this same station, four containers were brought in for the policemen to work in. I begged the Commissioner of Police on February 2008, to fix the station at no cost to him. I told him I will buy all the cars for the station, it is my constituency and they refused me. And today, this is it. [*Holds up picture*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Vision 2020.

Mr. J. Warner: You know the Mayor of Chaguanas, Dr. Suruj Rambachan, on August 18, 2008 wrote the Ag. Commissioner of Police, James Philbert. In that

letter he was telling him about problems at the Medford Gas Station by the Medford Flyover where people are being robbed and harassed and vehicles are being damaged and so forth. He said that there were two gangs operating in the area and he was appalled at the lawlessness and was begging for help.

I called him last week Friday and asked him what the status was. He stamped: “Urgent, situation deteriorating and no action from the Chaguanas police. And that is what the Minister is telling me is a model police station.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I ask myself if our Ministers travel and they do not learn, they watch but they do not see. If you go to Toronto or New York, in the city you see policemen with helmet on bicycles, two at a time patrolling the streets block by block because they know that their bicycles can move faster in the cities than a police car. And I ask why can it not be done here, and I got all kinds of reasons why it cannot be done.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Chaguanas Borough Corporation has five police bicycles two years now and no policemen to ride them. That same Borough needs a strength of 51 policemen for the Borough but they only have nine, and you are telling me about a model police station. So giving the Minister \$4.7 billion will not help him. If money were the problem we would have no crime in this country. It is not money; it is management and manpower and the third “M” is manning. The first two are the solutions; the last one is the problem.

I asked the Minister of Tourism if he does not see the long lines at Piarco and if he can help the people. He said he has tried; he has spoken to the Minister of National Security, blah, blah, blah. When he told me so, I said I finish.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Speaker, the lines at the Immigration Department are long and I am ashamed to leave the people in the long lines and go in some line first. It is wrong. So I now have to go in the long line and suffer too. It is wrong and we must find the means to correct these things.

I look around in the airport Mr. Prime Minister and the escalator goes bad very often. Can you not put an elevator for the old people? This is the pavement in Chaguanas and St. Augustine. [*Member holds up picture*] There are no manhole covers, a simple thing as that. Mr. Prime Minister, I passed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for nine months and the shutters at the top are open, and pigeons and rain get inside. A shutter? We cannot be serious.

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I am making the point that you can pay Mastrofski \$80 million, and I have checked with Giuliani this morning and he sent me the contract because the Minister said that the contract was for US \$60 million.

Mr. Imbert: US \$16 million.

Mr. J. Warner: I have it right here. If he said \$16 million, I will read it for you because you always know.

This is the Minister speaking on September 26, 2008 and this is the contribution given by Mr. Martin Joseph, the Minister of National Security last Friday. He said:

“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.”

Mr. Imbert: That is marked “UNREVISED”.

Mr. J. Warner: When I called Giuliani, he said it is US \$2 million, and he is faxing me the contract. Even if it is \$16 million, there is a bid difference.

Mr. Speaker, he said to me that something has to be wrong because if you have a man there for four years—that is Mastrofski and his team—at the end of each year you have to evaluate what he has done. But for four years and every year the crime rate is escalating and you are paying TT \$80 million.

I come to the Minister of Social Development who, of course, I want to be kind to because he is learning and I am told by my dear friend from D’Abadie/O’Meara to go easy on him. I will go easy on him and say that I found that he praised everybody but nothing about the Member for Diego Martin West, as if, of course, he does not exist. What objectivity is that? He is critical of those people who talk against the Government because not a damn dog must bark, whether you are in the PNM or you are out; whether you are on this side or that, you must not talk.

He talked about political and negative statistics because we must not say what is wrong. If the statistics we have are all wrong or negative, what can we say? *[Interruption]* Okay, cherry picking. So therefore, out of respect, I believe that in 20 years if the Member for Diego Martin Central is still here, he will understand that one has to be balanced and objective, and, therefore he must criticize anybody.

The budget also gave Tobago \$2.6 billion. I sat here and I heard them say what Tobago wants Tobago gets, and I said to myself; what Chaguanas wants

Chaguanas does not get or any of us on this side. And I ask myself: what Tobago did to deserve \$2.6 billion? I know it is separated from Trinidad by water. I said let me of course see the reasons and I went into my crystal ball and came up with three reasons. The first reason I found was that when you offend one Tobagonian, all Tobago "dis" you, and therefore, I said to myself possibly it is an attempt to appease Tobago for the insult perpetrated on Dr. Rowley. The second reason, I said, possibly it is payback time; in 2002 Tobago gave them two seats to make it 18/18 and gave them the office. So Tobago—give Tobago, give Tobago, okay. Then I said to myself if, of course, Tobago gets \$2.6 billion—and I am very glad, my father is from Tobago, my good friends are from Tobago so I am happy for them—but give us on this side a “cacada” as well. The whole of Trinidad got a little more than \$1 billion, I am glad for them, but take care of the rest of us.

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: Thank you for giving way, Member for Chaguanas West. You gave three reasons, but the reason, as I indicated, is the decision of the arbitration tribunal which gave a decision that 4.03 per cent minimum should be given to Tobago out of the national budget, and in keeping with that, we being law-abiding persons on this side, we have maintained the requirement to give that allocation. That is the reason. In fact, we gave more, but that is the reason.

3.20 p.m.

Mr. J. Warner: But did the law not say that you have to have equality? I ask you, where is the equality?

By the way, I said if it is payback time because of the election in 2002, then at least the COP should get a little “cacada” for last year’s election, because the COP helped them also. The third reason I said was because of the Tobago election in January and therefore it is money to help to keep the Government there in power, particularly after there were rumblings of COP forming a party with all the dissidents, to oppose the Tobago House of Assembly.

But that is okay. I say again, I am glad for Tobago, but give us on this side some “cacada”. Chaguanas West got a mere \$74 million. In 2008 this year, Chaguanas West got \$72 million; in 2009, \$74 million. They got \$300,000 to repair 36 grounds throughout the year—36 grounds for \$300,000! Less than \$10,000 a year per ground! That cannot make sense. After all, Chaguanas West is the Mecca of sport, except for, of course, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West. I will come to him just now. Therefore, I am saying it is wrong. There is no equity; there is no equality in this.

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You know, before I go into my two major issues—sport and foreign affairs—I just want to end by saying when the Member for Siparia spoke about women in her contribution, she made the point that the budget did not address women, and then I heard the Member for Diego Martin North/East say: “We on this side have nine women! Nine! Look at the Ministries they hold!” I said this Minister is indulging in deliberate mischief, because the fact is, the Member for Siparia was talking about single female households—

Mr. Imbert: She did not say that.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Of course, I did.

Mr. J. Warner: Okay, well I say it now. [*Laughter*]—where they have to provide for their children, escalating food bills, fuel, home, and so on, and we were asked, “How many you have on this side and on that side? Oh, my Lord, I mean, is that debate?”

Anyhow, I will hustle this part quickly because I know time is going. You know, this country would love to see candidate Manning. When you were candidate Manning, you used to walk all over this country like Mahal, [*Laughter*] pull brakes and so on. You had one pair of shoes; you kissed every baby in the country and candidate Manning was a man loved by many; hated by a few. What has gone wrong, Mr. Prime Minister? Prime Minister Manning is now hated by many; loved by a few. Even in your own party they talk you bad! Prime Minister, you have lost the milk of human kindness.

Prime Minister Manning, I used to see you go to the Breakfast Shed in the old days. The Breakfast Shed today—UDeCott built the Breakfast Shed—there are 13 kitchens there; four kitchens are functional; nine not working for three months now. Poor people! It is true the Member for Diego Martin West does not eat there anymore because he cannot afford it—he is no longer a Minister—but you can. UDeCott built that.

As I said, UDeCott, next to the breakfast shed, I was having lunch there last week and a guy asked me: “Jack Warner, you in Parliament?” I said: “Yes.” He said: “Tell me something, Jack Warner. Dem high building dey building there, the fire tenders could reach the top floor?” I said: “I doh know.” He said: “I am telling you, Jack, if a fire happens on the top floor, no fire tender in this country could out it.”

Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings—

Mr. Manning: What are you trying to say?

Mr. J. Warner: I am telling you what he asked me.

Mr. Manning: What about the Empire State Building?

Mr. J. Warner: I do not know; that is what he asked me. [*Crosstalk*] In New York they have helicopters that could go and spray the fire and so on. You have helicopters here?

Anyhow, the last thing I want to say, Madam Minister, in your budget you spoke at length about all the money you have that you are spending and you spoke as if the boom would last forever. Boom and bust are cycles. The boom is now and while we have the boom, five men in this country are controlling the boom. The least of the five is the Prime Minister. Five are controlling the boom.

Mr. Imbert: Jack Warner—

Mr. J. Warner: Madam Minister, I am telling you, following a boom is a bust. I have a copy of the debate between Obama and McCain and both of them said:

“We have to have energy independence, so I’ve put forward a plan to make sure that, in 10 years’ time, we have freed ourselves from dependence on Middle Eastern oil by increasing production at home, but most importantly by starting to invest in alternative energy, solar, wind, biodiesel, making sure that we’re developing the fuel-efficient cars of the future right here in the United States.”

They said so, in 10 years’ time. What we are saying here is that if you did not close down Caroni, Caroni could have produced sugarcane. It had nothing to do with food—sugarcane—and sugarcane could have been used for biofuel. That is what we are saying. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Browne: Complete nonsense.

Mr. J. Warner: All I am saying to you one more time, if we had done that, our dependence on oil and gas would have been relieved considerably.

So I come now to foreign affairs and after foreign affairs I would come to sport. I would not talk too much because the Minister is not here. She is at the United Nations General Assembly and therefore all I can say is that foreign affairs have never been high on this Government’s agenda. Note, I have said foreign affairs, not foreign travel. You have your frequent flyer card for foreign travel and if by chance you want to travel more, join FIFA. The taxpayers are not to pay.

In this year’s budget, the Minister of Finance made fleeting reference to the global economic crisis. She spent two lines on the collapse of Lehman Brothers,

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Merril Lynch and AIG and made no mention, in any real sense, of how these events will impact on this country. In 2003/2004, the budget said nothing also about political integration. In 2004/2005, again, not a word on political integration; in 2005/2006, it was the first time we heard that Caricom was even mentioned where the Minister at the time was the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. He praised Caricom for its initiatives in interregional trade and business. He spoke then in 2005/2006, of the Caricom Trade Support Programme.

In 2006/2007, again, nothing on foreign affairs, not even Caricom. In 2007/2008, for the first time we hear about the International Financial Centre when the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance says, and I quote:

“...we are close to finalizing several pieces of legislation which are needed to bring our financial infrastructure in line with international standards.”

I ask myself and I ask you, Sir, what legislation has been finalized to date? What are we close to finalizing? In fact, what does “close” mean?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: That was a year ago.

Mr. J. Warner: A whole year ago but we are close. In 2008, the Prime Minister was not, of course, mentioning anything at all about the IFC. In fact, in 2008 he proceeds to shun and to disrespect Caricom and goes on his own political mission for political integration.

In this present budget, the new Minister of Finance talks about the same thing and promises to bring to this Chamber, legislation which, of course, will reform the IFC. In the Minister’s presentation, nothing has been said about the EPA. What does the country stand to benefit from being in the EPA? Trinidad and Tobago, like the rest of the Caribbean, is sending mixed signals on international trade.

The *Jamaica Gleaner* of September 07 said, and I quote:

“Over the last year, the directions in which CARICOM governments have been taking us are conflicting and confusing. The big four – Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago, Barbados and Guyana – have failed to produce clear leadership in these troubled times.”

Here are some examples of how they have failed the Caribbean:

- i. Barbados and Guyana have joined the Caribbean Court of Justice; Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago have not.

Mr. Manning: Not true.

Mr. J. Warner: Okay. Well, answer when your time comes.

- ii. Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago want to sign the EPA; Guyana does not.
- iii. Trinidad and Tobago (I should really say the Prime Minister and not Trinidad and Tobago) wants a political union with the rest of the Caribbean; Jamaica and Guyana will not join.
- iv. Jamaica and Guyana have joined PetroCaribe; Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago have not.

So what you are having here is overlapping ambitions. Caricom's "big four" are at cross-purposes and our present Minister of Finance, as well as her predecessor, remains clueless.

Worse yet, the Caricom project has been put aside and we have spent the past year consumed with the EPA and not with the Caricom.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. J. Warner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank my colleagues on this side.

Mr. Speaker, the Caribbean Court of Justice is in abeyance. There is no new hope of a Caricom Commission and our Minister of Foreign Affairs, a former banker, stands in her shoes and she wonders.

3.35 p.m.

On January 23, 2008, Prof. Norman Girvan in an article in the *Financial Gleaner* on the implications of the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) said:

The Caricom agenda is for the most part absent from the EPA.

What does this Government say? Our Government says, "We have our pen; we are ready to sign." [*Interruption*] I know. "Doh worry."

Arthur L. Mc Shine of Belmont on February 10, in an article on the *Sunday Guardian* advised that the EPA will kill the region's sovereignty.

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President Bharath Jagdeo said:

Now the EPA divides the ACP and gives Europe the power to make trade rules for Caricom. The EPA undermines the two-year Caricom Single Market Agreement. It undermines Caricom's trade policy for decades to come with very little flexibility of our own management.

The EPA will allow Europe to flood our food markets further. The EPA also overrides regional integration and Caricom's authority on trade. Caricom countries are going different directions and the region needs leadership.

The regions, like the PNM, need leadership.

I leave the EPA and go on to political integration. The budget did not say anything on where we are going *vis a vis* the EPA and what it means in terms of Trinidad and Tobago. *[Interruption]* You will talk in time. "Doh worry. The political integration has been a big flop. The Prime Minister left this country and failed in his attempt to woo Jamaica and Belize in a proposed political union. Up to now, the details of this union are a mystery to the people of this country and even the majority of the PNM Members on that side.

I have a copy of the MOU. This is the MOU that is the big secret. The people of this country do not know about it. The people of this country did not know about this before it was signed. This was never debated in this Parliament. Any government that is responsible and has to put our sovereignty at risk must come here and debate it.

This is the kind of contempt which the Prime Minister and particularly, the Member for Diego Martin North/East has for this country and even their Members. I ask myself: Why is there no Guyana in this document? Why was President Jagdeo not invited?

Mr. Manning: I thank the Member for Chaguanas West for giving way. The distinguished President of Guyana was invited. He was unable to attend and had his foreign minister present. The foreign minister of Guyana, as indeed the foreign minister of Barbados were both present when that document was signed.

Mr. J. Warner: I speak to the President of Guyana and his consulate very often. I was advised that he was never invited. That is all that I could say. I will move ahead.

Mr. Manning: He was invited.

Mr. J. Warner: Okay, fine. Thank you very much. I will go ahead. I have to hustle. Time is against me. You will answer me just now.

My advice is that the Prime Minister of this country was lukewarm at best and dismissive at worst for Guyana. That is my advice.

Mr. Manning: I do not wish to interrupt the Member for Chaguanas and I propose not to do it again. We are being accused of being lukewarm to a country in respect of which we wrote off US \$532 million in debt. Is that being lukewarm? The government of Trinidad and Tobago did it. A lot of it was written off also by the PNM government of Trinidad and Tobago. That could never be the actions of a government that is lukewarm to another country.

Mr. J. Warner: I will go faster. That debt the Prime Minister referred to is a debt that they incurred which the UNC wrote off. What is the big thing?

I make one more point. You recall that we gave St. Vincent and the Grenadines US \$10 million for their airport. I do not recall that coming to Parliament for approval. Of course, it is your money, so give them. Give it away. Give them. We do not know the conditions under which it was given; the terms of pay-back or interest.

I read where St. Vincent and the Grenadines now has ties with Iran. We have an MOU with St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Does it mean that we are now linked with Iran? This Parliament has a right to know. Mr. Prime Minister, you behave as if this country is your plaything and the Treasury is your piggy bank. It is not. I will leave foreign affairs because I do not have much time.

Let me go to my favourite minister, the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs. Throughout our lives we are called upon to make judgment calls. Some of the calls are trivial and others are monumental. The measure of success in our lives is the sum total of all our judgment calls. The essence of good leadership is good judgment calls. Let us see some of the good judgment calls of the Prime Minister. He has made a banker the Minister of Agriculture, Lands and Marine Resources; a grocer the Minister of Health; a priest—I have nothing against priests, by the way—the Minister of Public Administration; the party secretary, the Minister of National Security.

By the way, last Friday when I was here, the deputy Chief Whip was telling the Prime Minister that Howard Chin Lee is the new chairman of the NCC. I asked the Prime Minister if it was true. He said, “Yes. He is the chairman.” I said, “Prime Minister he was a minister of national security and a minister of tourism, why did you go so low?” He said that he was good or words to the effect. Chin Lee is not Ronnie Williams. He has failed at national security, tourism and Carnival. I will look to see what his radio and TV station stand to benefit from

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Carnival as a result. I was talking about the Prime Minister's judgment. He made a lawyer the Minister of Finance. I have nothing against lawyers. I have a good one on my right and a good one on my left. He made no one the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs.

I turn to sport. In the budget of 2003/2004, the Government said that it would establish national sport institutes and an academy of sport at the University of the West Indies. The Government said it would place emphasis on high performance sport. All we got were high performance lies. In the budget of 2004/2005 only nine lines were spoken on the subject in two minutes. The then minister of finance said that the sports commission would pursue sports as a viable business activity. In 2005/2006, the then Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister said not a word on sport. We were facing a Cricket World Cup in 2007 and 2006, a football World Cup. In the 2006/2007 budget the Prime Minister said,

“The power of sport to unite the country and build and transmit positive values and national pride are well established and undeniable. The achievements of our national football team, the Soca Warriors over the last year, attest to this.”

If ever there was an opportunistic prime minister in history, that Prime Minister is the person. The Prime Minister blanked the Soca Warriors for a lifetime and then rose on the crescendo of their success when they came back. I will talk about that just now.

In the 2007/2008 budget, the Prime Minister as Minister of Finance advised that a sport company will be formed and this company will be mandated to repair and upgrade existing facilities. In 2004, sport commission; 2007, sports company. The name of the game simply changed. The Minister of Finance and Prime Minister went on to say that as part of the thrust to provide first class facilities for training and international competition, we will complete the construction of the Brian Lara Cricket Academy and construct national facilities in the disciplines of swimming, cycling and tennis. Do you remember those words? The Brian Lara Cricket Academy is to be completed in 2008. We have 90 days to go and for that to be done it has to be the ninth wonder of the world.

Now in this budget, the new Minister of Finance, the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara spent three minutes on sport and four minutes on youth affairs. I will not tackle youth affairs because my esteemed colleague, for Oropouche West, Mickela Panday will deal with that. She told me that she asked for a national sport policy.

In the Minister's budget speech the Minister of Finance said that to this end the Government has been providing financial and technical support to our national sporting organizations. Madam Minister, did you say so? The effectiveness of this support was measurable at the Beijing Olympics where the athletes excelled especially in track and field events. In the last four years we have had outstanding performances and success at regional and international competitions in football, swimming, golf, volleyball and cricket. These were not just by chance. They were based on a deliberate government strategy.

What a joke! What a sick joke! Following the 2006 World Cup, the Prime Minister of this country, Patrick Augustus Mervyn Manning at noon on a Sunday called the foreign coaches Leo Beenhakker, Wim Rijsbergen, the Football Association President, Oliver Camps, some top technocrats in the government, the then Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, Roger Boynes and me, to his office. It was a Sunday at lunch time.

Mr. Ramnath: Did he feed you?

Mr. J. Warner: Feed?

3.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, it was a Sunday at lunch time. The Prime Minister promised then the moon and the stars for football. He said that he would assist the 2010 effort including, but not limited to, financial assistance to pay salaries and expenses for the team's technical and managerial staff and assistance with training facilities. That was in August/September 2006.

In January 2007, the first payment was made for salaries only for the technical and managerial staff; nothing for training, nothing for accommodation; nothing for anything else. Since November 05, 2007 to the present, this Government, led by this Prime Minister, has not given the World Cup team a nickel for the World Cup effort 2010. To add insult to injury, every effort has been made by the Minister to frustrate the Federation from using the facilities which the Government provided, especially the Hasely Crawford Stadium.

As I say that, I want to correct a statement the Prime Minister made on September 12. I am speaking from the *Hansard*. I was not here when it was said, so I asked for the *Hansard*. While I was in Peru I was told that the Prime Minister made a statement together with the Member for Chaguanas East. I will not deal with him; he is a waste of time. I will talk about the Prime Minister because a prime minister must always lift the bar in Parliament.

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He said:

“I want to be sure. Thank you very much...CONCACAF...They were building five stadia in Trinidad...at a cost of \$365 million. Do you know what my friend does? He forms a company called CONCACAF and tells the national community that CONCACAF is building these stadia and, therefore he is operating on behalf of CONCACAF. That is what he did.”

Mr. Speaker, they never built five stadia; they built four. We opened a fifth. At the time the funding could not have been found to start the project. The Concacaf President stood alone for the Government of this country for \$30 million. I did that. I did not come here for a living; I came here to give people a living. I lent the Government \$30 million. *[Interruption]* The Government had a company appointed, P&W, and they did not get the money released. I was asked to facilitate them with a loan until the money was released. I did that. *[Interruption]* P&W were the contractors; to start the job, they did not have the money. To quickstart the project, I was asked to give them a loan of \$39 million. I did that. The Government paid them and they paid me back. To say that I took money for football, Prime Minister, you do not know. This is a level of “mauvais langue” that Eric Williams would not have indulged in.

The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs did not give the football people any money. He asked them for a budget; he got it. He wanted copies of their technical staff contracts certified; he got them. He wanted accounts from the Federation; he got it for 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005 and a draft for 2006; all from KPMG; and October 2008; all supposed to go in. He got everything for which he asked.

To this day, the Federation has received no payment for salaries of staff, accommodation and travel, insurance, international commitments and training. That Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs has even refused to pay Lincoln Phillips, the technical director for the last four months. I came in this country before he was born. Lincoln Phillips, Mr. Speaker, served this country for four months without pay. *[Desk thumping]* To the present time, the Federation has spent \$23 million on the World Cup Football team. They will spend more and we will reach South Africa and come back.

While all this is taking place, the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs is plundering the Ministry. The plunder that has taken place there would make Johnny O'Halloran look like an angel. What O'Halloran took 12 years to plunder, that Minister has plundered in nine months. I would not go into much detail. I have it here.

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps the word "plunder" might be unparliamentary in the context. Perhaps you can find another suitable word.

Mr. J. Warner: I will say he presided over the plunder. Under this Prime Minister, corruption is a virtue and accountability and transparency are vices. I have given the Prime Minister every picture, every figure. I have sent them to all parliamentarians, showing where the money has gone and there was not even an acknowledgement.

What happens? He fired three members of staff. Their names are Sherry Ann Joseph, Destra Silverton and Nadia Yearwood because he says they gave me information. He suspended one Wayne Riley for the same reason.

Mr. Speaker, at 2.45 a.m. on Republic Day, policemen were sent to the home of Wayne Riley to search for arms and ammunition, a manager of the Sport Company because they said he gave Jack Warner information. I say publicly that wherever Wayne Riley and those three girls are, I shall stand all legal expenses for them to carry this to another level.

I come to a company called Voyager. [*Holds up documents*] I have three copies: one for a company called Voyager Energy Limited. This is the interim special statement up to March 31, 2008, unaudited. This is the same company, Canadian Voyager Limited, financial statement for 2005/2006. These are the companies that bid to do onshore/near shore drilling in Block 2AB, NCMA 2 and 3.

This company has no money. In fact, they had to link with a company called Petro Andina from Argentina to get the necessary funding to come here to do drilling. This company is Canadian with no money and, with a budget of Can. \$1 million, they have gone to sell shares to raise funds. They have said that they can only do the contract to do offshore drilling if they are sure that the Government will give it to them. [*Interruption*]

Canadian Voyager Limited is linked with Petro Andina to do offshore drilling. The company has no revenue base and it is three years old. This company got the contract and because it had no money, it linked with Petro Andina to do offshore drilling. Worse yet, they have come here and they have put these figures. It is interesting to know who the shareholders are. The company is doing offshore drilling and onshore drilling for oil at Blocks 2AB, NCMA 2 and NCMA 3.

On what grounds does this company qualify for the contract in the first instance? Corruption in this country is now at its worst. We are in serious trouble and unless we on this side get together and bury our egos and confront the PNM at all costs to save this country, we shall all perish together.

I thank you very much.

The Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment (Sen. The Hon. Emily Dick-Forde): Mr. Speaker, I do not know how many people actually heard what the Member for Chaguanas West just said, but he made a revealing statement. He was calling on the Members on that side to bury their egos and work together. It is a revelation that points to some serious problems in the opposition.

I congratulate the Minister of Finance and hon. Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara on the excellent delivery of her first budget as Minister of Finance. As one of the twelve women making up this unique and path-breaking Government—I am including all the MPs—I also celebrate the first reading of the budget by the female Minister of Finance in our nation's forty-sixth year of history as an independent nation.

I wish to acknowledge the insight and foresight of the hon. Prime Minister in giving women real and visible roles in this PNM Government. As I study the budget further and consider the comments made thus far both inside and outside the Parliament, I am convinced that the Minister made the bold move to treat with our citizens as responsible, patriotic citizens, willing and ready to shape the future of Trinidad and Tobago in unity.

“Shaping our future together”, the title of the 2009 Budget, invokes a unity of purpose and an acceptance of the national vision with maturity and a sense of civic responsibility.

4.05 p.m.

I hope that the comments of the Minister of Social Development were heard, not just in this Parliament but across the nation where he offered a rich discussion on this topic in his excellent contribution earlier.

One of the issues that we face, with respect to the budget contribution thus far from that side, is the spectre of corruption that they keep raising but are unable to really give any concrete—the exposition by the Member for Chaguanas West is an example in point of just the sceptre of corruption. He had nothing to say. I kept trying to take notes on what exactly he was coming with and nothing emerged. It was a spectre. It is just like a ghost; no real substance to what was being said.

Noting the problems that seek to hold us back, we must take firm measures to address and correct these problems. My contribution today is framed by this Government's ongoing agenda to transform Trinidad and Tobago into a developed nation by 2020. I join with the hon. Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara in her call to citizens, corporations and communities to work with the Government

to realize the change that we as a nation have so clearly articulated in Vision 2020 and the change that we all long to see. We must believe that it can happen, in order for us to be a part of the change. I take the perspective that change begins with me.

The Government also saw that change was required as it took up a new term in office. I am here to report on the experience of the new Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment and as I go along, to answer a number of issues that were raised with respect to the operation of this Ministry.

The Ministry leads the process to achieve developed country status, through the coordination, implementation and reporting of Vision 2020, the National Strategic Plan. Our own strategic planning exercise, as a new Ministry, was facilitated and executed with no external assistance. We developed our mission, vision and values and we are ready to contribute, as a Ministry, to the implementation of the budget that was presented so ably last week.

In my contribution I would report on what this Ministry has done and what we plan to do in 2009, to elaborate on some of the measures that were mentioned in the budget and also to 2009 for the Ministry.

We have quite, what I would call, an exciting challenge as a Ministry, to bring together three very powerful areas: planning, housing and the environment. We have an executive management team in the Ministry that came together and we outlined some strategic priorities for the year outlined early in 2008 and pursued, with leadership from one or more persons from the executive management team of the Ministry. We were able to achieve all of our strategic priorities. We concluded our strategic planning process. We were able to get a Cabinet approval for our revised allocations policy. We began the CSO reorganization, which continues into 2009. Town and Country Planning also had significant advancements in transforming it to give proper service delivery. We were able to operationalize the Green Fund and we were able to work—they would try to distract me, but—on the programme management office, Vision 2020, getting ready for sorting out its problems, as they relate to really getting to assist the achievements of the Government under Vision 2020.

We had a lot of challenges as a Ministry, as it relates to some of our agencies. The HDC, for example, only recently appointed a chairman and a deputy chairman after over a year without these persons. The Corporation continued its housing development work, completing several long-awaited sites and addressed the housing needs of our citizens. A little later, I would address some issues that were raised by the Member for Diego Martin West, with respect to housing.

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Right now, I would speak to the UDeCott issue, which the MP for Diego Martin West also raised. I want to put on record that UDeCott has been under intense fire for nearly the full year that I have been the Minister. I suspect it was going on before as well. I think it intensified. Despite this, my experience is that UDeCott remains among the best performing agencies in the Ministry and, indeed, the Government. The dedicated citizens in UDeCott must be commended for their fortitude and decency in the face of sustained and sometimes bitter criticisms and allegations from oppositional forces.

With respect to the allegations made by the MP for Tabaquite—we have spoken about this so many times and I have to come again to put it on the record—re: Mr. Calder Hart and his family, as it relates to the UDeCott issue of a contract to CH International and eventually Sunway.

Mr. Speaker, you would recall that allegation was the basis for the establishment of the commission of enquiry to look into the construction industry and the operations of UDeCott. What I find of great concern—I try to listen how people talk about this—is that I get the feeling that people are afraid of the commission of enquiry. Somehow they wanted it, but they do not really want it. In trying to get UDeCott to respond to the allegation that actually caused the commission of enquiry to be called, I am wondering if people are not trying to fish for information, so that they can fish and look for more to go and fabricate more stories. My view is, if a commission has been set up on the basis of a particular allegation, then that allegation would have to be sorted out by the commission. Let the commission ask the questions and get the details on the matter.

I have been asked over and over again and criticized for not forcing UDeCott. I would say it again, my sensibility is just as good as anybody else's or probably better than some when it comes to governance. Let the commission do what it was set up to do on that very matter and enquire into the truth. Those who want to hustle to find out what exactly UDeCott has to say, they would have to wait until the commission of enquiry comes. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Manning: Simple.

Sen. The Hon. E. Dick-Forde: I think the rush for an answer has something to do with trying to fabricate more stories, so let them wait.

I want to speak briefly on the environment and then on housing. That is my longest section. The reason I have notes is to make sure that I cover all of the hard work that was done in this Ministry and by all the public servants in the Ministry; significant work that was done.

Under housing, we had a lot of stories coming from the other side, especially from the budget response by the Member for Siparia. I would deal with that in a little while. The Government is committed to a nurturing and caring society in which the felt needs of citizens, particularly the most vulnerable, are met and they are treated with respect. Within that context, the Ministry continues to implement the Government's housing policy. This policy has the potential to impact a large number of broader economic and social policy objectives, through meeting the housing aspirations of citizens. What we mean is, when you provide adequate housing for people, you raise their standard of living and their sense of self and it changes not just a household, it changes a family and communities as well. We have seen it. The policy acknowledges the lived reality of our citizens. Housing is a real need.

We at the Ministry have received from the HDC—the implementing arm; the ones who execute the housing programme, in terms of construction—an estimate that we have approximately 32,000 housing starts since the commencement of the programme. They have reported to me as well that this 32,000 housing starts include 3,147 housing starts from November 2007 to currently. The statement from the MP for Diego Martin West who said that from 26,000 to 32,000 is 6,000 units and he wanted to know where those units were located. As someone with just as many degrees as the Member, he said he has three, I have three as well, plus a professional accounting qualification, my understanding of numbers—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: “Yuh went tuh ah better school.”

Sen. The Hon. E. Dick-Forde:—is that numbers are also fraught with problems. Whenever you are going to number anything, there is an assumption that goes with it. The assumption we have to look at is what are the assumptions that were used to decide what is a housing start.

When I came into the Ministry—note that I am not running the Ministry of Housing; I am running the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment; I have access to a wide-ranging set of information—26,000 housing starts were reported up to 2007. When I enquired about what was happening in the current year, I was told that the units that they were actually working on this year, in terms of actually having been started, were counted as starts last year. When I dug further, these are the assumptions that were made: the assumption was that once a site was identified—this is my information from the HDC—and the sod was turned to begin infrastructure work, units were counted. I argued and said that my assumption for a housing start is that a foundation must have been started in order for a housing start to be counted. I believe that this 3,174 that they have given me for November to current is based on actual foundation starts.

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Additionally, we could not and, of course, will not count again the ones that were counted already erroneously under that 26,000 housing starts. My understanding is that we indeed have 32,000 housing starts, but a great bulk of those were calculated before November 2007, even before the ground was broken. What makes it worse is that, indeed—[*Interruption*] I cannot tell you exactly how much was actually started, because they were counted in error last year. I would have to say in error; using a wrong assumption. The assumption that I have asked for and what we are using now is that a foundation must have started.

Mr. Speaker, I have all the details, because the Member for Diego Martin West wanted to know where these houses were. I have all the details for the 3,174 houses that I believe should be counted for this year, because we cannot double count. I am not going to count twice. [*Interruption*] If you all were not quarreling and listening, you would have heard how it is not 6,000.

I go straight to outlining what the Government does, with respect to making housing affordable. I want to cover this point quickly to deal with the Member for Siparia. In addressing this issue of affordable housing, the Government came up with a number of initiatives, all of which were on the table since 2002/2003. We have reduced mortgage interest rates from 12 per cent to between 6 and 8 per cent. There has been further reduction from 6 per cent to 2 per cent for persons with a monthly income of less than \$8,000 and purchasing state housing with a value of \$450,000 and less. The interest rate has been brought under control and even further subsidized substantially for those who would have trouble accessing housing.

4.20 p.m.

Mortgage down payments were reduced from 10 per cent to 5 per cent during 2002—2006, and in 2007 there was a further reduction from 5 per cent to zero per cent for persons with a monthly income of \$8,000 or less.

I want to come now to the untruth told by the Member of Parliament for Siparia in her big finale last Friday that you now need a household income of \$30,000 a month to access Government housing. That is untrue. The *Hansard* says, and I quote:

“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?”

The Member for Siparia went on to give the national community the impression that people now need to earn \$30,000 a month to access Government housing. That is a very deceptive statement. Again, it is just like the one about the

Green Fund which is a dangerous statement to make. You are playing with the souls of the poor people. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the average citizen in this country who depends on Government housing knows how important this affordability issue is. There was only a thread of truth in what the Member of Parliament said and then it was couched in a big set of talk that put forward a real deception. I was really upset about it and luckily I was not in the House, because I might have been suspended, because it was that dangerous to make a statement like that. It is a very dangerous thing to trouble the poor and the vulnerable, especially given the amount of work that was done to address that affordability issue.

The HDC went on to develop a housing development in Santa Margarita. In pursuing that development, because of the topography it cost a lot more for the infrastructural works and other works than anticipated. So, that housing development ended up with housing units costing well over \$450,000. There was no choice but to sell those houses outside of the low income group, and the reason being they could not have accessed those houses, and the Government had already made a decision that it was going to subsidize housing costing up to \$450,000.

So, having had this housing development in this particular circumstance, the Government then sought to decide who then can access these houses, and that \$35,000 was actually used to put a ceiling on the salary levels of persons who can actually access this housing development. The reason that cap was put was to avoid speculators getting into the Government's housing programme. Speculators cannot come into this programme. The salary ceiling puts a limit, so people who had a lot of money could not come in. We did not sell those houses at their full value. They were sold at a cost to recover the cost of construction, and a decision was taken not to subsidize the infrastructure, and that is why those housing units cost a maximum of \$830,000-plus and that is because of the location of those units and the topography of the area, they went beyond the \$450,000 that the Government had agreed to subsidize. Now, having set that salary ceiling, we ensured that no speculators could go into that housing development and take advantage of the Government's housing programme.

I want to springboard now from that speculation point to the other point that the Member for Siparia made about the failing housing market in the United States of America when she tried to link it to Trinidad and Tobago. With all of these proper programmes that we have put in place in terms of affordability, what I think the Member of Parliament for Siparia did not understand was that the United States of America's experience has a fundamental flaw, and the

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fundamental flaw was instead of looking after the vulnerable and low income people, they left them to the vagaries of the market and what the market did to those vulnerable people in the United States of America is that it gave them extremely high interest rates and they began to make all kinds of financial deals on poor people heads. Whenever you attack the vulnerable, the whole system is going to fall.

What happened in the United States of America was they created these subprime mortgages and people—as I said, this is a real need that people have agreed to these high interest mortgages and at the end of the day they could not sustain. The financial markets invited all of their friends to invest in these high risk and high return mortgages and what happened was an international collapse. All those institutions were taking advantage of the poor credit rating of these vulnerable people. That is a fundamentally different perspective to the one that we take in this Government with respect to housing for the poor.

By providing housing for the poor at affordable rates, we ensured that our system is insulated from what has happened there. There may be indirect effects as a result of what is happening.

Hon. Members: And you are mashing up houses.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. E. Dick-Forde: I am surprised to hear them say that we are mashing up houses. I have already said in this House that your big housing announcement in 1999 was that you were going to sell rental units in order to increase homeownership. There are two different things.

We go beyond simply dealing with mortgages, reducing interest rates and making sure that people can access funding to purchase houses. We also have what is called the Rent-to-Own Programme which is an innovative programme. This programme allows persons who are at a particular point when they are accessing homes and are unable to qualify for a mortgage despite the 2 per cent and all the subsidies, we allow these persons to pay a rent for up to five years, and two-thirds of that rental goes to the purchase of the home, and they are reassessed at the end of the five years to see if they have improved their circumstances to be able to actually go into a mortgage arrangement to purchase the home.

The Rent-to-Own Programme is one of those programmes that allows individuals to own their own homes despite their current circumstances. That is social justice. That is the kind of thinking that saves a nation. There is a principle to look after the vulnerable, and that is something we did not find under the UNC, and that is not what happened in the United States of America which resulted in the housing crisis that we see before us today.

Mr. Speaker, apart from that, the Rent-to-Own Programme actually gives a person an extra three years beyond the five years. If at the end of the five years they are unable to qualify, they have another three years so that they can have an opportunity to qualify for a mortgage. All of the programmes under the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, the Ministry of Social Development and all the programmes under poverty reduction would help a person in this situation to advance and be able to qualify for a mortgage.

We have the Approved Mortgage Companies Programme where finance companies are given tax benefits in exchange for financing the construction of homes at preferential interest rates and for making financing available on concessionary terms to potential homeowner beneficiaries.

The ministry has also vigorously implemented different subsidy mechanisms which have been designed to make houses more affordable. We go deep into the issue. As we encounter different people in the system with different needs, we then make adjustments to the programme to ensure that they are indeed affordable. So, in an effort to reduce the cost being borne by the beneficiaries, the Government agreed to subsidize the cost of the housing units being constructed by the HDC.

Mr. Speaker, the beneficiaries of HDC housing units are only required to pay for the raw cost of the land while the Government absorbs the infrastructural cost for the development of the land. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, beyond that, the ministry commenced implementation of the new housing subsidy which provides the following: a \$35,000 subsidy to purchase a new home which costs less than \$195,000 and these are going to be revised and it is based on beneficiaries earning an income of between \$40,001 to \$65,000 a month—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting of the House is suspended for tea and we will resume at 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Sen. The Hon. Dr. E. Dick-Forde: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I want to continue on the discussion with respect to the Government's housing policy and the mechanisms that are in place for ensuring that we have adequate and affordable housing. I outlined the mortgage arrangements; the interest rates arrangements; and the subsidies that are available to potential homeowners. Within the context of the supply of houses, we continue the accelerated housing programme using several mechanisms to seek to ensure that we always try to

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attain our targets of 10,000 housing units per annum; 8,000 by the Government and 2,000 by the private sector. We have three major approaches: the Infill Lots Programme, the Joint Venture Programme and the Accelerated High Density Programme which is the Urban Housing Programme.

Mr. Speaker, in an effort to continue to improve delivery service the ministry is always reviewing its policies and processes. We recognized that there was a need to further refine the national housing allocation policy, and that is because we noted a number of problems that people had especially those who felt that they had applied a long time and were waiting in the system for too long.

I am pleased to announce that the Government recently approved a revised housing allocation policy to ensure greater equity in the allocation process, to remove loopholes identified within the process and to ensure that there is transparency in the system. Three main issues that we sought to address in the revision of the housing policy was the salary ceiling which we never really had a clear outline of; to look at the date of applications so that persons who had applied before have a greater chance of being chosen than someone who applied yesterday. It does not mean that the most recent applicants are disadvantaged, but it simply means that you give a bit more weighing for those who have applied in earlier years. We have seen quite a number of persons who would have applied since 2002 in the new redevelopment of the database and they are still waiting. We felt that there was certainly a bit more fairness in a system that gives a higher weighting to someone based on the date of the application. We have also addressed the number of dependants a little clearer.

In tandem with revising the policy, we also looked at the clean up of the housing application fulfilment system which is the database to ensure that only eligible citizens are captured and to facilitate seamless processing from application to allocation.

Beyond simply providing an accelerated housing programme and ensuring affordability issues, the Government continues to look at maintaining an acceptable living standard with respect to the housing stock. To address that the ministry has implemented the Home Improvement Grants and the Home Improvement Subsidies which are intended to assist in the rehabilitation and maintenance of existing housing stock in the country.

Homeowners with a maximum household income of \$60,000 per annum and who also meet all of the relevant criteria are eligible for a home improvement grant of \$15,000. So far, during the period October, 2007 to August 2008, 1,164 grants were

distributed to beneficiaries. It is expected that another 300 grants will be disbursed by September 30, 2008. It is projected that 2,000 grants will be disbursed in 2009.

5.05 p.m.

With respect to the home improvement subsidy, which is a matching subsidy that provides to the beneficiaries with household incomes of less than \$84,000 per annum the maximum value of the subsidy, which is \$20,000, subject to the provision of a match in a combination of either funds, materials, sweat equity, which is labour, during the period October 2007 to August 2008, 556 families received home improvement subsidy disbursements.

An additional 150 families are expected to benefit from subsidies by fiscal year's end. It is projected that we will do 1,800 subsidies for fiscal 2008/2009. The Ministry was a recipient of the Prime Minister's Award for Service Excellence 2007, as a result of the outstanding customer service with respect to these two programmes. So, last Friday when, I believe it was the Member for Naparima who said that people had to wait in long lines and were not treated properly when they came to access the grants, that is not true. I know for a fact that citizens are seated and are given refreshments while they wait to be attended to, by courteous and well-trained young men and women at the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment.

In its effort also to improve the living conditions of citizens, the HDC has also continued its refurbishment programme of rental units, which include repainting of the buildings, electrical rewiring, plumbing works, replacement of and/or repairs to roofs, repairs to windows, internal refurbishment, replacement of railings and repairs to ceilings. These rental units serve the needs of some of the most vulnerable citizens in society and the refurbishment work is a critical part of ensuring that they are living in quality housing.

During 2007/2008, the HDC was successful in completing 85 per cent of the refurbishment of its rental units. Windows were replaced in 1,085 units at a cost of \$12.3 million, while approximately 550 roofs were replaced at a cost of \$14.3 million. Painting was done on several sites including the Beetham Gardens at a cost of \$5.39 million. Electrical works were carried out on approximately 717 units at an overall cost of \$8.1 million. In addition, approximately 700 units were completely refurbished at a cost of \$20.2 million.

Mr. Speaker, it is critical that these rental units are kept to an acceptable standard, so the spending on these units and the work done by the HDC is commendable.

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The Land Settlements Agency (LSA) has been implementing the squatter upgrade component of the IADB, second national settlements programme since 2002. Under this component the LSA has been improving living conditions and taking steps to provide security of tenure to families living in informal housing settlements on state lands.

In 2007/2008, infrastructural upgrade work continued on 3,576 lots at various locations including Pine Settlement, Sangre Grande; race course lands, Arima; Bon Air North, Arouca; Milton Village, Couva and River Estate, Diego Martin. Works also continued on three pilot projects of the Port of Spain squatter study namely Sogrin Trace, Laventille, Dundonald Hill, Belleview and Scorpion Alley.

The works included construction of footpaths, road, river and drainage improvement at an approximate cost of \$10 million. These works are expected to be completed by the end of September. These pilot projects are significant in that these sites are not on the schedule and therefore, works are being done to see how we can address those who are not on the schedule but really should be, because they were there for a long time, but perhaps some of them are on private lands. So, this pilot study is going to be extended from what we have discussed to address the problems of the people in the Cocorite area as well.

In 2008/ 2009, the work of the LSA, we expect to see the completion of subdivision and engineering designs for which early works in 2007/2008 were done. So, for quite a number of areas work that was done will continue in 2008/2009, and projected expenditure is \$15 million.

Mr. Speaker, one of the most controversial aspects of the LSA's work is the containment of squatting and the need to protect citizens' right to property. Persons who have occupied land illegally after January 01, 1998 are eligible to apply for housing under the Government's housing programme. The Government has agreed to provide subsidies to persons who were relocated because the land on which they were squatting was identified for public use.

The LSA division is charged with the responsibility of containing squatter sites and has been executing the policy to ensure there is compliance with the law, and at the same time protect the lives of families who unknowingly put themselves in danger, potentially by setting up weak structures on state lands.

The Member for Couva South said that we keep demolishing people's homes and the Member for Siparia also asked the hon. Prime Minister to leave people in their galvanized houses until we build 100,000 units. One of the features that is

prominent in a squatter site is the very poor quality housing and the very poor living standards that people find themselves in.

The Member for Couva South described an area where squatters lived in his constituency as a desolate place, where no one would want to live. What we do not understand is why the Members opposite will want to keep people living in those conditions. [*Interruption*] There may not be enough houses but people do not need to go and put themselves in those conditions.

In developing a caring society, it is imperative that poverty levels should be reduced and poverty alleviation measures initiated. One of the things that we seek to do is ensure that people are not living in squalor. Squalor is what exists when you persist in squatter sites, especially the most recent ones; the ones that most recently went up. If there is a natural disaster, a galvanized structure will not support anybody and then it puts the Government in even more trouble to try to salvage those persons. Therefore, you cannot leave people living in galvanized structures, as the Member for Siparia was seeking to beg the Prime Minister to do. That is not a caring society.

I go to the environment. The Ministry applauds the CNG initiative outlined in the budget by the hon. Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara. This initiative—we know that our CO₂ emissions from transportation are significant and the CNG signals our commitment to local human health and to the global effort to combat climate change.

Further incentives to encourage CNG use will include the incentive to encourage the importation of CNG ready cars, because there are such cars that are already on the international market, that are ready to accept CNG, they are made like that; there is no need for a conversion kit. So, it is one of the proposals that we have to look at to see how we can make a real incentive to encourage that.

I want to report on some of the efforts of the EMA, which is our implementing arm. As mandated by Water Pollution Rules 2007/2008, the EMA began the implementation of rules through the registration of approximately 500 emitters of pollution, as well as issuing permits to the quarrying sector in the North Oropouche River catchment area. Air pollution rules are also close to being completed and laid in the Parliament.

In fiscal 2008, the Ministry also continued its work under the Montreal Protocol to phase out ozone depleting substances. In December 2007, we successfully phased out the imports of chlorofluorocarbon into the country two years ahead of the stipulated phase-out date. For its national phase-out effort, the

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National Ozone unit of the Ministry was also awarded an Implementer's Award by the Montreal Protocol.

In 2009, the Ministry will continue to work on the phase-out of other ozone depleting substances including HCFCs and methyl bromide. Because we are a country with heavy industries, such as iron and steel, methanol and cement production, the Government has recognized its contribution to the production of greenhouse gases and its effects on global warming and climate change. So, cognizant of our international role and responsibility, to mitigate the effects of global warming and climate change, the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment has been collaborating with the UNDP and IDB to develop a strategy to reduce carbon emissions in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Ministry in collaboration with the UNDP has decided that as a way forward the transportation, industrial and power generation sectors, which are significant sources of carbon emissions, will be targeted for immediate action through a modified UNDP proposal. In fiscal 2009, our Multilateral Environmental Agreements Unit will lead in the examination of various aspects of the transportation, industrial and power generation sector emissions.

With the IDB, we are in the process of finalizing technical cooperation to outline projects for carbon capture and storage, sustainable energy and a climate change policy. Biofuels, in my estimation, which has been raised here by several people on the other side—I think they do not understand what exactly is biofuel and what it involves. The Member for Couva South should know better and the Member for Chaguanas West, I do not think you know what you are talking about. Do you know that biofuels require the use of agricultural lands? All the talk about Caroni, remember the same Caroni is being organized for agricultural purposes.

We have heard so much about the fact that we are not doing enough for agriculture. If we were to go into biofuels for ethanol in a big way, as they are saying and now, especially now—we are not going to rule out biofuels sometime in the future, but this is not the time for it. There is no scope, I think nowhere in the Caribbean except perhaps Guyana could actually pursue biofuels, and in fact, the United States has found it to have—I believe they are going to have to come out of it soon, because it has caused quite a great deal of turmoil in the food market. So, it is not a well-thought-out suggestion at all.

There is plenty that we did in the environment, but I want to report on a very significant project, and this is a project that is being led by the EMA, and it includes putting Trinidad and Tobago on the map with respect to entering the

carbon trading market. In response to the latest climate change report and the need to take drastic actions to reduce our carbon emissions, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago agreed to a programme, the Nariva Swamp project, which seeks to reforest and restore the Nariva wetlands and the forested area.

Within that project includes a below ground injection of carbon dioxide. Sorry, not in that project, but part of the entire project includes that. So, the Nariva Swamp project, the objective is to contribute to efforts to restore and conserve the Nariva wetlands through the recognition—

Mr. Speaker: Sorry to cut you. Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Senator, the Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment 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. Dr. E. Dick-Forde: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, thank you Members. This Nariva wetlands restoration project will be done through actions designed to restore and conserve about 1,160 hectares of its associated forest stance. The restoration of the wetlands will result in additional environmental benefits, including the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, conservation of biodiversity in the area, recovery of the protection and storm buffering character of the wetlands. The restoration of the natural drainage regime and natural and induced recovery of the original vegetation cover will cause carbon to be sequestered and emission reductions to be caused.

The World Bank bio-carbon fund has offered the Government a contract to purchase the approximately 193,000 tonnes of Kyoto compliant carbon dioxide equivalence—let me say that again.

5.20 p.m.

The World Bank bio-carbon fund has offered the Government a contract to purchase the approximately 193,000 tonnes of Kyoto compliant carbon dioxide equivalence up to the year 2017 resulting from the reforestation approximately 1,160 hectares of the Nariva Swamp. Once Cabinet agrees to this contract the reforestation effort will be able to generate millions of dollars which can then support further conservation activities in the community. This is the Nariva community and that community includes Plum Mitan/Kernahan and environs.

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The Green Fund, recently made operational, will also consider funding for this restoration effort. The local community has an important stake in the success of the project and is strongly behind its implementation. The carbon revenues over time provide an incentive to maintain and tend the newly established forest. The annual carbon payments on delivery directly contribute to the project sustainability. The carbon capture component is expected to be maintained for decades after the end of the project as it aims to establish long-lasting native forest that result in additional environmental benefits, including conservation of endemic flora and fauna species and recovery of the protection and buffer services provided by the coastal wetlands. To ensure that people do not misunderstand or do not get the point this is a significant project that ensures that Trinidad and Tobago, is indeed, a responsible global citizen with respect to addressing carbon emissions in our country.

I think I need to mention the Green Fund. It is quite an important achievement as well. I know people say—*[Interruption]* and the money that was not spent out of the Green Fund. No money was spent out of the Green Fund as the Member for Chaguanas West tried to say. We see this as a significant achievement and that is why I am spending time reading my notes because it is important for the community to understand the amount of work that we did in the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment on all of the areas under our responsibility. A significant achievement for the ministry was the opening of a fully functioning Green Fund office after almost 10 years of accumulated revenue.

The Green Fund is one of the major funding mechanisms to encourage and enhance the involvement of community groups and organizations to undertake projects in remediation, reforestation and conservation of the environment. We have already received applications for grants under the fund and the Green Fund Advisory Committee has been appointed by the Cabinet. This committee comprises technical expertise in areas applicable to the objectives of the Green Fund, for example, finance, law, forestry and the environment. Its primary function is to advise the Minister with responsibility for the environment on the certification of activities to be funded by the Green Fund.

We take pride in the staff of the ministry and the Green Fund logo is an example of our commitment to living the vision that we oversee, which is Vision 2020. The logo for the Green Fund was designed in-house in the ministry and emerged from a competition amongst staff members of the ministry. We encourage innovation and creativity of all of our staff. Within our ministry we are very excited about the possibilities of this Green Fund Unit and at present even

though we are taking paper applications, a fully implemented green office policy is under construction. We had some back office problems with the e-form but we will be going totally—people would only be able to apply online and we will provide all of the opportunities for them to do so—mobile units, making sure computers are fully equipped in community centres and also we will have a computer in the office that people can come and be guided to do their application. Because the Green Fund is seeking to speak to reforestation, we want to make sure that the Green Fund is a consistent office with that process, and therefore we are working towards a green office: waste reduction, reduced use of paper, conserving energy and water, wherever possible.

I want to go to the ministries that deal with planning and there I will address some of the misconceptions outlined with respect to the EPA. Under that ministry we deal with technical cooperation, seeking and interacting with agencies like the European Development Fund and so on. As Minister with responsibility for Planning, Housing and the Environment I also have responsibility towards ensuring a reduction of poverty in Trinidad and Tobago. To this end, through the social and economic policy planning unit, we commenced the establishment of a conceptual and methodological framework for a quality of life index for Trinidad and Tobago.

This index will serve to measure the well-being and quality of life of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago using relevant quantitative and qualitative indicators to assess the country's progress towards developed nation status. This index information would also help us to make sure that our policies are well informed. Once completed, the index will be utilized to inform further policies, programmes and projects aimed at alleviating poverty. In fiscal 2009 this social and economic policy planning unit will also seek the assistance of the UNDP in respect of the engagement of a consultant to provide technical expertise and training in the development of indicators relevant to Trinidad and Tobago.

With its role as facilitator in poverty reduction the ministry commenced the development of socio-economic profiles for 585 communities in Trinidad and Tobago. This exercise will assist in addressing the issue of equity in the Public Sector Investment Programme as it relates to the sustainability of poor communities in Trinidad and Tobago and assessing the impact of national policies at the level of the community with the aim of proposing new policies/strategies where necessary.

In keeping with the focus on poverty reduction the ministry is also spearheading the finalization of the country's millennium development goals report for 2008, and in fiscal 2009 a system will be developed and

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institutionalized for the production and monitoring of the millennium development goals report. The European Development Fund (EDF) unit was also instrumental in reducing poverty levels and during fiscal 2007 the unit monitored the poverty reduction programme which was being implemented by the Ministry of Social Development and is directed at decentralizing the system for the provision of social services throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

The EDF also monitored an initiative which provided support to the non-university tertiary education sector in our country which is being implemented by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. Additionally, in the health sector the unit assisted the implementing agency, which is the national AIDS coordinating committee, in the preparation of the open international tender dossier for the supply of antiretroviral drugs which was procured with assistance from Nipdec. For fiscal 2009 the unit will focus on finalizing proposals for support to economic transition and good and effective governance, the two areas for which funds can be accessed under the EDF.

I want to just switch to speak to the EPA. I did not write down what the Member for Chaguanas West was saying about the EPA. I am not sure that he really understood. [*Interruption*] I wrote down some of the things but they did not add up. So I just wanted to make some clear points with respect to the EPA.

Hon. Member: Why are you breaking down poor people's house?

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Sen. The Hon. Dr. E. Dick-Forde: Mr. Speaker, the broad context for the EPA and for any trading agreement in our times now is that increasingly there is a paradigm shift in the global trading environment. There is a paradigm shift that in particular certain developing countries are opposed to the continuation of waivers from WTO which allow developed countries to grant enhanced benefits to certain other countries. So without an EPA in place before the end of 2008, trade relations between the EU and the Caribbean would have been subjected to the generalized system of preferences regime which would have involved some trade disruptions.

The GSP arrangement provides non-discriminatory treatment in that it treats all developing countries equally. Without an EPA in place Trinidad and Tobago would have been required to negotiate at least 22 separate bilateral investment treaties with individual European States to ensure a favourable and attractive investment environment and protection for potential investments and profits. Previously, Trinidad and Tobago only had bilateral investment treaties with four community members: Spain, Germany, France and the UK.

In particular Trinidad and Tobago would have been relegated to accepting the generalized system of preferences arrangement which provides trade preferences to all developing countries and would have imposed punitive tariffs on the major exports. Our exporters would have faced increased competition from other developing countries in accessing the EU market. Our major exports into the EU which are methanol, ammonia, aerated beverages, juices and sweet biscuits would have faced the prospect of immediately higher EU tariffs between 2 per cent and 30.1 per cent. Over TT \$735 million worth of exports would have been affected with the imposition of these duties.

I believe people who say we should not have signed or we should not be signing the EPA are wrong.

Hon. Member: You could have gotten a better deal than—[*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. Dr. E. Dick-Forde: We are in a paradigm shift in the global trading environment. [*Interruption*] People have not studied it and so they make wild statements. [*Interruption*]

The development of sound infrastructure in Trinidad and Tobago is critical to achieve developed world status. And I am going to talk about UDeCott. In 2008/2009, UDeCott continues to be involved in several projects which will transform the infrastructural base of Trinidad and Tobago. Some of these projects will include the completion of the Government Campus Parkade, the proposed East Sea Lots Redevelopment Project which will involve the reclamation of 68,000 square metres of land, the completion of the International Waterfront with the Hyatt Regency Office Towers I and II and the car park. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of the Member for Chaguanas West who is trying to trouble me, I am going to talk about the Brian Lara Stadium. [*Inaudible*] That was a misrepresentation of what happened. [*Inaudible*] Misrepresentation of what happened. Total!

Now, I want to speak on the Brian Lara Stadium to say that despite major setbacks—and this is one thing the *Bible* talks about—we heard a great deal from the *Bible* last Friday or was it Monday when the budget response came?—transforming your mind. So, I want to transform the minds of the public concerning the Brian Lara Stadium. Despite major setbacks the Brian Lara Stadium will be delivered and will become a space for the development of great and world class sportsmen and sportswomen. [*Desk thumping*]

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We have to transform our minds. The UDeCott would have provided us with another positive legacy for generations of Trinidadians and Tobagonians to enjoy. Time brings grace and healing, and so we must look down through the years ahead with vision and hope to see what we can accomplish despite present day challenges. If people were to just get stuck in the challenges that they have at the time we would get nothing done and we would be a hopeless people, but we are not a hopeless people.

That is what the 2009 Budget does; it provides a foundation for continued development of our nation well into the future. So I needed to put that in the record, that the Brian Lara Stadium will be finished. It is clearer then that voyager thing you were trying to say earlier.

Hon. Member: When? When?

Sen. The Hon. Dr. E. Dick-Forde: It will be finished.

Hon. Member: When?

Sen. The Hon. Dr. E. Dick-Forde: Stay tuned, stay tuned. The UDeCott has also played a key role in enabling competitive business. In fiscal 2008 the corporation completed the Hyatt Regency Hotel and Conference Rooms, which I informed you during the no confidence debate was formerly—that waterfront project was a UNC plan that we executed properly.

I am pleased to report that the contract for the development and construction management services for the new Port of Spain Port was awarded. This was done to assess the needs and to define development opportunity for a state-of-the-art port that can service the needs of the country well into the 21st Century. The UDeCott continues to be involved in projects that would make us a knowledge-based society.

In fiscal 2008 the corporation continued construction work on the new Ministry of Education Tower, the Scarborough Regional Library and the National Academy for the Performing Arts in Port of Spain and San Fernando. These academies will provide state-of-the-art acoustics and offer inspirational settings for the enjoyment of and training in the performance arts, and are projected to be completed in fiscal 2009.

5.35 p.m.

You must have a dream, Member for Oropouche East, if you are going to get anywhere. Effective government can serve as a catalyst for change in our society and a main drive of improvement in the quality of life in the country. The

Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment as one of the implementing arms of Government, therefore has a responsibility for ensuring that our governance system works for the benefit of the nation and all citizens, especially the most vulnerable.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make sure that every agency gets a little coverage. In fiscal 2008, the Chaguaramas Development Authority (CDA) commenced the upgrading of its beaches and golf facilities, such as installing amenities at the Chagville and Macqueripe beaches and improving its golf courses, as well as restoring some of its historic buildings, such as the St. Chad's Church. These upgrading activities will continue in the new fiscal year. From fiscal 2008 and continuing into the next year, the CDA has begun implementing activities which will promote Trinidad and Tobago as a tourist destination, and this is being done in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism.

Additionally, the Ministry through the CDA, is seeking to protect our forest areas—if you know that area, there is quite a great deal of forest stock. In 2008, the CDA purchased state-of-the-art equipment, including a pole pruner and field chipper to minimize fire damage to our forest; and in 2009, a dual approach to forestry management via prevention and conservation will be adopted.

Mr. Speaker, the Town and Country Planning Division has made quite a number of strides over this fiscal 2008 in rebuilding the long-term land use planning capacity within the division. In addition, the following changes have greatly assisted in shortening time lines from months to weeks:

- the computerization of agency data used by the division in the preparation of its plans;
- improving the database used to collate and analyze land use data;
- addition of three town planners to the unit;
- continued training in data collection techniques;
- the division also purchased satellite imagery which will be used to inform the development of local area, and national physical development plans for Trinidad and Tobago;
- the Town and Country Planning Division plans to complete local area plans for Caura Valley, Chaguanas and Couva by the end of fiscal 2009; and
- regional development plans for the nine regional corporations and local area plans for Scarborough and San Fernando.

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I am also pleased to announce that Cabinet has approved the commencement of the preparation of the 2nd National Development Plan for Trinidad and Tobago in fiscal 2008 and we have already started the process towards the commencement of that process.

Central to the issue of the public sector reform is the strengthening of the system of national statistic, and the CSO has provided us with quite a number of initiatives launched, and currently is conducting the household budget survey 2007/2008. This is a significant achievement since the last survey was done in May 1997 to April 1998. In this survey, information will be collected on expenditure and income of approximately 7000 households. This information will be used to revise the basket of goods and services and their weights for rebasing the index of the retail prices, which is used to determine the rate of inflation. I want us to know that the last survey was done about 10 years ago and so, this survey is critical to updating our statistics on spending and what indeed represents a current basket of goods and services in Trinidad and Tobago.

The CSO has also begun the pre-census activities. The census year is 2010 and the pre-census activities have begun, such as publicity and promotion and the map drawing exercises. A pilot project to develop a programme of environmental statistics has also begun at the CSO; the completion of GDP estimates at current and constant prices for the years 2005, final, and estimates for 2006, 2007 and 2008 in over nine sectors. This has already been completed by the CSO and this data will be used in the review of the economy 2008/2009.

Mr. Speaker, under the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment, we have a significant number of agencies and units, contributing significantly to the continued development of Trinidad and Tobago. We have the Technical Cooperation Unit which provides a link, international, regional, bilateral and multilateral between Trinidad and Tobago and other institutions and countries. Just a quick example, this Technical Cooperation Unit will be able to secure technical cooperation at the bilateral and international levels with the Government of Korea, where they donated welding equipment and materials to promote skills-based training to the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme valued at US \$70,000; and the Government of Mexico trained two officers from the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources in plant tissue culturing and genetic analysis methods for the conservation and management of crop genetic resources; facilitated technical exchanges among developing countries; they provided technical expertise for the finalization of the project proposals of line agencies and worked with line ministries to ensure that the absorptive capacity exists for the appropriate transfer of knowledge and technology.

The Technical Cooperation Unit also made connections with the OAS in the area of education, in particular, aiming to provide the following:

- training in the use of technological equipment;
- training of teacher educators;
- training of officials to lead camps and workshops for young inventors and innovators;
- enhance secondary education and equip young people with skills for life;
- improvement of quality of education with new and diverse education materials and techniques.

Mr. Speaker, in promoting effective government, the Ministry has been implementing advanced ICT Management Systems and Processes and this flows all the way through the Ministry in the planning section, through Town and Country, Land Information Management System to improve the delivery of services, spatial analytical representation and sharing of land information is now available; asset management tracking system in the head office.

Mr. Speaker, I want to conclude by saying that the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment offers a unique opportunity to influence sustainable economic and environmental development in the country. While we were allocated 0.76 per cent of the total recurrent expenditure, we were also allocated 15.7 per cent of the total allocation for the IDF. The Ministry's recurrent allocation does not reflect the contribution that we make, but it reflects that our staff is in fact quite a professional staff, able to deliver significant services to the country.

We are living in times characterized by change, volatility and much pain. We can shape our future because we are created by God with the capacity to do so. So I invite all of our citizens to shape our future together for a better Trinidad and Tobago.

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

Dr. Moonilal: Wake up the House, Tim.

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): Mr. Speaker, I wish to sincerely congratulate the Member of Parliament for Siparia [*Desk thumping*] on her budget response on Friday. It demonstrated a thorough, comprehensive, clinical analysis of the budget, and showed tremendous implications of a budget which fell short of the public's expectations.

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I also want to congratulate my colleagues who spoke before on this side because they also demonstrated a tremendous knowledge and insight into the workings of different ministries according to their portfolios, [*Desk thumping*] so they were also able to analyze and give an evaluation of the non-performance and the failure of promises on the other side. So, I want to sincerely congratulate my colleagues who are shadow ministers in their respective portfolios. [*Desk thumping*]

Following the Member for Siparia, the response that came subsequent to that, left much to be desired as usual. Personal attacks, attacks on a vocabulary that seems to be stagnated to two words, "dotishness", "foolishness", and probably, one phraseology, "errant or arrant nonsense". It is very sad and it seems to be a behavioural pattern that signifies some sort of psychological disturbance that goes back way beyond, that somebody cannot get out of that mould. Something perhaps troubled that individual when he/she have to resort to that. I do not know what type of psychological problem that individual, the Member for Diego Martin North/East would have probably been subjected to, that caused him to become the way that he is. It is very sad. We have had to speak about it time and time again. What is even worse, is that next to him is the hon. Prime Minister, whom we expect much more from, since he has 38 years in Parliament and we would have expected that he would have allowed some degree of dignity to prevail next to him.

We have asked you on many occasions to lead from in front and lead by example, so we do not have to revert to political assassination in Parliament and I am sure the hon. Speaker cringes when we have to resort to that. We would not bring ourselves to that type of thing because there is so much more to say. How can the Member for Diego Martin North/East at any particular time talk about other people, when he knows that he lives in a glass house where the glass is already shattered? He built a stadium in Grenada and he is persona non grata; a little wind passed and blew down the stadium, [*Laughter*] a \$139 million. You are persona non grata. He built some apartments down in Diego Martin, a little rain falls and the whole wall come tumbling down.

We could say so much, but it has come to our understanding that the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East his direct family has a business operating at Woodford Square, a construction company that gets a great deal of contracts from Government and that needs to be analyzed. But we will provide the details and information to you, subsequently. Conflict of interest and the contract goes on in the National Housing Authority; that is one of the areas where the Minister's family—we understand it. It has come to our understanding—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for Caroni East for giving way. Are you suggesting that no relative of any Member of the Government is entitled to participate in Government's contracts? Is that correct?

Mr. S. Panday: It is openness we want.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I will come to that later, but you must operate under the Integrity in Public Life Act. You will have to do something about a particular Minister of yours today, when I open up on that issue, but I want you to be tuned in to this.

Mr. Speaker, our colleague who just spoke, the hon. Senator, the Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment made some statements in relation to what our Member for Siparia stated earlier on and which is, that they have a right to break down the shacks because these people live in squalor and they do not like people living in squalor; so galvanize can be blown off at any time and it poses a risk to the people living in it. But the people are comfortable in their little own homes; they are not on the streets, and whatever little abode they have—if they put up three bricks and some little walls here and a piece of galvanize there and they are comfortable in their home, do not break it down [*Desk thumping*] because they are comfortable. But the important thing as the Prime Minister alluded earlier on in one of the discussions in this House, he relocates his people who are supposed to be squatting. He tries to relocate them first, and then he deals with the homes and so on, subsequent to that. Why can that law or why can that same thing not apply to all people in Trinidad and Tobago? [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Manning: Indeed, Mr. Speaker, that is Government's policy. Please—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

5.50 p.m.

Mr. Manning: The problem is that hon. Members opposite have been encouraging—

Hon. Members: Noo! We are not like the PNM!

Mr. Manning: They say no; our information is otherwise. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. S. Panday: That is why you are destroying people's homes, because of vindictiveness! You are vindictive!

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Princes Town, I think you spoke already, previously. Let us hear the Member for Caroni East.

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Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed in the hon. Prime Minister making that statement. Nobody on this side would encourage people to do the wrong thing.

Hon. Members: Ooh! [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: It is an issue with law, that they have something before 1998. There was a law passed and you have to respect that law. The shadow Minister of Housing will speak about that a little more.

I want to quote a quotation from Sir Winston Churchill on his final major address in the House of Commons on March 01, 1955, 53 years ago. The topic was the hydrogen bomb and arms control. The quotation goes as follows:

“The day may dawn when fair play, love for one's fellow men, respect for justice and freedom will enable tormented generations to march forth, serene and triumphant, from this hideous epoch from which we have to dwell.”

Does that sound familiar with our environment now?

“Never weary, never flinch, never despair, no matter how bleak the forecast, courage will carry us forward.”

This is what is happening in Trinidad and Tobago at the moment.

My colleagues, this 2008/2009 Budget, and those of the last six years under Patrick Manning, have never and will never deliver this nation from this hideous epoch, and I would want to say cataclysmic destruction of the minds and heart of our people.

Hon. Members: Ooh!

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: You have destroyed our people and they have lost all hope, they have lost all faith, they have lost all courage and all trust in Prime Minister Manning and his administration.

When all institutions come crumbling before us, their cliché for this budget of Shaping Our Future Together, Vision 2020, is vacuous, empty, compact with rhetoric and illusionary and delusionary promises that resemble a psychopathic ensemble gone mad. Those on the other side know fully well that all their friends and supporters clustered around their ruler, Emperor Prime Minister Manning, are growing richer while our less fortunate brethren starve, while corruption flourishes deep and wide in the bosoms of the PNM.

You are dipping deeper and deeper into the huge coffers of the shrinking State, to pay for lavish residences, skyscrapers, palaces, extensive overseas travel

and privileges and perquisites that feed your greed. Inflation soars and huge cost overruns on every infrastructural project attempted, as my colleagues, the Member for Fyzabad and the Member for Couva South showed, by this and previous administrations of Prime Minister Patrick Manning. Incompetent regimes and administrations that are clueless and hapless.

The foundation pillars of any civilized society, of education and health, are crumbling before our weary eyes and aching hearts and souls. Regular food shortages, widespread hunger and poverty abound in a people who have lost their self-worth and self-esteem and human spirit. The Treasury and coffers are being sucked dry by unscrupulous PNM leaders, technocrats, bureaucrats and cronies. More than \$220 billion corruptly wasted away in the last seven years.

Education, training and health have received nearly \$12 billion in this 2009 Budget, and between 2002 and 2008, almost \$40 billion between education and health. Mr. Speaker, \$21 billion in education, and \$19 billion in health. Expenditure on health care in Trinidad and Tobago in the six years under the UNC administration was just \$5.5 billion; \$5.5 billion in health during the six years under the UNC; rising from a small \$560 million in 1995, to \$1.1 billion in 2001.

So far, this PNM Government has spent \$14,884 million in seven years on health, and now rising from \$1.249 billion in 2002, to \$4.343 million in 2008/2009; total, \$19,227 billion in health. Nearly four times more or 400 per cent more than the UNC spent in their six years. Where has all the \$16 billion gone? Has it gone into the deep pockets of the Minister or the Ministers' families, the PNM families and friends? We ask the question: Where have all this \$19 billion gone when people are subjected to the worst form of health care ever to be seen?

The Member for Diego Martin North/East was the Minister of Health for two years, and then Prime Minister Manning fired him because of his incompetence and non-performance.

Mr. Manning: How you know that?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Why was he moved? Even in that short time—synonymous with your physical stature, but I do not want to be dirty—there was widespread corruption of \$23 million and \$53 million in the purchase of CT scans mammography and MRI machines. We raised this question and there was no answer; we are still waiting for answers. [*Interruption*] I am not giving way to you at all. Until you start to behave yourself in this Parliament and you show respect, then we will give way. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*]

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I asked a question in Parliament, hon. Prime Minister. The same members of the technical team which brought the specifications for that \$76 million for the purchase of these things were the same members of the evaluation team. When we asked the question, they could not answer it in the direct form; they waffled on it, but we know that there was massive corruption in the purchase. Those were the same persons who drew up the specifications, gave the evaluation and awarded the contract to their friends.

Mr. Imbert: Not true!

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: We know that is true.

Minister Imbert was then replaced by a cloth haberdasher, not a clue about health. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: No, no; I am really disappointed in you. I know you know better than that.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I know you are overestimating me. He was replaced by someone else who did not have a clue about health.

Mr. Dumas: That is better.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Do you remember how the Member for Couva North described him? He said that particular Minister scorched the earth of the Caroni plains and the earth will never forgive him. The same Minister destroyed the lives, not only of 10,000 Caroni workers, but nearly 100,000 of our hard-working people of Central Trinidad, and destroyed the lives of generations. But his 6 feet deep space in Central Trinidad is still reserved for his resting place. The same place he destroyed.

He continued the same destructive pathway by his omission and commissions and his inept and incompetent performance in the Ministry of Health. Lives of hundreds of sick patients, young and old, were lost under his watch and authority.

Mr. Speaker, good health care must be a right, and something that people ought to receive when they need it. It is a right; it is a fundamental right of any citizen. But here people are begging for help and mercy while in the throes of despair and death in our hospitals. They are begging for care. Our crowning achievement of failure and widespread social decay is embodied in the Health Ministry. With a beleaguered health system and thousands of citizens' complaints about the miserable failure of the former Minister of Health and Prime Minister Manning as well, and failure to provide a basic, equitable, accessible, adequate

health care, the Prime Minister was forced to call a commission of enquiry—do you remember that Prime Minister?—on the health sector.

At that time you had 23 babies at Mount Hope dying from enterobacter, and the Minister said that heads would roll; not a head rolled. Just like the St. Ann's Psychiatric Hospital eggnog scandal, the 13 deaths—you would remember that, Prime Minister and hon. Speaker—in the 1980s, but no one was held accountable. Not under PNM, nobody would be held accountable. Thirteen persons died in the eggnog scandal, no one was held accountable; 23 babies died in Mount Hope from enterobacter, but the Minister said that heads would roll; not a head rolled. The Prime Minister sits and does nothing about it.

Rats and roaches in the kitchens of hospitals; laboratory workers falling through the floors in the laboratories; patients defecating on the floors and wards; patients dying on floors; patients bringing beds to hospitals, lying on trolleys for 48 hours without any medical attention, and this is a government that says, "We care; we are a caring government." That is how you care?

Patients waiting at Accident and Emergency for two days, waiting for beds and there are no beds. This is a government shaping our future together. I do not want to be in that togetherness. Pregnant mothers in labour sitting on benches. I ask any one of our nine female colleagues on the other side, could you imagine being in labour and having to sit on a bench while having uterine contractions? Oh God!

Mr. Speaker, \$108 million went missing from a Regional Health Authority, it was supposed to be paid to the Board of Inland Revenue; and they are the ones that talk about corruption. The former Chairman of the same health authority employed his wife and gave her a human resource contract. He ran out fast, but it could still come to him. That is misconduct in public office, Eastman and Associates.

What no one would forgive this Government for is the numerous child victims of the health sector. As if this Government is not satisfied with the record breaking murder and crime rate that has our citizens living in terror and fleeing our country, they have managed to make the one recourse to safety, which are the hospitals, another virtual killing field.

Remember Christine Loubon, her 13-year-old daughter Shanelle Sookoo was diagnosed with a brain tumor, dying hours before her scheduled surgery while waiting for an intensive care unit bed. There are only four beds in the San Fernando hospital, but the intensive care unit was promised more about since six years now and nothing has been done.

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Anthony Blanc died 11 days short of his 17th birthday at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, after battling for almost six hours with an asthmatic attack. Anthony took his final breath in his mother's trembling arms. His last words to his mother were, "Mom, I am tired; let me sleep; the sun will come up soon and we hope the doctor will be here." He died at sunset.

Young Jonathan Belix died because our health system could not treat his fractured leg. Imagine a child dying from a fractured leg. Little Faith Williams, do you remember the name? She died because we could not treat a simple umbilical hernia. Big enquiry, big noise, "We are going to do something about that; somebody has to be held accountable", but as usual, and not surprising, no one was held accountable, not under the PNM.

Mr. Speaker, what does the Prime Minister do with his Ministers? They sleep before him and he does nothing? You do not shake them up for their incompetence and inability? It is time that you take charge of your Cabinet and take charge of your Ministers. [*Desk thumping*] I believe that was why you fired a lot of them before.

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: No, if you cannot do it, we will do it. Put us there and we will do it. Remember that you are a minority Government; 343,000 people voted against you. [*Crosstalk*]

Cover ups of for deaths of innocent children. Ronald Gill complained of abdominal pain, sought treatment at the Port of Spain Hospital. He was told that it was muscular pain; a few days later he died of acute appendicitis. Baby Sean Ganness had his collarbone and left hand broken and cheek displaced during a forced delivery at San Fernando General Hospital.

Mr. Prime Minister, I want to quote Mathew 18:6, the warning of the Lord:

"But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

I am sure that rings a bell. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

6.05 p.m.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Mr. Prime Minister, through you Mr. Speaker, you and your Minister of Health have been inflicting pain and suffering and death on the

poor, sick and vulnerable innocent people of this country; babies, children and adults. [*Desk thumping*] You stifled the Commission of Enquiry into the Health Sector with its work, you did not appoint a lawyer for a long time, you changed two chairmen, the commission of enquiry dragged on for almost three years and after it was completed, after pressure from the public the report was laid in Parliament.

At that time you said you appointed a committee to analyze the recommendations of the findings of the Gafoor commission of enquiry and to report back to Parliament in one month. Up to today we have not had a report of that committee. What has happened to it, hon. Prime Minister? You have failed to report anything to Parliament and no one knows what has happened. All this massive corruption, wheeling and dealing unearthed by the Commission.

Mr. Speaker, this report of the commission of enquiry into the operation and delivery of health care services, Volume I has so much in terms of recommendations and findings and areas of special concern. There is evidence of corruption and other malfeasance; in others the status quo simply cannot continue without incurring serious risks to the health of patients. There should be an investigation into the cases of phantom companies operating in the public health sector, conduct a forensic health audit of the five regional health authorities, investigate allegations of corruption, nepotism, mismanagement and so forth. Nothing was done.

You said that you were reporting the matter to the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Integrity Commission and the Commissioner of Police, it is almost a year and a half now and we have not heard a word about what has happened. Prime Minister, when you were asked about that report at one time, you even confused it with the Monteil corruption scandal, but we do not expect anything to come out of this, it is similar to the La Brea/Labidco Enquiry in 2002 when the hon. Prime Minister, Sen. Dr. Lenny Saith, Mr. Malcom Jones and Prof. Ken Julien were mentioned in that report.

The then Director of Public Prosecutions sent a 2,000 page document to the Commissioner of Police for further investigation and action. Six and a half years later we have not heard anything about that and the police say they are investigating it and continuing investigations. Major recommendations had been made on that commission of enquiry for Minister Narace to do something about it, but he did nothing. He sought to do a 100 day plan. Almost 260 days have gone and we do not even know what is happening.

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Do you know what is happening? I think the hon. Minister of Health does not have his mind on the health sector; he has his mind somewhere else. Do you know of an insurance group called Trinre? The Reinsurance Company of Trinidad and Tobago, Trinre was formed in 1975 by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to handle the reinsurance requirements of its major state enterprises and to participate in the programmes of local insurance.

Local insurances registered under the Insurance Act were encouraged to purchase shares from Trinre and work in close harmony with them and they were also mandated to see at least 5 per cent of their treaties through Trinre, that is state enterprises and local insurance companies. Government owned 60 per cent, and the local insurance brokers, 30 or 40 of them at the time owned 40 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, Government eventually divested its controlling shareholding in 1994 under your administration to SIGMA Investment Promotion Limited owned by a Jamaican insurance group. Investment Managers Limited, owned by Ramnarine Jerry Narace—you heard the name—now Minister of Health.

Dr. Moonilal: Who is that? Ramnarine?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I do not know why he is afraid to carry the name Ramnarine, he wants to carry the name Jerry to signify “gerrymandering” or whatever.

Dr. Moonilal: The mosquito Minister is Ramnarine?

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Investment Managers Limited owned by Ramnarine Jerry Narace, now Minister of Health injected capital and was issued 27 per cent of the share capital, SIGMA still owned 45 per cent.

So in 2001, Investment Managers Limited (IML) acquired 70 per cent of SIGMA, therefore 70 per cent of 45 per cent equals 31.5 per cent, therefore IML in 2001 owned 58.5 per cent of Trinre.

In 2003 IML’s shareholding in Trinre increased to 45 per cent and SIGMA 33 per cent. You see how it is moving up? In 2006, 50 million shares were issued and IML injected \$12 million to acquire those new shares. IML now owns 86 per cent directly and controls 8 per cent owned by SIGMA, so Investment Managers Limited now owns 86 per cent of Trinre.

A review of the returns for Investment Managers Limited shows that Mr. Jerry Narace, Minister of Health is the owner of that company which also owns 70 per cent of SIGMA.

Mr. Prime Minister, through you, Mr. Speaker, it has come to our attention that Trinre has grown over the last five years as a result of major support given to it by the state organizations. Mr. Narace is the public relations officer of the ruling party, a close friend of the Prime Minister and we are told that local brokers handling Government business are instructed to deal with Trinre. *[Interruption]* You ask the Minister.

State companies that are headed by senior party officials and supporters are instructing that Trinre handle certain energy programmes as a front. We understand that the Petroleum Company of Trinidad and Tobago (Petrotrin) is one such account, and since becoming Minister of Health last year, he resigned from the board of IML on November 08, 2008. He is no longer Director but still maintains as a principal shareholder.

Mr. Speaker, I have reports from the Registrar General's Office on July 07, 2007 name of the company, Investment Managers Limited, amount issued on outstanding shares 2.6 million. Who are the owners? Investment Managers Limited, Ramnarine Jerry Narace, 2,692,498 shares; Rani Lakhana Narace, 1 ordinary share; Prematee Ramroop, 1 ordinary share.

Mr. Speaker, that same company, the Reinsurance Company of Trinidad and Tobago in 2005 was running at a loss of \$4.7 million and in 2006 that loss was reversed and it made a profit of \$1 million, a sudden increase of \$6 million.

Mr. Speaker, we have the Directors of SIGMA Investment Company. SIGMA Investment Managers have 15,750 shares and Insurance Company of the West Indies has 6,750 shares and this is from the Registrar General's Office on continuance July 14, 2007.

After the election which was held on November 2007, Ramnarine Jerry Narace resigned as a Director of that company and instead his daughter, Vasha Narace of 5 Nevis Avenue, Federation Park was made a Director. Rani Lackan Narace, Director; Vini Narace, Director; Vasha Narace, Director; Ojaram Narace, Director.

Mr. Speaker, continuance April 01, 2008, amount issued on outstanding ordinary shares, 58,383,333 and do you know who owns most of it? Ramnarine Jerry Narace. Reinsurance Company of Trinidad owns 51,666,212 out of the 52,778,433. So in fact, Ramnarine Jerry Narace is 99.9 per cent owner of Investment Managers Limited which owns 51.66 million out of 52.778 million of Trinre.

The issue is a senior Cabinet Minister ought not to be a recipient of lucrative insurance contracts given out by the State without any competitive bidding process.

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[*Desk thumping*] It is quite evident that Minister Ramnarine Jerry Narace was put as a Minister of Health to milk another cash cow. Another blue-eyed boy like Calder Hart, Uthara Rao, Ken Julien, Harry Ragoonanan and Devanand Ramlal.

Devanand Ramlal is the one in charge of the street lighting programme throughout Trinidad and Tobago with \$650 million invested. When we are finished I wonder how any of you would have the conscience to remain in a PNM Government when you see corruption swirling around you. The same thing that the Member for Diego Martin West said this morning, and here you have a Minister who is the major shareholder of Trinre, Investment Managers Limited being the major shareholder and he has 99.9 per cent of Trinre.

Today I sent a letter to the Chairman of the Integrity Commission as follows:

“Mr. John Martin

Chairman

Integrity Commission of T&T

Independence Square

Port of Spain.

Dear Sir,

I write to you requesting your office to investigate the Hon Jerry Narace, Minister of Health and Senator to ascertain whether he has violated the Integrity in Public Life Act 2000 via his conduct.

I refer you to the attached documents which show Mr. Narace’s direct connections to insurance company Trinre and the background of his ownership. The documents also show the majority of directors in charge of the company are relatives of Mr. Narace. They show that while he resigned as a director in November, 2007, following his appointment to the Cabinet and Senate of Trinidad and Tobago, he never resigned as the company’s principal shareholder.

Since January 2008, it was brought to my attention that Trinre has been a recipient of several State insurance contracts...”

We want the Minister of Finance to determine who has done the reinsurance for all the state enterprises and the special purposes companies. You will have that information and you will see that it has gone through Trinre.

In fact, Minister Ramnarine Jerry Narace bought out most of the insurance companies that had shares in Trinre.

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“...several State insurance contracts which are worth millions of dollars since 2006, which ensured that the company, which previously operated at a loss, made a complete turnaround and began operating at a profit.”

We understand it is operating with a portfolio close to \$100 million now.

“These include VMCOTT and Petrotrin, along with other Special Purposes Companies and state enterprises. I was informed that the company got these contracts via Mr. Narace’s direct political connections, and none were ever put out to competitive tender which is a violation of the tendering procedure of the Government of T&T.”

6.20 p.m.

“However, I was told (and it has come to our understanding) that after assuming office, the amount of State insurance that went to Mr. Narace’s company increased, due to the fact that as a member of Cabinet, he has direct oversight and input in the appointments of Directors of State Boards...”

He sits in Cabinet. He is part of the decision to appoint members to state boards and chairmen:

“...who in turn ensure that these contracts go to Trinre.”

So here it is, I sit in Cabinet; I appoint person X to be a chairman of a state board but, boy, I want you go give all your reinsurance back to Trinre.

“My investigations for the past six months have shown that many State companies in fact use Trinre as their insurance company of choice. My concern is that as a Senior Cabinet Minister and high ranking Member of the ruling PNM...as well as a personal friend of the Prime Minister, Mr. Narace is guilty of a serious breach of public ethics and operating under a conflict of interest. I thereby request that your institution (which is the Integrity Commission) launch an investigation into these allegations into Mr. Narace to determine whether he has breached the Integrity in Public Life, (2000), section IV, 23—26 which states...”

I just want to read one part:

“‘arrange his private interests whether pecuniary or otherwise in such a manner as to maintain public confidence and trust in his integrity’.”

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So you are a minister of Government; you own Trinre; Trinre is getting all the State companies' reinsurance; no tendering. So is that not something wrong? I continue:

“A person to whom this Part applies shall not—

(a) use his office...”

My Attorney General will pick that up right away:

“for the improper advancement of his own or his family's personal or financial interests or the interest of any person.

(d) directly or indirectly use his office for private gain.

A person to whom this Part applies shall not use information that is gained in the execution of his office...”

As a Cabinet Member.

“and which is not available to the general public to further or seek to further his private interests.”

So I went on and I am going to complete this.

“I would also like to point out that the documents attached show that Mr. Narace's wife, children and brother are all directors of the company, and therefore, should he use the reason that he is not guilty of a conflict of interest and/or that has now put his shares into a Blind Trust, he will still be in violation of the Integrity in Public Life Act, 2000, section IV, 22, which states...”

And it goes on.

“So today I look forward to a prompt response as to your determination in this matter since I view it as a serious matter of national concern.”

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for giving way. As an attorney, I have high regard for the highest traditions of Parliamentary tradition and it is not in the interest of the Member to make these statements, having regard to the fact that he mentioned he made a representation to the Integrity Commission. My own understanding is that one, having attained ministerial office, has to surrender one's directorship, but if one has shares, then one has, as a matter of course, to declare one's assets. So I do not understand the point that the hon. Member is seeking to belabour. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, even though he has ceased to become a director, he owns majority shares, but his family; his wife, daughter, son, brother, the entire family, and the Integrity Act which I just read parts of it too, clearly defines what is misconduct.

So I am calling on the hon. Minister, if he will come to this House and clear it up and tell this honourable House what is his role in the entire thing and whether he feels that he is not or whether he is breaching the Integrity in Public Life Act. This is why we have written this letter to the Integrity Commission.

I come to the next issue, the dengue issue.

Dr. Moonilal: Well that is the mosquito Minister.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: The dengue-resistant Minister. Nothing was more heartless, unforgivable and criminal than this Minister's response to the dengue crisis in this country. You remember in about February we had raised a matter of urgent, public importance on the dengue issue and you knew it was an epidemic and you allowed us to debate it as a matter of urgent, public importance, which we were very grateful for and the public was also very grateful. But the Minister of Health treated it flippantly and it seems as though he did not care about what was happening and he made no direct intervention. He just spoke about collaboration with NGOs, CBOs, CAREC, PAHO and so on, but he failed to do anything about the problem and the problem escalated to an outbreak.

Do you know what he did? The dengue-resistant Minister denied there was a dengue outbreak; he denied that eight-year-old Sasha Bickran died from dengue, even though her blood tests and death certificate confirmed this, and he proceeded to deny the dengue outbreak even when to date more than 2,000 people have contracted the disease and many have died, including babies, the elderly and adults, and there is now a dengue epidemic.

The dengue deaths as of September 25, 2008 are as follows:

Josh Moonilal, age 11 months, San Fernando General Hospital, died on September 17, 2008.

Sasha Bickran, age eight, Freeport. No name given for the doctor; confirmed dengue as cause of death by tests done by CAREC.

Solomon Mehenbaig, Rio Claro, died a few days before this article's date.

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Elicia Mootilal, Tabaquite, Monday, June 02, 2008.

Cindy Ramnarine, age 23 years, Old Railway Road, Rio Claro.

Anand Dwarika, Penal.

Aziza Ali, age 35, Princes Town; was five months pregnant.

Rishi Mahabir, age 30 years.

Ramlal Moonesar, age 60 years, Ecclesville, Mayaro; died September 10, 2008.

Adrian Ojeer, age seven; Longdenville Government School.

Mr. Mohammed, 42 years, from Freeport.

The Ministry of Health should be charged for his blatant cover up of this problem and charged with misconduct in public office by deliberate omission to perform what was needed of him. Because, do you know the consequence of that cover up? People died, as I mentioned; lives were lost and it was the fault of the hon. Minister, because if he had told the nation the truth and admitted to a dengue outbreak and adopted the proper awareness strategies and programmes, then people would have known; they would have been more acutely aware of their environment and to be on the lookout for this. But he treated it flippantly, as though nothing was happening, and he spoke about—

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you very much colleagues on both sides.

Mr. Speaker, people have been reported on the television and newspapers as saying that had they known there was a dengue outbreak, they would have been on the alert, and people would have known not to take simple things like common aspirin and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs like Cataflam, Motrin and so on, which worsens the haemorrhagic problems in dengue haemorrhagic fever. A lot of people would have died as a result of taking that medication.

There should have been massive, widespread ground-spraying throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Imagine Tobago now has 20 cases already. My sincere belief is that the hon. Minister should be arrested for this as a direct lack of

performance by an hon. Minister. This has to set an example to this country. You are in authority; you have the responsibility to care for the people of this country and for the lives of citizens in this country and if you do not take your portfolio strongly and responsibly, then there is something in law which my colleagues will tell us, that by a direct act of omission you can be charged with misconduct in public office.

So in that context, I wrote the Director of Public Prosecutions on Friday, Mr. Geoffrey Henderson. I take this thing seriously. Eleven lives were lost as a result of the carelessness of the hon. Minister. You have \$225 billion over the last six or seven years and you say you spent \$6 million looking after dengue, and you do not care; you do not want to spend more money on it? How can you be so callous? What about the lives of the people; the families who have lost their loved ones? Lives are cheap in this country! Lives are lost like nothing! But our colleagues can go and get—I do not want to speak because this is the Prime Minister's personal business and it could happen to anyone of us. But when you take money and you take credit card and you go for in vitro fertilization abroad and so on, you know where to go. Members of this Government are guilty of that, but they do not want to care about our people.

So I have written the Director of Public Prosecutions:

“Dear Sir,

I write in reference to media reports (see attached) on the dengue epidemic currently ongoing in this country.

I wish to point out that these reports highlight the ongoing denial of the Health Minister, Chief Medical Officer and other senior health officials in the country in light of evidence to the contrary.

To date, there have been close to 1500 cases of dengue reported and half that amount confirmed in the country, according to the testing done by private and public health institutions. It is instructive to note that the common practice by the Health Ministry is to warn the population about the outbreak of such a disease which is endemic to this country, and take necessary measures to educate the populace about the consequences.

In such a situation, it is also incumbent on the Health Ministry to take proactive measures towards combating the spread of the disease, which include spraying, furnishing the medical institutions with appropriate

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resources, etc. I wish to point out that these common protocols were never publicly observed this year by the Health Ministry.

Instead, the Health Minister and CMO along with senior Ministry officials engaged in a MISLEADING public campaign to cover up the dengue outbreak. Their actions resulted in the population remaining ignorant of the preliminary symptoms of the disease, as well as precautions they should take in such an instance. This includes not taking common aspirins and other non steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs like Motrin, since this would increase the haemorrhagic danger of the disease.

As a consequence, many people died from the disease, or reached a stage of near death. If they were alerted to the dangers of the disease, they could have gotten appropriate and timely treatment that may have saved their lives. That this did not happen is a direct consequence of the Health Ministry's cover up of the dengue outbreak.

I therefore write to your Honourable office asking for a full criminal investigation into this matter, with a view to determining whether the Health officials, especially Health Minister Jerry Narace and CMO Dr. Anton Cumberbatch, are criminally liable for the deaths of the individuals from dengue.

I sincerely hope that you respond in a timely fashion since, to date, both aforementioned officials have not yet admitted to the population that there is a dengue outbreak, so the lives of citizens continue to be at risk by this omission.

Attached is a list of some of the persons who died from Dengue.”

This is just one of the major issues that this Minister has had to face within the last eight or nine months, and the Prime Minister asked the Member of Parliament for Mayaro: “Who do you think could be a Minister of Health, a doctor?” I think a chimpanzee could be better than any of the ministers of health that you have appointed. You have appointed all three and all three have failed you. So obviously your judgment is poor; something is wrong with your judgment.

6.35 p.m.

The Prime Minister in budget after budget—I wonder how he stands when he gives budget speeches—regurgitates the same promises year after year. He knew fully well in his heart and conscience that he was not able to deliver these promises. It takes a man without a heart to do something like that. I will give you some of these instances.

He promised to reform the management systems in the RHA; that was not done. He promised to build six district health facilities like in Couva and Princes Town which the UNC built, but not one of those was built in the seven years. These district health facilities are open 24 hours; they would have ultrasound, laboratory, X-ray and some beds, so they could take the pressure off the public hospitals. If these six district health facilities were built you will never see the overcrowding that you see in the hospitals. He promised to complete construction of the National Cancer Centre.

Today, after seven years they are talking about completing the cancer centre by 2011, which they have been speaking about since they took government in 2001. Ten years to complete a cancer centre? The sum of \$100 million has been spent already and only the foundation has been done. The work has stopped for arbitration. How can you feel comfortable being part of a government with such ineptitude and inability to implement anything? I hope that you change as your colleague for Diego Martin West said that you do not seem to have the management and expertise for implementation.

In Trinidad and Tobago, the incidence of cancer is about 3,000 per year, but 1,000 will require radiation and chemotherapy. We have about 16,000 births per year; 12,000 deaths; 6,000 women and 6,000 men. The commonest cause of death in women is cancer and in men, heart disease. We have 1,000 cases of cancer requiring radiation. They include breast cancer, cervical cancer, colonic cancer and cancer all over the body. They care about women. They have to wait six months to get an appointment to have any semblance of having the treatment at the National Radiotherapy Centre. The machine is 17 years outdated. When they get their treatment they suffer from radiation burns to the bowels and bladder.

In 1997, at Mount Hope, I had two young girls aged 21 and 23 who had cervical cancer. They were referred from San Fernando Hospital to me for surgery. They were sexually active from age nine and ten and never had pap smears, so they developed cancer. I did surgery on one and I did not send her for radiation. I did surgery on the other, the same radical hysterectomy and I sent her for radiation. Within two years, that young girl died as a consequence of the radiation.

One thousand patients per year have to wait for cancer treatment? That is abominable. The Government is taking 11 years to build a cancer centre. You are cruel! You are a cruel government! You can afford to go for treatment abroad. When the poor people come; they must have radiation and cannot get it, they become frustrated. Do you know what the private centres are charging? It is

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\$150,000 for the entire treatment. If the Government has to give this treatment to 1,000 patients, it would have to spend \$150 million per year because of its omission. That is a government that cares. We care for you and we will move together. You care for the women. The highest cause of death in women is cancer and you care for women. My colleague, the Member for Oropouche West, will elaborate on the issues related to women. Eleven years to bring out a cancer centre. How heartless and cruel!

In 2004, the Prime Minister said that we will continue work on the Scarborough Regional Hospital; the National Oncology Centre and construction of a number of district health facilities and enhanced centres. Nothing was done. Upgrade works will begin in 2005 at the Sangre Grande Hospital and construction of the district health facility would be completed in 2006. It is 2008. Construction of the new hospital in Point Fortin will also start in 2005 which was promised in 2001. He repeated it in 2002, 2003 and 2005. It is a recurring nightmare. I think that is what probably puts the Prime Minister in his slumber at times when he thinks about what he has said.

It has been shown by the firm of PricewaterhouseCoopers that less than 25 per cent of their projects are implemented. Health is abysmal.

In the 2005 budget statement, the Prime Minister assured the nation that work is ongoing at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex and the general hospitals at Port of Spain and San Fernando. By 2007, we expect that construction of the Point Fortin and Scarborough hospitals and the National Oncology Centre and a new wing at the San Fernando General Hospital will also be completed. Not one has been completed.

He promised a burns unit at the San Fernando General Hospital. Nothing. An intensive care unit at San Fernando Hospital—the little child died while waiting for a bed. A new wing at San Fernando General Hospital, nothing. A neonatology unit looking after babies born within the first 28 days at the San Fernando Hospital, nothing. A national blood policy was promised; Health Services Quality Act; a Revised Dental Profession Act, nothing. A trauma centre at Port of Spain General Hospital, nothing.

He promised to adopt the National Mental Health Plan and implement guidelines of draft disability policy. None of these was done. He had also promised in 2004 to have two renal dialysis centres, one in the north and one in the south.

I had asked you to debate a matter of urgent public importance. You allowed me to debate it on the Adjournment. Contracts were given, \$75 million per year to

establish these two dialysis centres for 200 units each. That means 400 dialysis units. Because the friends of the Minister of Health or the Prime Minister or somebody did not get the contract, they squashed it and went back for tenders twice to try to see if they could get their friends to do it. Four years later, these two renal dialysis centres that were promised were never built. Patients with renal failure are dying like flies. There are about 2,000 to 3,000 patients who require renal dialysis twice or three times per week in this country. All they are able to accommodate is about 500 or 600. The poor people will have to pay about \$80,000 per year. Where will they get that money? All those who were waiting for dialysis died while the Government fiddles and the Ministers go into corrupt practices.

Do you think that we as an opposition could sit back; look at that and stare it in the face? How can you stare that in the face? This is why I bring it to your attention. Today, your colleague told you to be critically aware of what is happening around you and do not fall into the trap. If you are worth your salt and conscience, you would do something about it. In fact I heard a while ago that a message was sent to all of you to attack Dr. Rowley. Let me see how many of you have the intestinal fortitude to go and attack him or not to attack him. An attack started already from the hon. Minister. Let me see what is happening.

I move on to the surgical waiting list. They had a surgical waiting list for about a year about which they were boasting. It was \$18 million to do the surgery. Many patients on that Surgical Waiting List Programme died. It was one of the most corrupt and incompetent programmes. Listen to the facts. They had a theologian doctor looking after a surgical waiting list programme. Do you remember that? I cannot remember his name at this time. All the medical personnel know him and refused to work with him. They used to get the junior doctors who could not do surgery to do it. Do you know what used to happen? If you have multiple pathologies like diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and so on they are supposed to screen you firstly to know if you can withstand the surgery. There was no screening. They went for surgery and they died on the operating theatre table because they had multiple problems.

Do you know what happened again? One anesthetist wanted to make so much money that he put two patients to sleep; one in one theatre and one in the other. He left one after putting them to sleep and then went to the next theatre to put the other one to sleep. Do you know how many people died in that Surgical Waiting List Programme?

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The head of the Pharmacy Board on the *Newsday* in 2008 called on the Government to re-evaluate the CDAP drugs. We have been saying all the time that these CDAP drugs are not good. He said that complaints of the drug have been too frequent. We have to be wary of drugs that are too cheap because of rampant pharmaceutical counterfeiting. I advise you and all my colleagues, when you go for pharmaceuticals in the pharmacy buy the original manufactured drug because the generic drugs do not work efficiently. Worst of all the CDAP drugs are five cent drugs. Patients with diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, glaucoma, asthma and ulcers take these drugs and are getting worse because they are ineffective. Their diseases are becoming worse because of the ineffective CDAP drugs and the hospitals are overcrowded because of the complications of these diseases.

It is good that the Government has now come to its sense and say that it would re-evaluate the programme in the 2008/2009 budget. We look forward to the re-evaluation of the CDAP drugs.

This is a government that interfered with the Medical and Pharmacy Board in typical PNM style. The Minister of Health attempted a legislative coup with respect to the Medical Board and the Pharmacy Board of Trinidad and Tobago. In February 2007, the Pharmacy Board objected to the vindictive steps being taken to amend a section of the Pharmacy Board Act relating to the register and registration of pharmacists. You remember when they wanted to bring pharmacists from the Philippines and impose them immediately on the population without them understanding what was going on here? The Pharmacy Board kicked hell and we kicked hell. It went to a joint select committee and we sorted it out. They were supposed to have 500 training hours before. This is what your government was attempting to do.

By now you know that the amendment to the Medical Board is not about the presence of lay people on the Medical Council, but about the Government's control of the profession. You were trying to control the medical profession and the medical professionals. If you do not have your way you are putting RHA regulations which will shut up the doctors so they will not be able to talk about the corruption that exists around them. The doctors will not be able to move and have meetings and lectures. When we were debating it the Prime Minister said that he will look at that legislation down the line so he could amend it after he passed this legislation.

The diabetic issue. This Government said that it would give glucometers to insulin dependent patients. Insulin dependent diabetics are 10 or 5 per cent maximum of diabetic patients. If you give monitors to only insulin diabetic

patients, 90 per cent of the diabetics will not get these glucometers. They will not get the strips and their diabetes would become worse. How much does it cost for a glucometer? \$100. If you take 100,000 persons with diabetes which is too many, it would cost the Government \$10 million for the glucometers and another \$20 million for the strips. Is \$30 million too much to give to the diabetics of Trinidad and Tobago, when they end up in the hospital and the cost of an average day's stay is about \$1,000? Thousands of patients come with the complications of diabetes and hypertension. We say provide every diabetic with a glucometer and the diabetic strips. This is what you should try to do immediately rather than squandering the money and involving yourself in massive corruption.

The Government said recently in the budget that it is undertaking a fundamental shift in policy in the health sector. In this context, the comprehensive health care system places greater emphasis on preventive services.

They seem to have been brain dead or comatose all the time. The Government has finally come to listen to the Opposition. A few months ago, I told the Government that the emphasis should be on preventive care, preventive medicine and primary care. My colleague, Dr. Hamza Rafeeq since 1995, when the UNC took over, those were our watch words, preventive care and primary care.

6.50 p.m.

We have 105 health centres in Trinidad and Tobago. We refurbished and renovated 43 of those within the last three and a half years. If we equip these health centres with the proper equipment and have doctors, pharmacists and nurses there and have some of them opened up to 8 o'clock in the evening, the patients who live close by will not have to travel long distances to a pharmacy to get these cheap CDAP drugs which are ineffective. They will be taken care of right there. If the problem is taken care of at the primary health care centres and the district health facilities, you will reduce the burden on the hospitals.

Mr. Speaker, the UNC, with \$5.5 billion for six years expenditure as opposed to the Government spending nearly \$19 billion on health, was able to accomplish, not for the sake of talking—let me tell this Government what we were able to do with \$5.5 billion.

We had over 500 infrastructural projects throughout Trinidad and Tobago in all the institutions. We repaired 17 out of 20 wards at the Port of Spain General Hospital; built a new pharmacy waiting area, a haematology ward, a gastroenterology ward, a laboratory department and a 10-bed intensive care unit in four months in 2000, at the cost of half what it cost in the 1980s. We built a

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new 37-chamber mortuary, with state-of-the-art equipment for post mortem and pathology, so that bodies would stop decaying in Port of Spain. You do not hear about it in Port of Spain anymore, but you hear about it in Mount Hope and San Fernando.

We refurbished and equipped seven operating theatres, new X-ray department, an X-ray department at Accident and Emergency, which was absent for 15 years. We improved the nurses' quarters, water storage system and standby generators. We built four new wards at St. Ann's Hospital. We improved the electricity, water storage, roofing system and at St. James we built a new chemotherapy fuel chamber, did infrastructure improvement and installed a new cobalt radiotherapy device.

We rebuilt and refurbished 47 health centres, two district health facilities; over \$200 million in new equipment. We had 50 open heart surgeries for children; performed over 3,000 cataract operations; opened four wards at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. We opened the Wendy Fitzwilliam Paediatric Hospital with transfer of the four wards from Port of Spain to the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. We built three new wards at Caura Hospital for the TB patients. We signed off on a Government to Government arrangement with Canada with the National Cancer Centre in 2001 and that could have been built in two years. It is still 10 years behind.

We completed a study by PricewaterhouseCoopers in 2000 for the transfer of health sector workers to the RHA and we increased nurses' salaries by 25 per cent. This is just a synopsis of what the UNC was able to do in five and a half years. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, how do we determine what is happening with a country's health care system? There are a few characteristic indices that we use to judge a health care system. My colleague, the Member for Siparia, told you that life expectancy has moved down to 67. [Interruption] I cannot find my paper now, but I will quote the source. I am quoting from *Country Corporation Strategy World Health Organization, Human Development Report, 2006*.

Life expectancy at birth 67.5 years;

Maternal mortality ratio per 100,000 life births;

Do you know what life expectancy in the United States is? In 1950, the life expectancy was 68. Our life expectancy is 58 years behind time. We are 67 and we say we want to be a First World country. [Interruption] I gave you the source.

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Trinidad and Tobago World Health Organization Country Corporation Strategy, Human Development Report, 2006.

Our infant mortality rate is 24 per 1,000 live births. They were questioning that with you. Do you know what it is in England? Six and five per thousand.

I would have been able to go on a little more on other issues, but I just want to complete my contribution by quoting American President, Woodrow Wilson, who said, and it is applicable here:

“We have come to be one of worst ruled; one of the most completely controlled and dominated governments in the world; no longer a government by conviction and vote of the majority, but a government by the opinion and duress of small groups of dominant and corrupt men.”

That quotation is so applicable to Trinidad and Tobago.

We call on this Government to remove the torture it is putting the country under; your corrupt, useless and incompetent Government. The future of this country depends on the immediate resignation of this Government. [*Desk thumping*] The more the Government remains in office, the worse it will be for the people who suffer hell and torture under you all. We ask you to remove yourselves. Resign! History will record you as the worst government ever in the annals of the country of Trinidad and Tobago. You have run the country to the ground and continue to do so. Do everybody a favour and step down!

The Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs (Hon. Marlene McDonald): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate and, at the same time, to compliment the Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira, the hon. Minister of Finance, for so ably presenting the National Budget. [*Desk thumping*] By her presentation she has stamped her mark on the advancement of women and provided a powerful reminder of this Government's commitment to the promotion of gender equality and gender equity. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, gender affairs is part of my portfolio and I will say more about it later. The National Budget has significance for all citizens since it outlines Government's policies, programmes, priorities and resource allocation, all of which are relevant to the national community. But more importantly, the budget is cast within the broad framework of Vision 2020, our National Strategic Development Plan.

This debate will allow all Ministers to share with the national community the progress made in their Ministries and the way forward for our nation as we march towards the goal of Vision 2020.

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The National Strategic Plan identifies five developmental pillars, two of which speak directly to the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs. They are:

Developing an innovative people; and

Nurturing a caring society.

My contribution will be presented under these two pillars of development. However, I will give precedence to the programmes and projects under nurturing a caring society and defer the contribution of developing innovative people to the Hon. Junior Regrello, Member for San Fernando West and Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, when I listened to the Member for Caroni East, for a moment I thought I was living in a war zone, so I would like to bring some sort of sobriety back to this House.

Last Friday, I listened to the contribution of the Member for Siparia and a lot of allegations were made, flippant statements, as seems to be the way with the Opposition. She said that no money was allocated for gender affairs; the budget did not address the unique concerns of women; there is need to improve gender equality.

The Member for Naparima, who has worked, I understand, with the Community Development Division for quite some time went into another flippant statement. He said that 78 per cent of the resources of self-help would go to the PNM constituencies.

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

He also said that we operate—after working in the Ministry, he tells the national community that we operate a scholarship fund. The Member for Fyzabad also said that people pay to use our community centres. During my contribution, I will dispense with all those false and flippant statements made by the Opposition.
[*Desk thumping*]

My Ministry deals with development of communities. As we look at the pillar of nurturing a caring society, it is the foundation of our communities. This is what we are measuring to develop our society. It should be noted that there are eight administrative districts through which our programmes are brought to the people. My Ministry is a people-oriented Ministry. We do a lot of outreach programmes and without the development of the communities we would not have a society.

There are eight administrative districts through which the Community Development Officers work: St. George East and West, Victoria East and West, Nariva/Mayaro, St. Patrick, St. Andrew, St. David and Caroni. Madam Deputy Speaker, I will outline at least ten interventive mechanisms through which we effect our work in the communities. I hope the Opposition is listening. This is uplifting and not in any way derogatory.

Under group development, there is group formation, group registration and group servicing. Group formation is key to building communities—I am happy you are here, Member for Naparima—and this is undertaken through mobilization, forming new groups in the communities and we encourage this at the Ministry. This is where you are able to impact on the lives and livelihood of the people in your communities.

Over the last fiscal year, we were able to register 88 new groups. In my constituency of Port of Spain South, I was able to form a group at St. Paul Street called the St. Paul Street and Environs Residents Association. These groups are asked to pull the communities together to access goods and services because there is strength in numbers.

When groups are formed, they are registered and it ensures the bona fides of the groups and the repository of records at Community Development Division shows that currently there are 1,719 groups at the Ministry. This is one of our mechanisms for intervening in our communities.

The second one I want to look at is the Community Education Programme under which the following components are undertaken. There are three components here: skills training, a basic programme, leadership development programme and the community sensitization and awareness programme.

7.05 p.m.

The programmes are brought to the people, through these three components. The Skills Training Programme allows persons of any age, with little or no prerequisite, to access or gain certification right in the comfort of their communities. This programme is brought to the community in many skilled areas, especially the rural areas, where they learn fishnet repairs; boat construction; PVC furniture construction; tailoring; cosmetology; home furnishing; garment construction; balloon decoration; tiling; and plumbing, to name a few.

I would give you a breakdown of some of the classes held: St. George East over the last fiscal year, 55 classes were held with 1,400 persons graduating; St.

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George West, 48 classes with 848 persons graduating; St. Andrew/St. David, 64 classes with 500 persons graduating; Caroni, 56 classes with 886 persons graduating; Victoria West, 34 classes with 603 persons; Victoria East, 44 classes with 875 persons; Nariva/Mayaro, 40 classes with 685 persons; and St. Patrick, 35 classes with 523 people graduating. During the period under review, a total of 6,320 graduated from a total of 368 classes held throughout Trinidad. Is this not a caring Government?

The Leadership Development Programme—under this programme the Community Development Division assists group-strengthening efforts, through the Leadership Development Programme. The division conducts training in issues affecting groups such as proposal writing, conflict resolution, programme planning and programme implementation. Over the period, 278 leadership classes were held.

There is also the Community Sensitization Awareness Programme which addresses social as well as national issues which impact on the lives of all our communities. The issues dealt with were health, law, housing, local government and financial literacy. Over the last fiscal period, 184 such programmes were held throughout Trinidad.

The Community Development Division is charged with the responsibility of promoting harmonious relationships between the Government, as well as the local communities and organizations. In so doing, the division collaborates with a number of government, as well as non-governmental organizations. These collaborations allow for the dissemination of information to be shared among our communities.

Within the period 2007/2008, collaborations were promoted with agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme, in order to initiate a walk against hunger in Nariva/Mayaro. We have seen a successful health caravan at Victoria East, through the collaborations with the South West Regional Health Authority. We have seen collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development, to ensure a successful ageing programme. Within the new fiscal year, the division proposes to expand the Skills Training Programme and the Community Sensitization Programme by having live media coverage to bring community views to the wider public.

Another inventive measure is the Community Safety and Enhancement Programme. This is a community-based crime prevention programme, which focuses on the formation and empowerment of specialized groups to implement

and manage crime prevention initiatives and enhancement programmes. This is critical because the community development officers would go into areas and form specialized groups. These groups are then able to penetrate the community and work with the people who display deviant behaviour and actually organize them in groups and show them a different way of life. This particular programme is akin to the Citizens' Security Programme at the Ministry of National Security. We intend, over the next fiscal year, to work hand in hand with the Ministry of National Security—we have already had two meetings with them—to form a nexus between what we do under the Citizens' Security Programme at the Ministry of National Security.

We look now at our GAP programme. Our Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme demonstrates the caring nature of the Government, which is grateful to and appreciative of the contribution of our elderly citizens and which gives our youth the opportunity to develop their self-worth and gain wisdom from their interaction with the elderly.

The programme is designed to train adolescent males and females between the ages of 19—25 in nursing care, nutrition and life skills to equip them to provide companion and care giving support to the elderly. During fiscal 2007/2008, 552 trainees graduated from level one and they were conducted. The training programmes were held all across the nation at community centres in Valencia; Cumana; Arouca; Enterprise; Embacadere; Katwaroo; Rio Claro; Williamsville; Lot 10 Community Centre and Point Cumana.

There is a level two, which is the advanced programme and 360 persons graduated from the level two. The training took place at six centres: Lions Civic Centre, San Fernando; Penal Rock Road Community Center; Red Hill Settlement Community Centre; Lisas Gardens, Couva Community Centre; Biche Community Center and St. Joseph Community Centre. This is why I am painstakingly going through and reading out exactly where all these centres are located. They are not only the PNM constituencies, as the Member for Naparima said on Friday.

Member for Naparima, you worked at the Ministry and you know that these classes and centres are all across the nation. When we get the self-help, you would recognize that it is 78 per cent—you said that and I do not understand where you got it from—and we would work through it when we get there.

Over 400 senior citizens received government-assisted home care support monthly. These graduates selected for providing the service, receive a stipend of \$1,800 monthly, paid for by the Ministry. The Geriatric Adolescent Partnership

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Programme therefore provides much needed benefits for our young people and the elderly, some of whom live in circumstances which require a dependence on the working population. The GAP Programme is therefore providing an essential national service. That is a caring Government.

We turn our attention to another mechanism, which is the Anaculture Community Concert Programme. The Anaculture Community Concert Programme is another community-driven programme which focuses on the unearthing and development of latent talent and making use of the free time of our vulnerable youth. The opportunity is provided for budding community artistes to perform alongside professional artistes in the comfort of their own community stage.

Training opportunities are also provided to assist potential artistes discover and develop their skills. The underlying philosophy here is that culture is an effective mechanism in the fight against youth delinquency and crime. The programme continues to be very popular; it was introduced in 2004 among our vulnerable youth and our elderly. Over the fiscal period 2007/2008, 98 such programmes were held and we will continue with this particular programme.

Our programmes are not only designed to equip citizens with skills to access wage employment or create their own jobs, the Ministry is also instituting measures to engage communities in poverty alleviation, through the Community Development Fund. The CDF provides funding for institutional strengthening and capacity-building activities, targeting community-based organizations. That is why, when I started my contribution I was very clear when I said that we needed to form groups in our communities. It is through the formation of groups and these community-based organizations, you are now able to access funding for your projects and programmes in our communities.

This support prepares these organizations for active involvement in poverty alleviation initiatives. A total of \$6.2 million was spent in grants to organizations under the basket of funding programme. Funding directed to organizations under the project funding for poverty alleviation amounted to \$3 million. Seventeen organizations benefited from this allocation. These groups came from the poorest communities across Trinidad and Tobago. The CDF also provided small grants funding to community organizations, the amount provided totalled \$1.6 million. This was distributed over 83 organizations. Funding to special initiatives amounted to \$1.5 million. Total participation in these programmes exceeded 70,000 persons.

The CDF also continued with the implementation of the National Organization Mentoring Programme. This programme aims to recruit volunteers from among the professionals and match these professionals with organizations to achieve specific objectives. Over 150 organizations have applied to participate in this programme. The CDF also implemented, over the last fiscal year, the National Pan Technology Programme. This programme consists of three components. The first is the pan construction/pan tuning and a personal development component for participants. A total of 81 persons completed the training and was certified.

The alleviation and eradication of poverty remains the primary objective of the Community Development Fund. The recent strategic planning exercise undertaken by the CDF will further position the agency to continue its contribution to Government's efforts towards poverty alleviation. The programmes and approaches proposed for fiscal 2008/2009 are designed to not only tackle poverty, but to embrace the development of all our communities.

As a caring Government, we are also ensuring that the people initiate and participate in their own development. We are all familiar with and have benefited from the work of the National Commission for Self-Help. The Commission has been spreading the message of self-help to all our communities across the country.

7.20 p.m.

During the period October 2007 to August 2008, the National Commission for Self-Help implemented 1,208 projects valued at \$33.7 million. Member for Naparima, I am coming to you. On Friday evening you said that 78 per cent of the self help projects go to the PNM constituencies. *[Interruption]* Do you want me to get the *Hansard*? You said 78 per cent and I wrote it down. Now, I am looking at the period for the last fiscal year and there were 1,208 projects. Let me tell you what is happening. You all got—I am saying “you all” because you started it—512 projects out of the 1,208 projects. I am going to tell you where these projects are located.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in Caroni Central 10 to the value of \$325,514; Caroni East 67 to the tune of \$1,732,471; Chaguanas West \$2,019,220; Couva North, 18, \$267,091; Couva South, 11, \$455,626; Fyzabad, 34, \$514,742; Nariva, 13, \$232,785; Naparima, 20, \$369,242; Ortoire/Mayaro, 38, \$1,234,353; Oropouche East, 15, \$708,034; Princes Town North, 68, \$1,404,722; St. Augustine, 10, \$81,620; Siparia, 88, \$4,462,248; and Tabaquite, 4, \$210,176. *[Desk thumping and Laughter]*

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Madam Deputy Speaker, I do not want to take too long because I have a constraint with time, but of the \$33.7 million the Opposition constituencies got \$14,017,844. [*Desk thumping*] For the maths, that is 42 per cent and not 78 per cent. Look at what you all got! Well, I have to say, as the Member for Mayaro—

Mr. Peters: I would just like to ask the hon. Minister when she said “who is we” and “who is them”, who is she talking about? Are you talking about the people in Trinidad and Tobago or are you talking about a separation in Trinidad and Tobago? I just want to know.

Hon. M. Mc Donald: Member for Mayaro, if you were listening, I said I did not start this, but the Member for Naparima on Friday evening said that 78 per cent of the self help projects go to the PNM constituencies. So, what I am doing now is refuting that ludicrous allegation. [*Desk thumping*] That is what I am doing. So, it is you and me. Let us move on because I have limited time. [*Desk thumping*]

I now turn my attention to the Community Centres Construction Programme. In 2005, the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs embarked on a community centres programme for the construction of new community centres, refurbishment, modernization and enhancement of existing community centres. The original stock of community centres was constructed in the 1960s and consisted of very basic structures with limited functionality. Several of these centres are now in dire need of major repairs and expansion in order to accommodate the range of activities of communities in keeping with Vision 2020.

The community centre of the future will be user-friendly. Its architecture will permit effortless flow of patrons through its portals; we would have lobby and reception area, administrative officers, teaching kitchen, computer literacy, Internet access space, audio-visual rooms, multipurpose activity rooms, auditorium and backstage area including storage, change rooms, fitness or daycare centres and ancillary building and plants. I must add that the new community centres would also be used as disaster shelters in times of emergency.

Again, I want to demonstrate to the Member for Naparima, coming out from the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs that we did not only put down community centres in PNM constituencies. So, I am going to take him through the excursion. San Raphael was opened on March 15, 2008. [*Interruption*] San Raphael and Brooklyn are in the constituency of Cumuto/Manzanilla. I opened those two community centres; San Raphael at a

cost of \$1.7 million and Brooklyn at a cost of \$1.2 million; St. Joseph Community Centre at a cost of \$1.3 million; Rambert Village Community Centre in Oropouche—the Member for Oropouche East did not come to that opening—Tortuga Community Centre at a cost of \$460,000. That is in the constituency of Tabaquite. You did not come, but you sent a representative. What I am demonstrating here is that this is a Government that crosses all borders regardless of race, ethnicity or political affiliation. [*Desk thumping*] According to our Vision 2020 plan, no one shall be left behind including you all. [*Desk thumping*] Mulchan Trace Community Centre at a cost of \$3.5 million. That is in the constituency of Siparia; Penal Rock Road Community Centre 4-Mile Mark at a cost of \$3 million; Embacadere Community Centre, \$568,000. That is in the constituency of San Fernando West; Pleasantville Community Centre, \$2.5 million. That is in the constituency of San Fernando East; Trou Macaque Community Centre in Laventille West, \$731,000; Erin Community Centre in Point Fortin, \$2.2 million; Never Dirty Community Centre in Laventille East, \$559,000; Thicke Village Community Centre in the constituency of Fyzabad, \$11 million.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as I speak, we will be opening at least 10 more community centres before the year is through and they are Maracas Bay Community Centre; the St. Joseph Road East Dry River Community Centre; Penal Central Community Centre—three community centres in Siparia; Guapo Community Centre; Gonzales Community Centre; Central Diego Martin Community Centre; Hard Bargain Community Centre in Princes Town North; Butler Village/Waterloo/Carapichaima Community Centre in Couva North; Los Bajos Community Centre; and Upper El Dorado Community Centre in Tunapuna.

As we speak, there are 28 community centres currently under construction. Member for Naparima, you said that you looked at some figures and you said that you do not know how we are going to build the community centres and so forth, but if you did not know how to find the figures, you could have asked me. [*Desk thumping*] In the budget allocation for this year we have \$134 million allocated for the construction of new community centres and refurbishment. Remember, this is the operational period 2007—2010, so it means that for this fiscal year we have a certain number of centres to complete, and then we will need more money to complete centres in 2009/2010. Minister of Finance, am I correct?

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: Yes. [*Desk thumping*] So, do not expect to see \$325 million there. It is divided up. We have numeracy and literacy programmes at the ministry, so we are going to send you. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Mc Donald: Madam Deputy Speaker, let me turn my attention to another intervention under the ministry which is the Financial Assistance Programme. I want to read a letter from a student. I am not going to call the student name, but suffice it to say that this student is from a very deprived area, and I want to read the circumstances and then we are going to fit them into what this Government has done. It says:

“Dear hon. Minister.

I wish to thank you for the initiative of your Government in affording me access to free tertiary education. Having attended the Belmont Junior Secondary School, the Diego Martin Government Secondary School and then on to John Donaldson Technical Institute, I was able to gain entry into the UWI where I am now pursuing a bachelor of science degree in Civil Engineering. By this achievement, I have proven that good things and people can also come out from Belmont Junior Secondary and further...”

He called the community which is a very deprived community.

“However, over the past few months, I have been faced with tremendous obstacles that may hamper my continuing studies into the second year of my degree programme. I come from a family of eight where my mother had no choice but to leave her job, thus making my father the sole breadwinner of the household.

Over the years, due to the rising cost of living, my father who has been experiencing grave difficulty in meeting the financial demands of a family of eight with an older brother trying to pursue tertiary education and two younger siblings in primary and secondary school, it truly has become difficult.

As of late, my father has been verbally abusive and has created an environment where it is difficult to function. At times, I had to spend sleepless nights trying to study at school because the environment at home was not conducive for studying, and it was just too stressful. I am quite aware that the negative treatment displayed lately by my father is wrong, but I have to be cognizant of the fact that he, himself, is going through a stressful time in meeting the financial needs of our family.

Over the last semester, my father stopped supporting me financially. Civil Engineering is a full-time course, and I do not have the option of switching to it part-time to facilitate getting employment. I also tried accessing the HELP Loan but could not meet the necessary requirements as stipulated, since none

of my parents are in a position to cosign on the loan. As a result, the assistance I got from close friends and the few occasions I was afforded the opportunity of temporary employment, it afforded me transportation and food only for that semester.”

7.35 p.m.

“I even worked for my father to gain some revenue during the summer period. To date I have not been paid. All I have received during and after working for him was abuse and a series of threats. However, I trust in God and he tells me once there is a will there is a way, and that he will never leave me or forsake me. I have developed a passion for civil engineering and feel the need to go deeper into the course of study.

If I were afforded the opportunity to complete my degree I would be in a better position to help my family get out of the situation that we are in. Further, as the Government embarks on its Vision 2020, I feel it is my duty as a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago to enhance my skill so that I can reinvest in Trinidad and Tobago what it has invested in me.

As a result of my situation, I am kindly asking for financial assistance to meet the cost of transportation, books and living expenses for my second year of studies. By me being able to finish my degree, I know that I would be further equipped to significantly contribute to the development of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, thus helping us attain First World status by the year 2020.

I trust that my application will be given due consideration, and that I will be contacted with a favourable response at your earliest convenience.

May God continue to bless your office with prosperity and success.”

Madam Deputy Speaker, when you get letters like these and you realize that there are vulnerable and needy students outside there in the system, somehow or the other these students can fall between the cracks. This is just one situation, there are others who apply to UWI and probably their grades were not high enough and they were not able to get it. It does not mean that they cannot go to access any tertiary form of education. So, they probably would apply overseas or to some other form of institution. Are we to leave these students behind? We cannot do that. This was the thinking behind the Government back in 2003, when they developed the community development scholarship programme—I am reading

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from the Social Sector Investment Programme 2004; this is the budget document, page 77. I quote:

"The Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs is the executing agency for this programme, which provides bursaries to young persons from communities that are not tied to or restricted by the traditional criteria and selection processes for such awards. The bursaries could be used to pursue programmes of training and/or studies in traditional and non-traditional disciplines at local, regional and international institutions.

It is also designed to build human capacity within communities..."

That is why I said it is an intervention in our communities.

"as well as to improve and develop communities as viable and sustainable units of families and family life."

I am proud to state that and I want to refute what the Member for Naparima said, we do not have scholarships at the Ministry of Community Development; we have financial assistance. [*Desk thumping*] The terms of engagement for a scholarship is different from the terms of engagement for financial assistance. I want to make that abundantly clear. I want to say that the brochures are there.

You can come to the Ministry or to any of the eight administrative districts and you are able to get the brochures, the forms, and each application is given due consideration by the financial assistance committee. "Done talk!" [*Desk thumping*]

I turn my attention to gender affairs and I am surprised—I am not seeing the Member for Siparia—by some of the statements made, but let me start to refute one of the allegations. The Member for Siparia looked at me and said, no money for gender affairs, not one cent for gender affairs. That was said on Friday. Let me start right there.

The division of gender affairs has received significantly improved allocations within the recent years. During the UNC administration, allocations for gender never exceeded \$1 million; research will show. However, if she had asked me I would have sent her here to "current transfers and subsidies"; I was going to send her to 005: Non-profit institution, and I was going to call out line 27, where it says non-profit institutions, Gender Affairs Division, and I was going to show her that gender affairs fourth period 2008/2009 is in receipt of \$13.5 million. [*Desk thumping*] As matter of fact, they got a \$50,000 increase over the last fiscal period. So, to say that the gender affairs—and this is it, I can make copies—did not get, somebody is setting the Member for Siparia up, and it is the same thing the Member for Diego Martin North/East said on Friday, somebody is setting her up.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The speaking time of the hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. M. Mc Donald: Thank you, Member for San Fernando East. Equity and respect including equal opportunity for every man, every woman, every boy and every girl would be achieved; they would certainly achieve their fullest potential, and these are the attributes characterizing Vision 2020.

The gender affairs division is the national focal point for the promotion of gender equity and equality in Trinidad and Tobago. To do this, the division works collaboratively with state agencies, with academia and civil society to promote gender perspectives in all policies, programmes and projects. The work of the division is also guided by several international mandates. We are committed to our obligation under all our agreements and all our conventions, and over the past fiscal year, the gender affairs division undertook the preparation and completion of the first draft of what you call the fourth and fifth periodic report to the Convention for Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CDAW).

In addition, over the past year, as a Government we have been able to successfully defend our country's implementation of the articles under the Convention of the Belém Do Pará. In fact, not only are we seen as pace-setters among our Latin American and regional colleagues, we are being asked to share our best practices on programmes and projects we have implemented. [*Desk thumping*]

The development of a national policy on gender and development in order to advance gender equity and gender equality is not an easy task. I am sure this honourable House would understand that as well as the wider society, that what this involves is a dynamic process and it will involve a cross section of our communities. As I stand here, I wish to state quite categorically that the draft policy document on gender and development has been revised and would be submitted to Cabinet very shortly; I think within the next two weeks. I anticipate that within the next few months it would be laid in this honourable House. I have worked along with the gender affairs division and we have finalized that document, so it is just now to go to the hon. Prime Minister and to Cabinet.

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Madam Deputy Speaker, in order to promote gender equality, the gender affairs department exposes various publics to gender training and gender sensitization with a view to removing gender stereotypes and gender discrimination; every sphere of national life. These initiatives target the general public. We do it through the schools, through the armed forces, through the Government ministries, through the NGOs and we come straight to your communities utilizing the community-based organizations. During 2007/2008, several organizations, including the Trinidad and Tobago Coastguard benefited from this training.

The gender affairs division also facilitates what you call the distinguished lecture series. This series has attracted some of the nations and regions finest professionals in their various fields, including the likes of Justice Desiree Bernard, the only woman serving at the Caribbean Court of Justice; Prof. Lyndon Lewis of Becknell University, Pennsylvania; we have the hon. Syringa Marshall-Burnett, President of the Jamaican Senate and Prof. Errol Miller.

The gender affairs division also conducts a television panel series entitled "Gender on your Agenda", and our NCC Channel 4. In the past, these panels had explored such issues as popular culture, masculinity and manhood, leadership and decision-making, labour and workplace issues, education health and wellness.

So, for the Member for Siparia to say that we are not doing enough or we are not running any courses in the Gender Affairs Division, is certainly not a truism. In 2007/2008, the panel focused on such issues as the livelihood strategies of grassroots and community women; the young of 2000, and celebrated the achievements of women. A masculinity series was conducted within the same period, subtitled "You've got male" and included six segments: male on male violence and crime; negative peer pressure and the young male; men's health; men and their family relationship; men and money matters and education performance of our boys.

I am sure that this honourable House is aware that great strides have been made in addressing the situation of unemployment in this country. However, and this is for the Member for Siparia, because she was interested in the head of single households. Single female heads of households are still in the majority. The "Woman in Harmony" programme was designed to address the problem of unemployment among women between the ages of 6 years and 45 years, who are single head of households, with low or no skills, or low or no income. The programme consists of an intensive 12 weeks full time training in two modules,

namely: caring for the elderly, agriculture or landscaping and life skills training. These are conducted in regions across Trinidad. This programme features a unique model in which the young children of participants are cared for by trained personnel on site as they receive their training.

7.50 p.m.

During fiscal 2007/2008 training was conducted at 18 centres throughout Trinidad and a total of 590 women successfully completed this programme. [*Desk thumping*] If one looks at a construction site one would observe that more women are now holding their own in this sector. This is a direct result of women taking advantage of the training available to them and thus increasing their earning potential. One such training programme is the non-traditional skills training programme for women.

In the last year, 400 women were trained in several areas including: masonry; plumbing; technical drawing; blueprint reading and electrical installation to name a few. Women are provided with a total of 320 hours of training on a six month part-time basis in technical/vocational skills. Through this programme women are better able to avail themselves to higher paying jobs in the construction sector and are better able to provide for themselves and their families.

So, for Member for Siparia to say that we are not doing anything to assist those females—single head of households—that is not a truism. There are two courses in place at the ministry. We also have the GAP Programme. Probably the Member for Siparia is not well informed as to the courses available through the community development division and I suspect that she should avail herself of the information.

Another sore point was the men's programme: The men's programmes have not been removed. Rather programmes conducted for and on behalf of men are more meaningful and effective now more than ever. In the face of increased male on male crimes—gang violence; we had the gender affairs department develop the finding masculine excellence programme. This programme, which was already being hailed a best practice by many at home and abroad, is an ongoing series of "Train the Trainers" workshops targeting men from various state and private agencies with their knowledge and skills to improve their social relationships and to provide training, community support and outreach to other men and boys in vulnerable circumstances.

Since its inception over 600 men and boys have been trained. In 2007/2008, 280 men and boys were trained as peer educators. These males are now in

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partnership with the gender affairs division to reach other men and boys with personal development skills. Among the agencies which benefitted from the outreach aspect of the programme are the Youth Training Centre and the young men association.

This programme is one of the flagship programmes of the ministry. Through this programme we have been able to see true transformation at work, the restoration of broken marriages, fathers and sons being reunited and countless stories of restored family life. In fiscal 2007/2008, so wide reaching was the impact of this programme that a member of the St. Kitts defence force on assignment in Trinidad, and who attended this programme has recommended, and in fact, this programme is being implemented in that island as we speak.

Additionally, the United Nations Population Fund is in discussion with the ministry to evaluate the programme and document it as a best practice. In the last fiscal year the food preparation and fine dining for men programme which was piloted a few years ago was fully implemented. A total of 489 men and boys over the age of 14 participated in the training which was conducted at 24 centres throughout Trinidad.

When a man aged 85 is prepared to learn how to prepare his meal and the death of his wife, and when a citizen is prepared to dip his hands in this pocket and purchase a stove to place in the centre because of the number of participants on the programme, and when there is an average of four young men between the ages of 14 and 16 seeking to make a difference with their lives by attending the programme, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am quite convinced that given time and with sustained efforts, we can see the type of transformation in some of our men and boys and we can justly be proud of them.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member for Siparia said in her contribution on Friday that the gender affairs department does not involve itself with gender budgeting. I want to say that again, I want to refute that flippant statement. Gender budgeting is an issue to which significant attention is being paid by our ministry. In March 2008, the division in collaboration with the UNDP held a breakfast seminar conducted by Miss Marcia Caddle, Economic Consultant on this very topic. All the initiatives which came out of this seminar were now being used to inform us as to what type of budgeting we should do in terms of gender budgeting.

So to state what the Member for Siparia said on Friday, I want to state again that is not so and she has been misled.

Mr. Imbert: Always!

Hon. M. Mc Donald: Madam Deputy Speaker, employment among women has grown. For instance, in Trinidad and Tobago, the labour force registered 628,400 persons at the end of the fourth quarter in 2006. This represents 353,000 men and 236,000-odd women. The labour force participation rate for males was 74.9 per cent, while females were 53.6 per cent. The number of employed males rose by 7,600 or 2.2 per cent and the females by 2.8 per cent. What I am saying here is that there is an increase. In other words, there is an improvement and enhancement of employment of women in the workplace. To say that this budget discriminates against women and this budget does not address women's issues, I want to say that this is false and the Member for Siparia should avail herself of information. [*Desk thumping*]

An important aspect of the work of the gender affairs division relates to the collaboration with other state and non-state agencies. For example: during December to January being the festive months and therefore the likelihood of the use of unsafe sexual practices might be on the increase. The gender affairs division collaborated with the Best Village Unit and the National AIDS Coordinating Committee to present to the national community an HIV/AIDS production. This production was delivered through a very powerful play called "Keeper of the List" by the Prizgar Lands/Kelly Village combined group which was really a musical presentation. I have to say that whoever—I had the pleasure of attending that show at Queen's Hall—attended that show and saw that powerful presentation, I would say would have walked away with a sense of pride to see what we can do here to promote this type of awareness for HIV/AIDS in this country and I salute them.

In July 2008, the gender affairs division in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development also hosted a round table discussion on research, policies and programmes related to men and boys. Through this exercise, previous areas of research and 18 programmes which specifically targeted men were identified. This information was shared with the relevant stakeholders and I am sure this will inform future policies and programmes.

I want to take this opportunity—my last five minutes—to address a national issue; an issue that has become somewhat topical recently. I refer to the whole question of the disbursement of funds, including subvention to groups associated with the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs with special focus on special interest groups and other bodies involved in cultural and other related activities.

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When I assumed office as Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs in November 2007, I was faced with critical decision making with respect to our national festival of Carnival which was mere weeks away. In the aftermath of dealing with the various special interest groups such as: Pan Trinbago; TUCO and NCBA, I recognized the urgent need to revisit all the systems, procedures and processes that influenced the relationship of these and all such groups with the ministry.

I met with the major stakeholders and informed them that it could not and would not be business as usual. I also shared this perspective with the national community in a post Cabinet conference and on other public occasions. In this regard it is instructive to note that I also provided professional support for strategic business planning sessions in an effort to build capacity within these organizations to facilitate the movement along a path of sustainable self-sufficiency with the ministry continuing to hold hands with all these cultural groups to ensure that the goals and objectives of Vision 2020 are not displaced and that the general population of the republic remains the true beneficiary of the financial and other outputs generated by the Government. We will continue our work in this area during the coming fiscal year.

Let me address one issue that has been highlighted recently in the print and electronic media; the National Parang Association, which, along with several other organizations is paid an annual subvention in accordance with a decision of the Cabinet taken in December 1997 under another administration. I responded to a request of the National Parang Association and met with representatives of the association within two months of my assumption of duty as Minister. Unfortunately, I was not in a position to accede to the request for a significant level of additional funding to meet outstanding debts incurred by that body. That was the last time I heard from the association, February 2008. There are no records in my office to show that any effort has been made to contact me on any matter affecting the organization.

I have initiated an enquiry to be undertaken with respect to the issue, including the claims of this association and the following has been brought to my attention: In order to be eligible for a grant all groups and organizations are required to submit audited financial statements and supporting documents in respect of the previous year's activities and a budget for the following year's activities by March 31, of that year. Each group or organization must submit a detailed report on its activities of the previous year. The National Parang Association established contact with the acting director of culture just over a

fortnight ago to discuss the disbursement of the annual subvention. The association was reminded of the stipulated requirements with emphasis on the audited financial statements.

A representative of the association returned to the culture division with a copy of the financial statements and was advised of the need for the original to be submitted, which was done the following day. The National Parang Association apologized for the extremely late approach to the ministry and the culture division began to process the subvention documentation as submitted.

These are the facts. It is not my intention to transact the business of the ministry with our stakeholders through radio talk shows and other media. The expenditure of public funds as approved by this honourable House must be undertaken on the basis of value for money and accountability, and in accordance with the requirement of the law. Attempting to hold the general public to ransom using the timing of national events is not the way to mask any deficiency in any organization. Our stakeholders including cultural groups, organizations and other bodies must be prepared to partner with the Government as it seeks to conduct its business in an orderly fashion without fear, favour or ill will as has become the hallmark of the Government which I have the honour to serve. [*Desk thumping*]

8.05 p.m.

Finally, we are currently working on a policy which will guide the disbursement of funds/financial assistance to groups and organization, and this policy will be laid for Cabinet in two weeks time.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Mickela Panday (*Oropouche West*): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Let me first say Eid Mubarak to our Muslim brothers and sisters.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I was hoping to congratulate the Member for Port of Spain South for filling in the gaps in dealing with the gender issues, which were so blatantly omitted by the hon. Minister of Finance. But sadly and unfortunately Member for Port of Spain South, it is unfortunate that I cannot do so because you have not dealt with any of the gender sensitive issues that are so pressing to our nation today. Instead, the Minister chose to launch an attack on disproving everything the Member for Siparia said. First by saying something about improved allocation, yet if you look at the Draft Estimates of which I am sure she has a copy, she would see that gender allocation for 2008 was \$35 million and the estimates for 2009 was \$26 million, and if you further look down you would

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realize that none of that, at least in this estimate is for gender. We have for recreation and culture, social infrastructure, community service, community development and I see nothing for gender. So I am sure someone will correct me if I am wrong.

The Draft Gender Policy of which I will be going through in detail, again, we hear it has been revised again, but still has not been implemented. Gender budgeting, not sure I understood what she said, but I am sure it was something that they had discussed during some sort of breakfast seminar. Then I heard about numerous launches, et cetera, but still, the Minister failed to give any specific deadlines for the implementation of such policies and/or projects.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is disappointing because this budget was touted as and I quote:

“Being crafted in a way that addresses the public and the population at large.”

In the words of the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Sen. The Hon. Mariano Browne, he says:

“Let me assure you, you are all well being thought of.”

But how many times have we heard this before? Nevertheless, I like so many others, waited with bated breath. After all, we had a new Minister of Finance, who would bring to the table a fresh, untainted perceptive on how things could and should be done. But alas, it was not to be, and so I, like most was disappointed. Because when you are in the Opposition, you do not love your country less. [*Desk thumping*] You do not wish your country to fail. Sadly, I cannot say the same for the Government. I make that statement without prejudice, ill will or malice. I do so based on the PNM's track record of broken promises in successive budget statements over the last seven years.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as with previous budget statements delivered by the Prime Minister in the past, this budget lacks credibility, [*Desk thumping*] And when I say so, this is by no means an attack on the hon. Minister of Finance, it is a statement of fact, based on the last seven budgets where promise after promise after promise was made and nothing of substance was ever delivered.

What was clear from the presentation of this and last year's budget, which were almost identical, was the Government seems to know what the problems of the country are, and they have a pretty good idea of what the solution should be, but for some curious reason they seem to lack the political will to implement the measures which they know are necessary. [*Desk thumping*]

The ultimate goal of any government should be to improve the quality of life of its people, regardless of colour, creed, race, gender, age or political affiliation. It appears that the Minister is aware of this. However, what makes no sense at all, is having enumerated the problems faced by the citizens of our nation, such as escalating crime, high food prices, the deteriorating infrastructure, such as a regular and adequate supply of water, electricity, flooding, bad roads, traffic jams, poor health facilities, carnage on our roads, underemployment, poverty and the rest of our daily torments, the Minister of Finance went on for more than three hours without saying specifically what the Government is going to do about the problems that confront us on a daily basis. How then, can this Government proclaim to be a caring Government, when yet for another year they fail to implement any measures that promote the well-being and future of our children, youth and women? How is this caring Government?

In the 2001/2002 Budget Statement delivered by Mr. Kuei Tung, the then Minister of Finance, he addressed the issue of battered women in our society, and I quote his words:

“Mr. Speaker, another vulnerable group that demands our urgent attention, care and support is the growing number of battered women in Trinidad and Tobago. Many battered women endure years of abuse and harassment out of fear of becoming homeless. For them the choice is between violence and homelessness, both for themselves and for their children. Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, the Government has agreed to provide 10 apartments for the shelter for battered women. The apartments will be used by the shelter for battered women as a pilot project aimed at providing transitional housing while they look for a job, pursue job training and/or seek out permanent housing.”

He continued:

“In addition, Government is also determined to tackle the root causes of domestic violence, and in July of this year, Cabinet agreed to expand the Male Support Programme in the Ministry of Community Empowerment, Sport and Consumer Affairs. This programme, among other things will sensitize males, both in the schools and in the community level to issues related to domestic violence. It will provide a support system to encourage perpetrators of domestic violence to seek help.”

Sadly, when the People's National Movement delivered the successive budget statement for the following fiscal year of 2002/2003, neither this initiative nor any other relating to children, youth or women were followed through with, or in

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some instances, even mentioned. And it is here that in 2002, the empty promises began and continued through the years to be perpetuated by the Prime Minister year after year and sadly mimicked by the new Minister of Finance this year.

Madam Deputy Speaker, back in 2002/2003, the now famous theme “Vision 2020: People, Our Priority” was born. A master political marketing gimmick that had a catch to it and sounded good. Advertising at its best and I quote the hon. Prime Minister, who has now run away:

"For us, Mr. Speaker, making People Our Priority means eliminating poverty; providing adequate support systems for our youth, senior citizens and the less fortunate; re-establishing standards of transparency, accountability and governance to ensure that the country's resources are employed efficiently for the benefit and welfare of our citizens; and nurturing our core values of equality, tolerance and mutual respect."

You would agree, Madam Deputy Speaker, great words, but no mention of women and children.

In the Budget Statement of 2003/2004, the theme was "Charting the Course to 2020: Empowering People" and again I quote the Prime Minister:

"I now exhort all citizens to do their part for the betterment of our nation. Let us all work hard, observe the law, be committed to family and country, cooperate with the authorities, lend a helping hand in our community, and together we shall make Trinidad and Tobago one of the best places in the world."

Again, great words, but no mention of women and children.

The Budget Statement of 2004/2005, the theme was "Ensuring our Future Survival", again it rambled on with wonderful advertising words, but failed to mention women and children.

The Budget Statement of 2005/2006, the theme was “Ensuring Our Future Prosperity: Addressing our basic needs”, and I quote the Prime Minister, again:

"Mr. Speaker, the family is the basic unit of society: the main building block. If you can fix the family, you can fix society."

Clearly he did not heed his own words.

In the Budget Statement of 2006/2007, the theme was, “2020 Moving Onward”. Again, if you read the statement, beautiful words but; nothing about women or children.

In the Budget Statement of 2007/2008, "Vision 2020: Determined to Reach our Goal" and it was called if I remember during the election campaign, "The love budget". Again, the love budget had great words, but no mention of women and children.

And the last but not least, the mother of all budgets, "Shaping our Future" delivered by the new Minister of Finance and sadly, it was a different face, but the same words. Disappointing most as it failed yet again, in the sea of high hopes to address any gender sensitive issues, and sadly only attributed 20 lines of the three-hour presentation to the plans for the youth of our nation.

And so, Madam Deputy Speaker, in the wake of what now seems to be a total snobbery of over half of the population, in my capacity as a representative of the youth and women of Trinidad and Tobago, I ask the hon. Minister, specifically, where is the national gender policy; where is the national youth policy? [*Desk thumping*]

On June 13, 2003, the Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs met with major stakeholders to develop a National Gender Policy and Action Plan, which you heard about again today from the hon. Member for Port of Spain South. I am talking though of 2003, the aim of this meeting was to focus on the approaches that would be adopted to address critical gender concerns in this nation. After that meeting, the Concept Paper received from the Ministry stated and I quote:

“The Government was determined to advance the goals of gender equality and equity”

And further:

“The Government stood committed to positive action aimed at addressing the removal of discrimination based on gender and the equitable advancement of women and men,” the Ministry said.

8.20 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am sure you have heard exactly those same words; this was in 2003.

“Main areas of concern are human rights, the economy, education, training, health, gender-based violence, eradication of poverty and other important topics.”

Things looked promising. Then, of course, in 2003, having heard these wonderful things for the first time, even more promising was the speech delivered

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by the then Minister in the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, former Senator, Mrs. Joan Yuille-Williams. In 2004—now we have gone a year ahead—at the 49th session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

This is the commission dedicated exclusively to gender equality and the advancement of women; it is the principal global policymaking body. Every year representative member States gather at the United Nations headquarter in New York to evaluate progress on gender equality. They identify challenges, set global standards and formulate concrete policies to promote gender equality and the advancement of women worldwide.

At this session, the then Minister proudly boasted, and I quote:

“Madam Chairperson, we have designed a policy framework which would guide the work to be done in the critical areas of concerns for the years to come. Our National Gender Policy and Plan of Action was developed and presented to the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago in December 2004.”

We have just heard that it was revised and would be sent to the Cabinet in 2008. It still has not been sent.

She continued:

“Our National Gender Policy and Plan of Action was developed and presented to the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago in December 2004. The process used in developing the policy was one of which we are exceptionally proud.”—Except nobody else knows about it.—“To ensure widespread participation, we engaged in numerous consultations throughout the country at the level of sectors, communities and interest groups. The undeniable benefit of this process is the national ownership of the policy document, which would be of immeasurable benefit when the implementation phase is embarked upon.”

We are now in 2004 at this stage.

Those words, "when the implementation stage is embarked upon", would subsequently form the PNM's mantra that would haunt us year after year after year, because no sooner had her words of encouragement reached our ears, the hon. Member for San Fernando East, in his 2005/2006 Budget, withdrew the gender policy stating that, and I quote his own words:

"The Government recognises the need to develop a Gender Policy. The draft Gender Policy Document being circulated was not issued by the Government and does not reflect the Government policy."

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So everything that was said by the Minister and everything that was said from 2003, 2004, completely denied and dumped.

I want to make it clear that these were not my words or the words of the UNC, this was the hon. Prime Minister who continued:

"In fact, there are certain recommendations in the document to which the Government does not and will not subscribe. The Government is therefore requesting that the document which purports to be official Government policy be withdrawn from circulation."

As if this was not adding enough insult to injury, so to say, those of us who waited patiently since 2003 for this policy, nothing prepared us for the reason given by the hon. Member for San Fernando East for the withdrawal. It came during a conference organized by the National Association for the Empowerment of African People in 2006. He said, and I quote:

"My religious beliefs do not allow for a flexible interpretation of gender."

That was the last we heard from the Prime Minister on the matter of a national gender policy.

However, the broken promises did not stop there. The Prime Minister made no comment on the draft Gender Policy in his budget presentation of 2006/2007. The then Senator, Mrs. Joan Yuille-Williams, in her contribution, although admitting that the draft was withdrawn, again promised that it was again about to be sent to Cabinet. You heard that only 15 minutes ago. Credibility has been completely destroyed. [*Desk thumping*] According to the then Senator, I quote:

"The Gender Policy is very much alive, we are determined to have it done, it is part of our international obligation as well."

This takes me on to another comment that was made by the Member for Port of Spain South.

One of the international obligations that she was referring to was the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, better known as CEDAW, an international convention to which Trinidad and Tobago acceded in 1990. Today, we the women, the UNC, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, would like confirmation that this Government will stop refusing to comply with all the precepts of the Convention. We call on the Government to submit to the Secretary General a report on the impact of the legislative, judicial, administrative and/or any other measures that they have taken to implement this Convention, as is required by the members.

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The last report that was submitted to the committee was by the UNC government on February 06, 2001. No report has ever been submitted, at least to my knowledge, by this Government, even though their first opportunity, since the new Minister, coming from Port of Spain South, had the opportunity to do so at the beginning of this year when the committee met in its 40th session between January 14 and February 01, 2008.

It is now 2008, and we are no nearer to seeing anything remotely resembling a National Gender Policy, until, of course, just recently. It was actually quite ironic, because we had not heard anything since 2006, then ironically there was the perfect timing of an article that I read on page 22, March 08 in the *Newsday*, captioned:

"Gender Policy coming"

It is 2008, still coming. I quote:

"Former Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, Joan Yuille-Williams, yesterday disclosed that Government has completed a national gender policy and it will be implemented soon."

Madam Deputy Speaker, I think you are probably getting distressed with the number of times I have said, "will be implemented soon". [*Desk thumping*]

According to the report, Mrs. Yuille-Williams made the revelation when she addressed a function hosted in her honour by the PNM's Women's League at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Port of Spain."

Madam Deputy Speaker, you were probably there, so you know what I am talking about.

"She said the policy came to Cabinet in 2006."

I do not know if that was before or after it was withdrawn, rejected, dumped. I have lost count.

"and was being fleshed out..."—now it is being fleshed out—"by the Cabinet's Finance and General Purposes Committee."

I am quoting from the *Newsday*:

"Williams said that the policy has been returned to the ministry..."

I do not know which policy this is by now; I am lost.

"but it would not be long before it returns to Cabinet, and is fully implemented."

Hon. Members: Sounds familiar.

Miss M. Panday: For such a serious issue I do not wish to make light of it, but the mere fact that this announcement was made by someone who is neither a Cabinet Minister nor a Member of the Upper or Lower House, speaks volumes on how serious this Government takes the issue of gender policy.

Further, less credibility is given to the statement, in light of the fact that the current Minister in the Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs, the Member for Port of Spain South, failed to mention anything about a draft gender policy herself while speaking during the International Women's Day celebration. But since she did not, I would like to know, was Special Ambassador Joan Yuille-Williams authorized by the Minister to make this announcement? If not, would the Member for Port of Spain South please clarify the current status, beyond simply saying, "It has been revised and would be sent to the Cabinet." [Laughter] We are just hoping for something. The women of this country are hoping for a little more than that now.

If, however, the announcement by her Excellency Yuille-Williams, was, in fact, the official policy of the Government, then I call on the hon. Minister to advise this House and, by extension, the nation, as to whether her Ministry would be bringing it to the Cabinet next two weeks, next two years or next four years. When it actually has been sent to the Cabinet, as she said it would be done in two weeks time, could she advise how long after it would be implemented.

Obviously, based on her Excellency's comments, the draft Gender Policy is in an extremely advanced stage of development; therefore, I expect that the Minister would soon be in a position to give a commitment. I know she is bringing it to the Cabinet in two weeks, but I would like her to give us a definite time frame without using the words "soon, not too long, in the near future". Given the importance of this legislation and the track record of this Government, would the Minister be willing to commit to a time line as to the various stages of the development of the gender policy, from draft to public consultation, to implementation? Surely that cannot be too much to ask.

Kofi Annan, who we all know is the former Secretary General of the United Nations, said, and I quote:

"Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation, and it is perhaps the most pervasive. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture, or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development, and peace."

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Women in our country have been discriminated against for too long. Domestic violence, prostitution, rape, slavery, degradation and verbal abuse are the sad realities in the lives of the women of our country today.

When we talk about crime in our country and the need for security, we must not sideline important issues such as the protection of our women from domestic violence, [*Desk thumping*] which is a manifestation of unequal distribution of power between men and women, and a violation of women's human rights.

Women like Salona Constantine who was chopped to death by a close male relative while her screaming three-year-old daughter watched in horror; and Shalima Mohammed, the mother of six from Cunupia, who was hacked to death in her own bed. She reportedly withstood more than 15 years of an abusive relationship. Let us not forget or turn a blind eye, if they say it is UNC propaganda, to Wednesday, March 05 of this year, when a Court of Appeal judge described the level of domestic violence in this country as having reached epidemic proportions, yet the Government refuses to implement anti-discriminatory measures.

8.35 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you will recall the Equal Opportunities Act which could be used as a vital tool in the fight to end gender-based discrimination. The commission that was set up still does not have an office even though the Privy Council on October 15, 2007 ruled that the Government acted illegally by not implementing the Act that was passed by the UNC government seven years ago.

Today we demand that the Government does all that is necessary to enforce the legislation that aims to improve the quality of life for us all, improve relations between men and women, reduce levels of violence and facilitate social and domestic peace while ensuring culturally ingrained gender imbalances are corrected.

We demand that this Government protects our women and children because despite the laudable achievements and higher profile accorded to successful women which I heard them talk about, and the palpable increase in their social and economic contribution in Trinidad and Tobago, women and children still remain the most vulnerable in society today. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, it was only last week that the Citizens for a Better Trinidad and Tobago (CBTT) said that many homes are a war zone and with every passing day family violence is getting worse. We must place serious emphasis on good family values if we wish to have our children become exemplary fathers and mothers in the future.

It is a criminal act to physically abuse your spouse. It is not a right to own and abuse your spouse. Both victims and perpetrators need help; victims need to know that there is a way out of the violence from which they are suffering and perpetrators with a history must be named and shamed.

So for the Minister to respond during the post-budget forum with Tony Fraser to Hazel Brown last Wednesday as to why she did not address any gender-sensitive issues by saying that within the Government, policies such as with training available in CEPEP, the Senior Citizens Grant and pension opportunities, it is implicit that women are included, and there is no need to specifically single out women in the budget fails miserably to address the issues. [*Desk thumping*]

Further, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is unacceptable for the Minister, when questioned about the fact that many women are still receiving below minimum wage, to respond that using minimum wage to measure poverty in Trinidad and Tobago is narrow, and that looking at income measures is not sufficient and we should look at health and transportation and grants and as human beings as a whole, and not just women. It is beyond belief, I was in awe.

Dr. Moonilal: Bewildering.

Miss M. Panday: Bewildering. Yes, Member for Oropouche West, my neighbour.

Madam Deputy Speaker, women in our country make up over 49.8 per cent of our population. It is unthinkable that the Minister is unaware that in her capacity as the Minister of Finance that one way to pinpoint policies needed to reduce gender discrimination as mentioned by my colleague, the Member for Siparia, is through gender budgeting which involves the systematic examination of budget programmes and policies for their impact on women. I hope that the Member for Port of Spain South did that during her breakfast seminar.

As the budget allocation increases year after year, we see less and less and in some cases, no money being allocated to the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs to address the gender-related issues specifically. I agree with the Minister for Port of Spain South of course, we saw that the ministry did get money, but was it given or allocated to address the gender-related issues specifically? And I support the Member for Siparia and endorse what she said. The answer is no. [*Desk thumping*]

Notably, Madam Deputy Speaker, upon examination of the draft estimates—you see, we need to do that ourselves, because we do not have all the ministry staff to do it so we cannot be fooled. We do our work for ourselves, nobody can

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manipulate us and fool us. So investigating the draft estimates expenditure for fiscal year 2007/2008 out of the Consolidated Fund, a total of \$35 million was spent on that ministry, of which no money was allocated to improving gender equity and dealing with the issues that affect the women in our nation.

Further, for this fiscal year only the \$26 million has been allocated to this ministry, again, with nothing allocated for gender. And as if matters could not look anymore grim, when the figures for the Infrastructure Development Fund were examined, although for fiscal year 2008, \$340 million was given to the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, none of that money was allocated to gender.

Similarly, of the \$597 million that has been allocated in this 2009 estimate, nothing has been allocated to the gender division even though the Minister of Finance came to the House last Friday requesting an additional \$3.9 billion. Absolutely shameless!

Similarly, Madam Deputy Speaker, when we examined the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, from the Consolidated Fund, \$41 million has been allocated to the ministry from \$48 million for the last fiscal year, so there has been a decrease, a substantial decrease of \$7 million and from the Infrastructure Development Fund, \$90 million has been allocated to this ministry for the fiscal year. Most of this has been allocated to the social infrastructure about which I am sure my colleague from Chaguanas West is happy about, but nothing has been allocated for youth development.

How did the Government intend to further develop projects that needed to be implemented under the Strategic Implementation Plan for the National Youth Policy? Is the Minister not aware that the youth in our country today feel misplaced and unheard? We need only look to recent years to see the increasing social problems our country has been experiencing involving the youths of our nation.

Despite the economy's increasing inflows of revenue, the PNM has created a legacy of massive unemployment, decreasing education opportunities, police brutality, murders and disappearance of our nation's youth. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is no secret that unemployment and crime are undoubtedly linked. Here in Trinidad and Tobago, crimes are not only being committed against children, they are being committed by children and this is because the working poor—and this is a statistic for the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's—are heavily concentrated among the youth; that is 15-24-year-olds who account for 27.9 per cent of the total working poor class across both sexes.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the statistics show that under this Government, young males age 15 to 24 were more likely to become among the working poor, 30.8 per cent rather than their female counterparts, 23.5 per cent.

This grim reality exists although the PNM continues to pump money into MuST, HYPE and YTEPP. In fact, in the 2007 budgeted allocations for these programmes was \$45 million for the Multi-Sector Skills Training Programme (MuST), \$32 million for the HYPE and \$51,500,000 for YTEPP clearly indicating that these programmes are absolute failures and a waste of money since they are clearly not equipping young people with the skill and expertise that are required for them to take advantage of the more rewarding positions available in the job market.

Madam Deputy Speaker, what we need is to create effective training programmes for young people that are geared towards meeting the demands of a competitive marketplace because this will equip our graduates with the capabilities of finding lucrative employment at the completion of their programme as opposed to the current system in which graduates are finding it nearly impossible to obtain meaningful, permanent employment after their training has ended. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, when we come to evaluating the benefits of the Government's allocation to education, again we can categorically state it is not how much you spend but how you spend what you have because only 20.9 per cent of youths, persons between 15-24 attain primary level education, whilst 60.2 per cent attain secondary level education and 1 per cent attain tertiary level education.

Those statistics clearly show that the education system in the country under the PNM is therefore very restrictive under all levels causing a dropout of 79.1 per cent of students at the primary level, 39.8 per cent—

[*Minister Parsanlal stands*]

No, I am sorry I am not giving way. You will have your chance to respond, please.

The effect of this system is that a large percentage of young persons who are out of the school system are turning to a culture of crime and drugs, or becoming sexually active or pregnant at an early age.

Madam Deputy Speaker, a World Bank report entitled "Trinidad and Tobago's teenagers need to stay in school and find jobs": reveals that while the payoff for staying in school is high, so is the price for dropping out. Each additional year of schooling increases individual earnings by about 15 per cent. By contrast, the cost of dropping out of secondary school and getting involved in

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crime is about \$101,810 measured through lost earnings as compared to those of a secondary school graduate and a cost of crime.

Madam Deputy Speaker, although the issue of crime has been comprehensively and effectively dealt with by the hon. Member for Princes Town North, I would like to say a few words on crime committed against the youths of our nation.

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

Miss M. Panday: Madam Deputy Speaker, no please. These are important issues; do not take it out of my time. You have not spoken as yet, you will have your chance. [*Interruption*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Please, could we allow the hon. Member to make her contribution and in the event she decides not to give way, by now we know how we should deal with the matter. Let us not be telling people sit down and so forth please.

Miss M. Panday: Madam Deputy Speaker, I was saying that Trinidad and Tobago today is witnessing the carnage of our children; it is bone chilling the percentage of crimes that are committed against our children. Yet, this Government refuses to take the issue of crime seriously and they made such statements, as that by the Energy Minister, Conrad Enill, on Sunday, I believe and I quote:

8.50 p.m.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Miss M. Panday: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was saying that this Government refuses to take the issue of crime seriously and they make comments such as the statement made by Minister Enill and I quote:

“The people of this country are not suffering. We are far better off today than before.”

How could anybody, far less a Minister of Government, make such an incredulous statement when our country is facing one of the bloodiest periods

ever experienced in our history? The murder toll is now 401 as of yesterday and more now than ever before our country's young people are being murdered at an alarming rate. It is beyond comprehension, but I guess those are the words of a caring government.

Having dealt with the issues affecting the women and the youth of our nation within the time permitted, I would now like to address some crucial issues affecting the people of the constituency of Oropouche West. The people in my constituency continue to suffer terribly from water shortages, poor roads, drainage problems, flooding, crime, praedial larceny, to name a few; areas such as Ghandi Village, Gopie Trace, Puzzel Island, Suchit Trace, Woodland, Doorbassa, Harbajan Hill, Timital, Birbal Trace, Antilles Trace, San Francique, to name a few. These are not places that the Minister of Works and Transport would probably know of. Those areas continue to suffer from the lack of basic human necessities such as water.

And while the people of Oropouche West have to survive without pipe-borne water, this PNM Government has managed to squander billions of dollars on WASA by paying exorbitant salaries to consultants and executives, like the CEO in 2003, of the heavily indebted public utility, who was receiving a salary and perks of \$900,000 a year.

The supply of water in these areas is not regular. It may be funny to them because they are not affected, but the people of Oropouche West are affected. You see, water comes once a fortnight, late at nights and only for a few hours. So if you want to ensure that you have a supply of water for the next two weeks, you need to sit and wait till the wee hours in the night and hope you will get enough that will last you for the next following weeks. That is absolutely unacceptable, not in this day and age.

They spend billions of dollars and still most of us in this country do not have running water and I speak for all our surrounding constituencies in the South. That just goes to show that money, again I say, is not the problem. The problem is this Government's inability to manage! Water shortages are not our only problem in Oropouche West. On the one hand we have no water and, on the other, we experience some of the worst flooding throughout the country. Therefore, when it rains, poor drainage and blocked watercourses cause substantial damage to people's homes and businesses.

Another concern raised by the constituency of Oropouche West was the neglected agricultural industry in this area, and I am sure my colleague will go

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into greater depths with that, but it is important for me to say it, because it is my constituency and the people of Oropouche West voted for the United National Congress because they had faith in us. [*Desk thumping*] So it is my duty to highlight. Madam Deputy Speaker, I do not know if you have ever visited that area, so I am personally inviting you. Oropouche West, East and those areas were considered at one time to be the food basket of the country. The once thriving agricultural industry in this area has been adversely affected by flooding, as well as the high price of necessary supplies, such as chemicals and equipment.

You will remember in December 2006 hundreds of farmers in Penal and environs lost thousands of dollars as a result of floods. It was only not long ago during the election campaign I was reminded by the people of San Francique of a particular farmer. He was a Barrackpore farmer, actually. His name was Popo Narine Dass, 78 years old. He lost four acres worth of chadon beni, what some of us know as bandania; oregano; fine thyme and mint.

The painful part about it was—and I must use the word although I try to avoid it—this vicious PNM’s response was—the Ministry sent him a cheque, believe it or not, for \$150. He was lucky, as I am told that some others who suffered from that flood received only \$48.50 and I know they were telling the truth because one of the ladies saved the cheque. The Government’s official position was, and this is from the *Trinidad Guardian*, of December 16, 2006. I quote:

“The government will not be paying compensation to farmers.

...allocations are tabulated not on the amount of produce lost for flooding but instead based on the amount of damage to farmers’ plants and the farmers’ replanting needs.”

Madam Deputy Speaker, \$48.50 cannot re-populate four acres; it cannot buy seedlings and fertilizer; it cannot cover the cost of sanitizing the land and it cannot cover the cost of ploughing. So how can you have money to invest in technology if every year your profits are washed away by floods?

Farmers have been kept back in a cycle of underdevelopment and poverty because they have been struggling to overcome the challenges of lack of access roads, irrigation, markets and praedial larceny.

In addition to flood damage in this area, the farmers also have a problem with praedial larceny, as mentioned by the Member for Siparia. As a result, most farmers have either scaled back or abandoned agriculture altogether and this, no doubt, has contributed to the rising food prices we are experiencing today.

Again—credibility—since 2003 the PNM has been promising in successive budgets to establish a praedial larceny unit of the police service. To date this has not been done.

While the PNM Government continues to depend on the depleting energy resources, our agricultural sector continues to be ignored and farmers are being forced out of the sector because of Government's neglect. What we need is for this Government to stimulate and sustain agricultural activity as an engine for food production.

These issues and so many more raised by the Opposition are done with the hope that the Government would heed what is being said as sound suggestions and not shrug them off as UNC policies and so irrelevant because we are not in government. Because when we were, contrary to what the Member for Diego Martin North/East says week after week, after week, in the hope of somehow brainwashing the population; in 2001, the International Monetary Fund which had to bail out this country in the 1980s now praised the UNC's performance. Here is what the IMF said at that time, and I quote: "steady economic expansion over the past five years", "a foreign investment boom", and "the soundness of the fiscal and monetary policy stances".

The *New York Times*, the most influential newspaper in the United States wrote and I quote:

"While much of the rest of the English-speaking Caribbean worries about making ends meet, this twin-island nation...is experiencing a burst of investment and growth...emerging as the region's foremost economic success story."

The United Nations Development Programme rated Trinidad and Tobago in the top five developing nations in the world for the way the UNC have "overcome severe levels of poverty". So there are things which can be learnt from successive governments.

In conclusion, I would like the people of Trinidad and Tobago to understand—I plead with them to understand and appreciate the value of preserving our democracy, for it is only when it is taken away from us would we appreciate what we have lost. I say so in the context so that when people's rights are taken away overnight—when they feel that their rights have been taken away overnight—it is not; it tends to be something that happens gradually and then before you know it, life is no longer what it used to be and our nation's future is bleak.

This is something that is close to my heart; it is something that I have been thinking about and thought that I would use this platform in my budget delivery to

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mention the importance of democracy and preserving it. You see, something very similar happened in Nazi Germany under the leadership of Hitler which soon became a dictatorship. A dictatorship requires one person and one party to be in control of a nation and a climate of fear.

I have mentioned no names. [*Interruption*]

Mr. S. Panday: “Yuh going good.”

Miss M. Panday: You are absolutely right; when the ball falls in your court.

When Hitler was appointed Chancellor on January 30, 1933, it was at the head of a coalition government. But even so, it was very clear in his mind that it would not remain this way for long. Soon he had acquired much greater powers than the former leading politicians could have ever foreseen when they supported his appointment as Chancellor. Soon the death of the President allowed him to combine both Chancellor’s and President’s positions into one, when Hitler became the Fuehrer and Reich Chancellor. By that time, everybody, from the lay people to the doctors, teachers, lawyers and economists, were asking: How did Germany descend so quickly into a dictatorship?

When Hitler was appointed in January 1933, Germany was a democracy. Germany had fair elections; nobody had their right to vote abused; there were other political parties you could vote for, et cetera. To pass a law, the Reichstag, which is equivalent to the Parliament, had to agree to it after a bill went through the normal processes of discussion, arguments et cetera, took place. More so, in that Parliament of 1933, over 50 per cent of those who held seats were against the Nazi party. Therefore it would have been very unlikely for Hitler to have got passed into law what he wanted. Many saw Hitler as the fall-guy politician who would have to basically—they did not see him as a threat—would be the one to shoulder the blame if things got worse under his leadership.

Hitler had promised a general election in March 1933. This would have been, in his mind, the perfect opportunity for him to show all politicians who opposed him where the true loyalties lay in the German people. In fact, 1932 had shown Hitler that there was a possibility that support for the Nazis had peaked as they were showing in the 1932 November election.

9.05 p.m.

Anything other than a huge endorsement of Hitler and the Nazi party would have been a disaster and a gamble which, it is possible, Hitler did not want to take. One week before the election was due to take place, the parliament building

burned down. Hitler immediately declared that it was the signal for a communist takeover of the nation, to play on the fear of the people and the president, because at that time communism was what everybody feared. Hitler asked Hindenburg, the president, to grant him emergency powers in view of the communist takeover. Using the constitution, the president agreed to pass the law—and this one is beautiful—for the protection of the people and the state. This law gave Hitler what he wanted, a ban on the communists and socialists taking part in the election campaign.

The leaders from both parties were arrested and the newspaper was shut down to keep the peace and maintain the law. The thugs roamed the streets beating up those who openly opposed Hitler. The election took place in March. Though Hitler was convinced it would be the last, Hitler did not get the number of votes he wanted, but he did get enough to get over a 50 per cent majority in the parliament.

Mr. Hunt: Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order.

Miss M. Panday: I am not giving way, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Hunt: On a point of order, Standing Order 43(2).

Madam Deputy Speaker: In a budget debate you normally will give some leeway, so that I allow the Member. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss M. Panday: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

In continuing, I am pleading to the people of Trinidad and Tobago to heed dictatorship and I am simply reviewing history and asking that the people beware; that 12 million people voted for what were effectively two outlawed parties.

It is remarkable that when the intimidation of voters was taken into account after the burning down of the parliament, politicians had no where to meet. The Kroll Opera House in Berlin was chosen. This was a relatively small round building perfect for meeting. On March 23, elected officials were due to meet to discuss and vote on Hitler's enabling law. As politicians neared the building they found it surrounded by SS and SA thugs who were trying to ensure that only Nazi or nationalist politicians went into the building.

The votes for this law were crucial as it gave Hitler a vast amount of power. The law stated basically that any Bill only needed Hitler's signature and within 24 hours that Bill would become law in Germany. With only Nazis and other right wing politicians inside the Kroll Opera House, the Bill was quickly passed into law. The Act gave Hitler what he wanted, dictatorial power. What he wanted would become law in Germany within 24 hours of his signature being put on paper.

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On April 07, officials were put in charge of all local government provinces.

On May 02, 1933, trade unions—this is how they take away democracy—were abolished. Their funds were taken; their leaders were put in prison; their workers were given a May day holiday in return.

On June 14, a law was passed making it illegal to form a new political party. It also made the Nazi party the only legal political party in Germany. [*Interruption*]

Since it is paining him so much, I shall round up. His only remaining problem—and this is when you have to worry from his point of view—was the loyalty within his party ranks. In June 1934, he overcame this with the Night of the Long Knives. Then I will give you the book.

The reason I reiterate this poignant moment in history is to illustrate the point I made earlier. We in Trinidad and Tobago need to do all we can to preserve our democracy. We in Trinidad and Tobago need to do all we can to preserve our democracy because in the words of the great Mahatma Gandhi, “Earth provides enough to satisfy every man’s need, but not every man’s greed.”

Thank you.

The Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Peter Taylor): Madam Deputy Speaker, I intended to begin my contribution by congratulating the hon. Minister of Finance for what I thought was an excellent 2009 budgetary presentation. As debates go I have to join issue with the Member for Oropouche West as she sought to deviate from the issue by making some very distant reference to Hitler’s Nazi Germany and personality with the reality of Trinidad and Tobago.

The characteristics of any dictator run counter to the contribution recently and to the overtures by the hon. Prime Minister to further the cause of integration which is not a new concept. Pursuing regional integration by definition suggests a surrendering of some sovereignty. I am sure that the hon. Member will agree that that is in direct contradiction to the point that she was trying so hopelessly to make.

While I am on the point of regional integration, so much has been said in the national community about the attempts at regional integration which is not a new concept. Ever since 1961 with the break up of the confederation, the issue of regional unity has been part of the national consciousness. When in 1979, Black Stalin sang Caribbean Man, he was giving voice to a concept that has been well entrenched.

When the hon. Prime Minister made the point that 85 per cent of the manufacturing exports of Trinidad and Tobago go to the Caribbean, the point of Caribbean integration has been made out. Our survival depends as much on the proper functioning of those economies as their dependence on us depends on a strong and stable national economy. My friend for Oropouche West embarked more on an academic expose that does not fit with the reality of Trinidad and Tobago.

The essence of the presentation by the Minister of Finance spoke significantly to assisting the downtrodden and most vulnerable in the society. One thing the Government realized and it was borne out in the budgetary presentation, is that while inflation is a challenge, it is more a social problem than an economic problem because of the fact that inflation as was rightly said, has the capacity to erode all the social benefits, impoverish and make more disadvantaged those persons on fixed incomes and those at the lower end of the economic scale.

I was happy to see the number of initiatives that the hon. Minister of Finance introduced in the fiscal package that will assist directly those disadvantaged. It is not for me to repeat the number of benefits, but I will digress and remind hon. Members and the national community about some of them.

A significant intervention is the removal of stamp duty on properties costing \$850,000 or less; the increase in the Senior Citizens Grant to \$1,950. The free passes on the bus and ferry are direct interventionist policies that will redound to the benefit of the same disadvantaged about whom so much has been said. As far as the Ministry of Legal Affairs and the Consumer Affairs Division are concerned, our interest is of course in monitoring food prices and to the extent that food prices have contributed significantly to the rise in inflation. When you look at headline inflation, you will see that a very large component is made up of food prices. To that extent the Government from as early as 2002, sought to address that issue by removing the VAT on many of the most basic items. That continues today. In March this year, the common external tariff was also reduced and/or suspended on many basic items. From a very early stage the Government recognized the impact in the inflationary spiral and sought to create the safety net for the most disadvantaged.

Much has been said on the need for greater efficiency in the economy. I agree with the point that inflation is a scourge. The Government is implementing the special purpose state enterprises precisely to create the type of efficiency for which the others on the other side are clamouring. The Member for Siparia indicated that 80 per cent of the government programmes have not been

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implemented. It is in recognition of the fact that the public service as it was conceived originally is a post colonial relic and was not designed for the type of development that this country is demanding.

As a result of that fact the special purpose state enterprises have been created precisely to do away with the amount of bureaucracy, overpricing of contracts and the inordinate delays that have become part of the national landscape.

9.20 p.m.

So, on the one hand, they are asking for greater efficiency and when the mechanisms are put in place to address this, there is another complaint.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am happy that we can say with a sense of pride that insofar as the Vision 2020 imperatives are concerned, the Government is well on its way to ensuring that the five pillars of development will be achieved.

I was happy some time ago to issue instruments of appointment to two committees, one of which was the committee to examine and regulate the video industry. I digress to that point only to say that the chairperson of that committee was the former UNC Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, Miss Gillian Lucky, quite an accomplished attorney.

In the course of her discussions, she did an interview with the *Newsday* and it was interesting to hear her comments insofar as her own view of the Vision 2020 document was concerned. I wish to read her comments into the record, only to show that there are persons of conscience who hold no brief for the Government, who recognize the lofty ideals of that document and who appreciate the very greatness of its presumption, the sheer presumption of its conception and that the document is really the way forward for the Government and, by extension, the country.

I take pleasure in reading an excerpt. The headline says: “Gillian: I am not PNM”. Such was her effusive praise for the Vision 2020 plan that perhaps the editor was wondering if she had gone PNM. She said, among other things:

“I have read Vision 2020 and there are some very commendable policies and noble objectives (in it),’....‘I have always argued that the time-line (for completion) was too far.’”—she is suggesting that we speed it up.—“They have given a time-line of 2020 when in fact there are things that should be achieved much earlier than that.”

The article goes on to say that she described Vision 2020 as part of the programme of the Government of the day that is leading the charge right now.

So those on this side of the House are very confident in the Government's plan of action. We are confident in the rightness of the decisions and we are very confident that as we move in our respective Ministries that the vision and the ideals of a developed society by 2020 will be achieved.

I wish also to make reference to another point of contention raised on the other side, which was addressed by Members on this side already, but I will take a slightly different angle. That has to do with the development and the building of the Hyatt Regency Hotel. I was at the function when that hotel was officially commissioned early in the year and I remember two young ladies who spoke, both nationals of this country. They expressed such a pride in working on a building of that stature. One of them reminisced of her experience working on the project. She was speaking on behalf of Genivar Developers. She noted that the project brought together persons of various nationalities, speaking various languages; all with their different cultural mores, but all of whom were able to find a common unity of purpose to achieve the ultimate objective.

There was another young lady, Miss Lisa Boos, who spoke as the representative of Bouygues Batiment, and expressed pride that it was the first time a national could have remained here and be exposed to such technological development. She indicated that the transfer of technology to local personnel was very significant.

There were many who were in opposition to the building of the Hyatt and today we sit here to hear that in a year or two that Hyatt could realize a profit. That is fascinating and has surpassed all expectations. It speaks to the vision of the Government; it speaks to the vision of the hon. Prime Minister in agreeing to stick with the design in spite of the opposition that we were building too many buildings and that it would have been another white elephant.

I wish to look at the important contribution of certain aspects of my Ministry. I will start with the company's registry. It is phenomenal to know the number of new businesses that have been registered within the last two years or so. When I call the figures they will reveal the level of confidence that exists in the business community and the level of entrepreneurship that is taking place at the lower levels of the society in stark contrast to the distorted image painted by others.

In 2007, there were 4,452 new companies. Up to September 2008, there have been 3,320 companies incorporated.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

As far as business names go, there were some 5,571 business names registered for 2008 alone and the year is not yet finished. As well, the company's registry is

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really the flagship of the Ministry of Legal Affairs and one of the innovative aspects of the company's registry has been the ability to provide eservices where now someone can stay from any part of the world and access the online registry. We have had hits—persons using the system—from as far as Singapore, England, Bermuda, India, Hong Kong and Taiwan, to name a few.

The online per download service—you pay a certain amount of money and you now have access to download information—tells you that the economy of Trinidad and Tobago is sound. It tells you that the investment climate remains healthy and that in spite of what is happening in the international community, the macroeconomic fundamentals of the Trinidad and Tobago economy is second to none, certainly in the Caribbean.

When we listen to the naysayers, the facts reveal a completely different story. If I go as far as back as 2004, there were 3,070 new companies incorporated; in 2005, 4,083. So within four or five years there has been this acceleration of development along all strata of society.

Mr. Speaker, another noteworthy development—and this all speaks to the pillar of enabling competitive business, of developing innovative people and of promoting effective government—we have recognized that the demand for birth certificates will continue, having regard to the fact that it is now a prerequisite for many other Ministries, the Ministry of National Security of course being the main one where you must have your computerized birth certificate to access your computer readable passport.

To this end, the registry has now co-opted the services of TTPost where we have a mail-in/mail-out service so that no longer will you have to come in physically to the Ministry of Legal Affairs. Your birth certificate can be mailed too. Through the TT connect service—there is one in St. James and one in Princes Town—persons can now access their birth certificate from these areas. I am happy to say that as it stands now, the Ministry of Legal Affairs has issued over 900,000 birth certificates. That deserves some applause. [*Desk thumping*] In fact the exact figure is some 998,720.

As we seek to promote effective Government, that is really a significant achievement because when you consider that number of persons out of a population of 1.3 million—of course there are persons who live outside Trinidad and Tobago who would access the service—it tells you that the whole vision of promoting effective Government is being met.

9.35 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the whole thrust to computerize the registry is a continuing one and the Government will continue to partner with the Ministry of Public Administration, to connect with the Government's backbone that would ensure that these services would become accessible to many persons who, as I have indicated before, may not be disposed to coming into the capital city.

Another area of interest/note/recognition is that as the Government of Trinidad and Tobago moves towards developed country status, it is imperative that we develop and modernize our laws as they relate to consumer protection. In this regard, you would recall some time around March or April, a Green Paper was laid on Consumer Protection in the 21st Century. The whole purpose of drafting the new legislation is simply in recognition that many of the existing laws, for example the Sale of Goods Act, are outdated and do not provide a facility for persons to make purchases via the Internet. There is no real consumer protection for credit card purchases over the Internet, et cetera. The Government, in taking the initiative, has embarked on a wholesale redrafting of the legislation, so much so that consultants have been engaged, PSTG consulting out of Canada, to redraft the whole consumer policy, so that as we move into the coming years, the consumer legislation would be standardized and harmonized and that the expectations of a developed society would be met.

I would identify a few of the benefits that would accrue from new consumer legislation. One would be, of course, the facilitation of ecommerce, the extension of the protection that previously existed for the sale of goods to include the sale of services and the development of clear credit disclosure rules to be consistently applied across all service providers. That would create greater transparency. Also the enhancement of protection against unconscionable business practices and, of course, the whole issue of no exchange/no refund, where many, many consumers fall prey to businessmen who refuse to exchange a good or service, where it is clear that the product is defective.

One of the innovative plans under this new legislation is, of course, to have a consumer tribunal that would adjudicate over matters not exceeding \$100,000. A person who may have bought a motor vehicle or an appliance and does not wish or might not have the means to access the normal judicial process, would have a very speedy and inexpensive consumer tribunal that would be the final arbiter of such disputes.

Mr. Speaker, sometime last year, I believe it would have been August 2007, a National Consultation on Food Prices was held. No doubt the Member for

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Oropouche West remembers. There were many recommendations that emerged out of that consultation, as they related to addressing the issue of food prices. Since that time, there have been a series of projects that have started and would give effect to many of those recommendations. Of course, some of the recommendations would include the establishment of megafarms. It would speak as well to the development of the agricultural sector, as it relates to praedial larceny and the development of greater fishing. To that end, I was happy to appoint two committees: the Prices Council, which was a recommendation of that said committee, under the chairmanship of Dr. Sharon Hutchinson. The mandate of that committee is to address comprehensively, from a supply-side perspective, the level of prices in the economy, in particular the increase in prices of food in the construction sector, as well as in mainstream agricultural sector. A Consumer Advisory Board was also appointed under the chairmanship of Mr. Brian Moore. The responsibility, *inter alia*, is to monitor prices and advise the Minister on all matters relating to consumerism.

What is significant about the outcome of the consultation was that it was really an opportunity for the national community to make its voice heard. It was an opportunity for the views of the national community to be taken into consideration. In a sense, that is really the highest tradition of a democratically elected government. It is the highest tradition of the Westminster system and in a sense it is the highest tradition of the PNM, where the views, however contradictory or divergent, could be given a voice and taken into account.

As Dr. Eric Williams stated at the Queen's Hall Conference in 1962 when they met—[*Interruption*] Yes, Member, I have read. Member for Chaguanas West, *Forged From the Love of Liberty*. The hon. Member for Chaguanas West would know that I also read *Inward Hunger*. The views of all and sundry could be heard. Dr. Williams summed it up by saying it was an educated democracy in deliberation, the Government seeking advice from its citizens.

The Government recognizes the importance of increasing the supply side of food and to that end, there has been established a Ministerial Committee and a Prices and Inflation Committee which is an oversight committee that is now monitoring the implementation of many of these recommendations that came out of the National Consultation on Food Prices.

I am happy to say that in the fullness of time, sooner rather than later, the nation would be seeing the benefits of this investment. It takes time to grow food. The important thing to note is that the infrastructure is being developed, the

foundation has been laid and in the fullness of time, the megafarms and demonstration farms would begin to have an impact on the national economy.

I was somewhat disappointed to hear the Member for Mayaro in his contribution seeking to trivialize the seed distribution effort that found favour with so many, indeed, including those on his side. The seed distribution programme, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, was an effort to sensitize the nation about the importance of growing our own food.

If you are in a situation of rising prices then the question now presents itself as to what I can do. The distribution was from the Ministry of Legal Affairs, which started at City Gate. No sooner had that hit the newspapers, I received a request from the Member for Oropouche East to replicate the same distribution in his constituency. We were happy to facilitate him, except that I personally did not attend. The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources acceded to his request. No sooner than that, I had another request from the Member for Fyzabad. I was happy to oblige. I must say that I was the Ministry of Legal Affairs, was received with open arms in Fyzabad; figuratively speaking, of course. I think the message and the venture had the desired effect, because it showed that we on this side were not prepared to play politics with the issue of growing food in the country and that we were prepared to go anywhere in the country, regardless from whence the request came, to extend, emulate and duplicate the virtues of the seed distribution exercise.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy, as I have said, to really compliment the Minister of Finance for an excellent presentation. It is really in the arena of public opinion that the merits of the 2009 budget would be felt. That is where the judgment will be passed on the effectiveness of the measures of this excellent presentation.

Throughout the budgetary presentation—as I have indicated earlier, while inflation is the main concern, it could have been much worse—the Minister of Finance was careful not to include the cost of fuel in the whole dynamics. In other words, she was able, in her presentation, to preserve the price of diesel and super unleaded, to ensure that in spite of the rise of the price of oil and fuel internationally, the Government's subsidy, for all intents and purposes, remained on the price of diesel and super unleaded.

9.50 p.m.

So, very innovatively, the Minister of Finance was able to ensure that all and sundry and, more so, the most disadvantaged persons who are on a fixed income would be spared the brunt of the effects of the increase in oil prices. [*Desk thumping*] Also, the macroeconomic fundamentals remain sound and the economy

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remains internationally competitive, and these are the key indices that tell you how well your economy is doing. I am happy to have been able to contribute to the debate, and to give some exposé of what the Ministry of Legal Affairs is doing to further the objectives of the Vision 2020 policy insofar as it relates to the pillars of investing in sound infrastructure; enabling competitive business; developing an innovative people; and promoting effective Government. It is within the context of these developmental pillars that you get a sense of how well the country is developing.

We heard from the hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs and the expenditure that is taking place at the level of the community. [*Desk thumping*] Those are the indices that tell you that this is, indeed, a caring Government. [*Desk thumping*] Those are the indices that ultimately ensure that the social peace is preserved; those are the indices that will ensure that Trinidad and Tobago continues along the path of development and along the path of political and social stability which are indispensable to any development and to any nation building thrust.

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

Dr. Hamza Rafeeq (*Caroni Central*): Mr. Speaker, thank you. Before I get into my contribution, I want to deal with an issue which my colleagues have dealt with, and which I think merits a response from every Member on this side. First of all, I would like to congratulate the Member for Siparia who gave an excellent contribution. People from all over the country who support our party and people who do not normally support our party have been calling in and offering their congratulations on a brilliant response by the Member for Siparia. I would also like to congratulate all the Members on this side who have spoken so far and, in particular, the baby on our side, the Member for Oropouche West, who gave an excellent contribution. [*Desk thumping*]

By the same token, in the 13 years that I have been in this Parliament, and in the 14 budget presentations that I have had the opportunity to witness in this House, I think by far the worst contribution has come from the Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Speaker, I am saying this because my constituents have asked me to say that they are fed up with the behaviour of the Member for Diego Martin North/East; they are fed up with his limited vocabulary of “dotishness”, foolishness and arrant nonsense and so on. I just want to put two things straight that he said. First of all, he said a lot of things about our party and that is okay,

because he is free to do that. If he feels that would help his cause, he is free to do that. He said in his contribution that—this is where I take offence—the Member for Caroni Central wanted the job of the Member for Tabaquite as Chief Whip.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Tabaquite and I have an excellent relationship, and I have no desire of taking his job as the Chief Whip. More seriously, I want to say that I will never aspire to the job of Chief Whip as long as the Member for Diego Martin North/East is the Leader of Government Business on that side. He is a difficult person to work with; he is a person who cannot be trusted; and he is an obnoxious person. I will never accept the job as Chief Whip as long as he is the Leader of Government Business on that side. So, let us put that rest.

The other point that I want to lay to rest is—I do not usually get into these things but, as I said, I have been asked to express these sentiments and I think I should—the Member said that the Member for Siparia will always be the bridesmaid, and would never be the bride. I want to tell him that in his case he will never be the bridesmaid; he will never be the bride; he will never be the best man; and he will never be the groom. I want to say to the Member that as long as he is sitting there, he will never get one day or a “10 days” to act as Prime Minister in the PNM Government. He will never get it! [*Desk thumping*] You will not be the bridegroom, the bride, the best man or anything. Mr. Speaker, that is just by the way. Let us get on to more serious business.

Given the track record of implementation by this Government, many of our contributors have made the point that the exercise that we are engaged in at present, over the last couple days and for the next couple of days could best be described as an exercise in futility. The Government has listed a set of projects that it would like to accomplish during this fiscal year, and it has listed the budgetary allocations for those projects, but we know that only 20 per cent of those projects will be implemented. We do not know which 20 per cent will be lucky to get implemented. More than that, we know that the Government, by its track record, will be returning here once, twice or three times for additional allocation. That is really a paradox.

When you implement 20 per cent of your projects with 120 per cent of your allocation, how does that make sense? You cannot implement all of your projects, but yet you come for additional allocation during the year. None of us know which projects will be implemented; none of us know what the final appropriation will be. I have said that this exercise really bears no relationship to reality. We do not know which projects will be implemented and we do not know what the size of the budget will eventually be.

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Mr. Speaker, the second point that I want to make in passing is that this Government has no interest in saving. It wants to spend all the money that it has and even more than it has by way of borrowing and so forth. A few weeks ago, the Government was asked about the impact that the situation in the United States and the financial market will have on our country, and one of the Ministers of Finance said that savings will be affected, but spending will not be affected. That was one of the most irresponsible statements made by a Government Minister over the last 10 years. Here we have a situation which is uncertain, and we do not know where this situation will eventually lead and the Government had a golden opportunity to address the nation in terms of letting the nation know that we have a situation, and we will not be able to spend the money that we had previously allocated, and that the Government will engage in belt tightening; save a little more; and spend a little less and they expect the national community to do the same. The Government had a golden opportunity to do that and it has missed out on that golden opportunity. That is the message you should be sending to the national community; save a little more money and spend a little less, because you do not know where all this is eventually going to end up.

Today, we have a situation in United States of America which has caused stocks to tumble right down. I am saying that the situation is so volatile and so uncertain that the Government had a golden opportunity to tell the population to save, engage in a little belt tightening and spend a little less and to do that by example. The fact that the Government spends so much money and wants to save so little is reflected in the fact that the Government has put an oil price of \$70 a barrel. The Government should have put an oil price much less than that so that it can save much more. [*Desk thumping*] Inflation is now 13.5 per cent and we had predicted by the end of this year it is going to be 15 per cent and it may very well cross that. The Member for Diego Martin Central said that we must not give bad news, but we are not giving bad news. The statistics that we are giving are real.

Mr. Speaker, on Friday morning when we were coming to the Parliament there was a group of persons standing outside Woodford Square and they were protesting the non-construction of the Belmont RC School. They were saying that the children in the school are housed in four buildings and the buildings do not have adequate toilet facilities and adequate water supply and so on. They have been getting promises for the last how many years and these promises have not been fulfilled. They have asked me to raise that matter in the Parliament. Since their MP did not raise the issue, they asked us to raise it in Parliament and to bring it to the attention of the Government and, in particular, the Minister of Education.

I want on their behalf to raise the issue and to ask the Minister of Education to meet with the residents of Belmont and have discussions with them with a view to working out a timetable as to when the school will be constructed. I did promise the residents of Belmont that I would raise the matter, and I hope the Minister of Education has taken note.

Mr. Speaker, everyone in this country knows that one of the most important problems facing this country is the issue of food prices. Sometime ago, we did a survey in the UNC and we were amazed of the number of respondents who told us that the issue of food prices was the No. 1 issue was facing them and it was much more important than crime. Mr. Speaker, this is not surprising, because food prices have continued to rise over the last six years to the extent that since this Government has been in office, the average food prices have increased by 290 per cent. That is putting a lot of stress and strain on the people who are living below the poverty line and around the poverty line. *[Interruption]* You do not believe this, but let us work it out. This document is from the Central Statistical Office. I am saying that if something in 2002 cost \$100, today it is costing \$291 dollars. Work out whatever is the percentage.

10.05 p.m.

Whatever the percentage; work out whatever is the percentage. *[Crosstalk]* This is from the Central Statistical Office, rate of inflation 2003 to 2008 in Trinidad and Tobago; 2003 inflation, 18.1 per cent; 2004 inflation, 8.6 per cent; 2005 inflation, 25.4 per cent; 2006 inflation, 23.2 per cent; 2007 inflation, 17.2 per cent and 2005 inflation, 25.3 per cent. Are you saying that the Central Statistical Office is lying? Are you saying that they gave wrong statistics? *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Dr. H. Rafeeq: The prices of food have escalated beyond control, whether they want to accept it or not, that is the stark reality. A few weeks ago in an answer to a question in this House, the Minister of Social Development indicated that based on calculation from 2005 prices, 16.7 per cent of the population were living below the poverty line. He said that translated to about 210,000 persons, by any standard—I am not going to quibble about 210,000, 250,000 or 300,000—that figure is high, especially in a country where revenue is so high and where you have a budget of close to \$50 billion.

This was based on 2005 prices, that is the basket of goods, the cost of the basket of goods at that time in 2005, translated \$656, and the food component of that was \$8.22 per day. He gave us the details of the basket of goods. I

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particularly asked him the contents of the basket of goods and he gave us. Today that basket of goods for one day, which cost \$8.22, today it is costing \$15.56; that is almost double from 2005 to today. Bread, \$11 a loaf; milk, \$10 for one litre; sugar, \$15 for two kilogrammes; rice, \$25 for two kilogrammes; flour, \$15 for two kilogrammes; cheese, \$60 for one kilogramme; tomato, \$10 per pound; eddoes, \$6 per pound; sweet potato, \$4 per pound; melongene, \$7 per pound; pawpaw, \$5 per pound; pineapple, \$6 per pound and fish, hovering around \$20 per pound.

Mr. Speaker, if you did the adjustments then, then obviously with the extrapolation because the \$665 of course, will be much higher than \$665 and there will be many more people who are living under the poverty line. I will not quibble with those figures, the point about it is even \$210,000, if that is the figure you want to stick with, that is okay, that is too high.

We must remember that there are tens of thousands of people in this country living with minimum wage. Tens of thousands of people living on \$9 per hour. Last year the Government mentioned that they were going to raise the minimum wage to \$10 that has not been done. The legal instruments to give effect to that have not been put in place and today the minimum wage is still legally and effectively still \$9 per hour; that is \$72 per day, and when you work out the 40 hours per week, and the 160 hours per month, it is quite small.

All of the experts have agreed that the single most important measure to deal with the increasing food prices is to grow more food. That is the issue that I want to spend some time on tonight. Before I go there, I want to address for a few minutes the issue of credibility as far as the Government is concerned in this budget. On the night of the day that this budget was presented, the President of the Agricultural Society in an interview in a panel discussion on television said she was happy the agricultural sector, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources had been given an increased allocation. She also said that the increase should be much more than that, because of so many deficiencies in the agricultural sector that needed to be addressed. So, she was calling for much more to be given rather than the small increase that had been given to the agricultural sector.

Since then, several stakeholders have expressed similar sentiments. The President of the Sheep and Goat Association queried as to what this increase will apply to. Whatever the increase was, he was querying as to what this increase would be applied to, because he said that last year when the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources got an increase, the increase was applied to things that really did not move the sector forward, like buying new vehicles and

so on. I want to demonstrate to the farmers and to the other stakeholders that we have a serious credibility problem here and the Minister of Finance has given to the agricultural sector and to the general population hope that does not exist.

On page 12 of the budget speech, the Minister said:

"The Government recognizes the growing importance of the agribusiness sector for national development and has increased its investment in the sector from approximately \$1.2 billion in the last fiscal year to an unprecedented \$1.7 billion for this new budget."

So, there is an increase the Minister said from \$1.2 billion to \$1.7 billion for the agricultural sector. When you turn to page 46, the Minister says:

"Agriculture \$ 2,175.3 million"

That is \$2,175.3 million. One page in the budget she said the budget had been increased from 1.2 to 1.7, and she said that agriculture has gotten \$2,175 million.

So, we already have two sets of figures there. When we look at the Appropriation Bill—and that is what we are debating here today, that is what will become law—the allocation for the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources under the Consolidated Fund is \$888,545,871. That is what would be appropriated from the Consolidated Fund. So we have three sets of figures here.

The draft estimates of expenditure come in two heads: the Recurrent Expenditure and the Development Programme. This year the recurrent expenditure for the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources is \$730,395,871. In the development programme the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources has been allocated \$198 million and the development programme comes under three headings: \$470,000 from the Inter-American Development Bank, \$157 million from the Consolidated Fund and \$40 million from the Infrastructure Development Fund, giving a total of \$198 million.

You have \$730 million from the Consolidated Fund, from recurrent expenditure and \$198 million for the development programme. When you add that, you get a grand total of moneys that have been allocated to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources of \$928,545,871. Let me repeat that. The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, according to the draft estimates have been allocated \$928,545,871, not \$2.175 billion, not \$1.2 billion, but \$928 million. By the same token, the revised allocation for last year's budget—and I would not give the details, I would just give the global figure—was \$759,609,674.

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So, this year's allocation is \$928 million, last year's allocation was \$759 million. This means that the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources has effectively got an increase of \$168 million for this year. The stakeholders in the industry want to know where this money will be applied to, and I want to address that.

Several departments from the forestry division and from the horticulture subsectors, which previously came under the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment, have now been transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. As they came across, they came across with their budgets as well, and the budget of the forestry division and the horticulture subsectors that came across from the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources that amounted to \$158 million.

You brought in two new departments with their budgets, which amounted to \$158 million; you had a \$168 million increase, so what you really got was a \$10 million increase. That is what the agricultural sector got this year, an increase of \$10 million. I want to tell Mr. Shiraz Khan from the Sheep and Goat Association; Mr. Norris Deonarine from the National Farmers and Food Crops Association; Ms. Danoo from the Agricultural Society; Mr. Baliram Maharaj from the Supermarket Association, and all those who have been wondering about the allocation, the allocation this year for the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources is \$928 million and that amounts to an increase in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources of \$10 million.

I hope that the population will understand that we do have serious credibility problems in this Government. [*Desk thumping*] That is because the Government feels that they can just fool the farmers, the practitioners of agriculture in this country, because they feel they are uneducated and they do not understand. I want to say to the Government that there are farmers who have O' levels, A' levels, Bachelor's degree, Masters Degree and PhD degrees. You cannot fool people like that all the time. The days of fooling people are gone.

Let us return to the issue of food prices and the importance of the agricultural sector. The agricultural sector is important for many reasons in this country. It is important because it is a plank for diversification of the economy. We know that oil and gas, regardless of whether you say it is nine years, 10 years, 15 years or whatever it is, will not last forever, and the economy has to be diversified. One of the planks for diversification has to be agriculture.

Over the last few years, the import bill for food has been steadily increasing. I want to read for you, Mr. Speaker, what has been the position of amounts of

money spent on food imports for the last five years. In 2003, \$1.9 billion, that is \$1,919 million food imports; 2004, \$2.215 billion, that is \$2,215 million; 2005, \$2.724 billion, that is \$2,724 million; 2006, \$2.758 billion, that is \$2,758 million; 2007, \$3.408 billion, that is \$3,408 million and from January to March this year, that is just the first quarter of this year, food import bill \$958 million, which if extrapolated means that the food import bill for this year will be \$4 billion.

10.20 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, that translates to the equivalent of 10 per cent of the budget, \$4 billion. This is scandalous and this cannot be sustained. The Government over the last six or seven years has done nothing to stimulate the agricultural sector in any significant manner to decrease this food import bill. How long are we going to continue with this? How long are we going to continue with this increase in the importation of food? Over the last five years from \$2 billion to \$4 billion; it has doubled over the last five years.

This Government has been following slavishly the Eric Williams model. And that is, that we in Trinidad and Tobago will produce oil and well now, natural gas, we will sell that and we will take the money and buy food cheaply. That is the model that various PNM regimes have been adopting and following and in the process they have strangled the agricultural sector.

You cannot build a robust and resilient agricultural sector in one year, two years or even five years. While the Government has been talking about agriculture, very little has been done to move the sector forward. As I mentioned, oil and gas are not going to last forever and despite all the assurances from the Government and from the Prime Minister in particular, we cannot bury our heads in the sand and say that we will always have oil and gas. *[Interruption]*

Yes, well you continue to believe that it will still be here a hundred years from now and you will see where exactly you will put this country in the next couple of years. We cannot sustain that level of expenditure—\$4 billion, \$5 billion, \$6 billion; we cannot sustain that level of expenditure for very much longer to import food. We have almost missed the boat, and I want to say, that in the same way that the oil producing countries have got together and they have formed themselves into a cartel, in the same way the major food producing countries in the world are going to get together and form themselves into a cartel and the prices of food are going to go up astronomically.

Guyana is already flexing its muscle as far as rice and so on is concerned and Guyana is only a small producer. I am saying that we have almost lost the boat

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and if we do not do what is required to be done now aggressively and we do not have a sustained agricultural policy, we will end up in serious trouble in years to come. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Nothing in this budget has given us any hope that the Government is serious about food production and that our population can feel comfortable.

Not too long ago, in pursuance of that philosophy that we will sell oil and we will buy food, one of the senior Ministers of Government said that the Government through one of its agencies, NAMDEVCO will go to South America and they will buy food and they will come and flood the country here with cheap food. Nothing! National Flour Mills tried that and they nearly went—as one of our speakers said—“buss”. [*Interruption*]

As I said, in this budget the Government has not announced one single new initiative to move the agricultural sector forward. [*Interruption*] I want to say that whatever they have said in this document, as I mentioned before, there is a serious credibility problem. I want to look therefore at the 2008 budget and see what happened in 2008 as far as the budgetary promises were concerned and see if we can trust the promises that have been made in the 2009 budget.

In 2008, the Prime Minister started off by saying—and he started off on the wrong footing—Mr. Speaker, the agricultural sector has been earmarked for intensive focus in 2008. So, he started off on a wrong foot, nothing like that in 2008 but his specific promises. He talked about:

- the establishment of a prices council which was done very recently and we do not know what that council has been doing. [*Interruption*]
- the establishment of a consumer advisory board, again, that was done very recently and we do not know what they have been doing.
- the establishment of an agricultural development commission, not done;
- a review of the entire package of incentives related to small and large farms, organic farming and agro-processing, that has not been done.
- as part of the Caricom effort, continue discussions with the Government of Guyana to make lands available for agriculture since Guyana has resources.

We do not know what is the status of those discussions. What we do know is that if the Government is going to ask the Government of Guyana for lands to plant, there is so much lands in Trinidad that cannot be planted, why is it that the Government still wants to go to Guyana when we cannot get our agricultural sector moving right here in Trinidad and Tobago?

- the establishment of a special regime of incentives for farmers, nothing has been done. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: We have been here since 10 o'clock this morning and for those Members who are getting restless, there are a number of teas that you can get in the tea room. Chamomile may I suggest to you, is good for calming you. Okay. *[Laughter]* So, please, I want to hear the Member, so let us hear.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Mr. Speaker, they just do not like to hear the truth but it has to come out at some point in time whether here or elsewhere, they will have to face the truth.

The establishment of a special regime of incentives for new farms, nothing has been done;

- putting in place new arrangements outside the police service to address praedial larceny in hot spots by the end of the first quarter of 2008, nothing has been done;
- the reallocation of 417 acres at Mon Jaloux to be allocated to the small ruminants society, not done;
- the design and implementation of a three-year plan to review the development of agricultural access roads, irrigation and other infrastructure by the end of the first quarter of 2008, not done;
- providing up to 100 acres each to three ammonia manufacturers in the country to create demonstration farms and negotiating a new pricing arrangement for fertilizer, not done—one of the companies has got a bit of land—
- negotiating with the fertilizer manufacturer to produce as far as possible all fertilizers used in the country with new pricing arrangements for domestic market as part of their social responsibility, not done;
- introduce in the short-term a system of making agricultural lands more available or readily available to farmers, not done. I will address this matter in greater detail in due course in my contribution.

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- the implementation of a new arrangement to contract farming with appropriate marketing arrangements for select commodities, not done;
- the restructuring of NAMDEVCO to allow the corporation to play a more proactive role in the development and expansion of the agricultural sector, not done. There are several others and I would just like to read one more:
- under our National Agribusiness Development Programme, the Government will create 16 large scale farms of a minimum of 100 acres each, all utilizing modern techniques and management for large scale production of food; not done.

Mr. Speaker, those were promises that were made last year in the budget. In this budget the Minister was very circumspect. She gave almost two and a half pages to the agricultural sector and she made four promises. The first one: We will increase the allocation to the Agricultural Development Bank to \$125 million. We would have liked to get some kind of appreciation as to what is happening with the Agricultural Development Bank. [*Desk thumping*] How many people have applied for loans? How many loans have been given out? What is the position with the servicing of those loans? Whether people are actually servicing the loans? What is the success rate as far as getting into farming and agriculture is concerned?

We would have liked to get an appreciation before you pump another \$125 million. It is a bank and it is operating under commercial principles. Yes, the interest rate might be low but it is a bank that is operating under commercial principles. We would have liked to get an appreciation of what has been done, but \$125 million.

The Government will continue to support traditional small and medium sized farms through a range of incentives, including soft loan facilities, expanded extension services and a comprehensive programme of training for farmers. That is the next promise that she has made.

The next one, Government will intensify the implementation of national agribusiness development programmes which in collaboration with the new roads authority will also upgrade and expand the road network. I will talk about that in a little while.

Then a new arrangement, including support from private security will be announced to treat with the question of praedial larceny. The four promises she

made in this: one to deal with praedial larceny; one to deal with agricultural access roads; one the deal with the agricultural development bank and the other one for training for small farmers. *[Interruption]* We will talk about it in due course, I have a lot of time here, do not worry. *[Interruption]* The night is young and what I do not say my colleagues will say, so do not worry. *[Crosstalk]* Do not worry, what I do not say my colleagues will say.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Dr. H. Rafeeq: We have a great deal of time; we have a great deal of time yet.

Hon. Member: We have until Thursday. *[Crosstalk]*

Dr. H. Rafeeq: So, those are the promises that the Minister made last year. As I said, less than 20 per cent of which were kept and this year the Minister has made four promises, and as I said we will deal with that.

Agricultural farming is an extremely difficult profession. For those of us, on both sides of the House, who have any experience in that sector know that it is an extremely difficult profession to be involved in. You are exposed to the elements of the weather and you are exposed to all sorts of things outside there, but in addition to that, it is a very risky business. When you plant your crops, you are subject to the mercy of the weather. If you plant your crops and three, four or five days pass and you do not get any rain and you do not have proper irrigation facilities you can lose all of that. If too much rain falls, you can lose your entire crop.

You are subject to the vagaries of the market. When you get your produce and you go to the market you can find a glut of that particular item, so you have to give away your produce for next to nothing. You can lose your entire crop by diseases, and we remember the mealy bug a couple of years ago where a number of farmers lost many of their crops. You can—as is the case with so many people today—lose many of your crops by praedial larceny. Even after you have harvested, remember that these produce are perishable items and have to be sold within a short space of time and if they are not sold you either have to dump them or sell them at very low prices.

Mr. Speaker, with that in mind and with the opportunities that are available for employment elsewhere and the opportunities that are available for investments elsewhere, attracting people in the agricultural sector is extremely difficult. *[Interruption]* So, you have got to do what is required. You have got to do whatever is required if you want to push your agricultural sector forward, you have got to do whatever is required to attract people into this sector. If you do not

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do that then your agricultural sector will continue to dwindle, remembering, that up to three or four years ago we had 30,000 small family farms, today, there are 19,000. We have lost 11,000 small family farms already.

So, the Government has to make agriculture attractive and give the kinds of incentives that will keep those who are already in agriculture there and to attract new people. People are not going to leave the comfort of their jobs and their investments and come into agriculture unless they are assured that the sector is lucrative. As I said, so far nothing has been said in the budget to give that kind of comfort to people to come into this sector. [*Interruption*]

Yes, I would tell you what I will like you to do. Wait, do not hurry. [*Crosstalk*] Do not hurry. The Government must demonstrate its seriousness about the agricultural sector by keeping its promises. With a track record like I read from last year's budget, that does not give any comfort as I said to farmers. As I said, even within the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, which has been allocated \$900-plus million, we do not know by the end of this fiscal year how much of that would be moved around and how much would be taken away. Because, remember just one and a half weeks ago the Government came to this Parliament and took away \$37 million from the agricultural sector from the Infrastructure Development Fund; \$57 million were allocated to the agricultural sector for development programme, the Government came here and took away \$37 million from those \$57 million.

So, we do not know at the end of the fiscal period how much money will actually remain within the agricultural sector and how much will be moved. We also know that the Government has serious implementation problems, and since that is so the Government should determine its priorities and the Government should give priority to the agricultural sector if it feels that it wants to stimulate the sector and to grow food so that the people who are living along the poverty line can get cheaper food to buy.

10.35 p.m.

Why is it that we have to spend so much money; and why is it that we have to spend so much on projects like the Brian Lara Stadium and in so many of these prestige projects? They are probably all important, but your priority, feeding the nation, is more important. You can probably afford to buy food whatever the price is, but many people cannot do that, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

The second issue is that Government should not make promises in the budget which it knows it has no intention of keeping. If you know that you are

implementing 25 per cent of your budget, then why make so many lavish promises when you know you have no intention of keeping them? A budget statement should be a list of projects that you are actually going to implement, not those that you would like to implement. A budget statement is not a statement of intent.

If you want to stimulate the agricultural sector and grow food, then you have got to make it as a matter of priority, and I am saying that the \$900 million that has been allocated is not enough. The Government should concentrate more on financial resources, human resources and all kinds of resources in the agricultural sector if they want to get the programme going.

Mr. Speaker, I now want to tell the Government what it has to do specifically, to stimulate the agricultural sector; if it wants to do that. The first issue is that it has to deal with the question of land tenure. [*Desk thumping*] When Caroni (1975) Limited was closed down in 2002/2003, it was the understanding that the 77,000 acres of lands that were owned by Caroni (1975) Limited would be left for agriculture purposes, for food production. That was the understanding at that time and that is what we were told; that is what we were led to believe.

Today, much of the land from Caroni has been converted to housing, to industrial and to other commercial activities, not agriculture. I am saying that you have to ring-fence and protect your agricultural lands, and if you have lands that you want to remain in agriculture, then you have to protect them even if you have to do so by legislation or by changing the Constitution, but you have to protect your agricultural lands. Because once you convert your agricultural lands to housing, for industrial purposes, for other commercial purposes, those lands are lost to agriculture forever. Those lands will never return to agriculture once you convert them for other purposes.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just finished my introduction. I am saying that no Government should be allowed to convert agricultural land for other purposes just by the stroke of a pen, they should have to come back to the Parliament to get permission to do that. [*Desk thumping*]

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Mr. Speaker, this is making a whole mockery of the Vision 2020 document. This is the agricultural component of the Vision 2020 document. On page 276, objective 3 reads:

“To prevent further alienation of arable lands and keep the same in productive agriculture.”

That is what the objective is:

- “Implement a system of zoning for agricultural lands based on physical plan...
- Design and implement fiscal incentives/measures to keep agricultural land in productive use...
- Enforce regulations sensitise the population and publicize programmes.”

Mr. Speaker, that is the objective in the 2020 document, and I am saying that the Government has already been making a mockery of this, by converting agricultural lands into housing and for other industrial and commercial activities. We have the example of River Estate, where within the last 10 or 15 years or so, more than 50 per cent of those prime agricultural lands have been converted for other use.

Mr. Speaker, I know several persons who have been given Caroni (1975) Limited lands for non-agricultural purposes; and I know people who have been farming on government lands, on state lands, for 20, 30, 40 and some of them 50 years and they have been begging the Government to regularized their tenancies, and so far they have not been successful. I have already made the case here for 40 farmers from Carlsen Field. They have been occupying an area of approximately 100 acres of state lands for the last 40 or 50 years. They have been farming on that area and begging the Government to regularize their tenure for their benefit, so that they can go to the bank and so on and they can be protected. So far the Government has failed to regularize their tenancies.

There is another area in Caroni Central, Rickenson Road, same problem; another area in Caroni Central, Bankruff Road, same problem; and then recently in an answer to a question, the Minister of Housing said that in other areas in Carlsen Field, they were going to build 4,000 houses. Carlsen Field is basically an agricultural community. You have people there who have been doing farming for 30, 40 and 50 years and now you want to uproot these people to put them elsewhere to do agriculture, where they have already established their farms and so on, to put housing there. What sense does that make? The farmers are very

reluctant to continue farming activities there because they do not know when one night, a bulldozer will just come and run through their lands and they will lose everything. This is not only happening in Caroni Central, this is happening all of the country, in state lands.

Mr. Speaker, with the track record of this Government, how can we believe the Government when it says it will accelerate the giving of tenancies for agricultural purposes to farmers? I went to the Draft Estimates, for survey and sub-division of state lands for distribution to farmers, the Government allocated \$900,000; not even \$1 million. How much can that do? The sum of \$900,000 for surveying and subdividing state lands for distribution to farmers. How much can that do? This is the clearest signal that the Government has absolutely no intention of giving out state lands for agriculture. As the Member for Siparia says, when you put that against the allocation for the PR vote, official entertainment, overseas travel and publicity and so on, \$12 million. The sum of \$12 million allocated to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources under these headings: publicity and printing, allocation for official entertainment and overseas travel, and for surveying and subdividing lands to give to farmers to plant food, \$900,000, not even \$1 million.

Mr. Speaker, security of tenure for land in agriculture is extremely important. No one will want to purchase a tractor or a plough or any piece of expensive equipment when they know, as I said, tomorrow morning they may not even have a farm. In the past year, we have had the experience where that has happened, where Government has moved in and bulldozed crops belonging to farmers. And I am saying that if Government is serious about moving the agricultural sector forward, then it has to fast-track the issue of land tenure for the people who are interested in agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, the next issue is the one on agricultural access roads. We have a very dim track record of fixing roads in this country, and especially under the present Minister; especially when we have a Minister like the present Minister of Works and Transport. All the Members on this side—I am not too sure what happens on the other side—have written countless letters to the Minister of Works and Transport asking for assistance in repairing roads. The Member for Oropouche—Gucharan Trace. The Member for Caroni Central has written the Minister several letters asking him for assistance in fixing the Arena Road, Siew Road, roads in Carlsen Field, Indian Trail, Caparo, Freeport, Chickland and Palmiste. Most of the roads in Caroni Central are in a dilapidated condition, and we have had no response so far. How about agricultural lands? If we have to

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move the agricultural sector forward, you need agricultural roads and so far, very little has been done.

I want to tell you that this year, in the 2009 Budget, an allocation of \$25 million has been made for the agricultural access roads. Last year, there was an allocation of \$11 million from the Infrastructure Development Fund. Mr. Speaker, just two weeks ago, they came and took away that \$11 million. So, there was an allocation of \$11 million from the Infrastructure Development Fund to the Ministry of Agriculture, for developing agricultural access roads and you told the Government, "Listen we do not need your money, take it back, because you could not build any road and repair any road." Is that how you are going to move the sector forward? So, \$11 million, not a cent was used and all was sent back to the Government to put back in the Infrastructure Development Fund.

This year the Government has allocated \$25 million and we do not know how much of that will be used but, Mr. Speaker, there is another issue. The Government says that it will form a roads authority, but of course, we have been hearing that over the last five, 10, 15 years. Our fear is that when you have a road's authority and you give them an allocation, none of the agricultural roads will be fixed, but you will fix the roads that the Minister of Works and Transport favours and people who are in the agricultural sector will not get 1 kilometre of road fixed.

Mr. Speaker, if there is going to be a roads authority, then the moneys that are allocated for the repair of agricultural access roads, must be ring-fenced and not be used for any other roads, except agricultural roads. If that does not happen, then we are only spinning top in mud.

I do not know how much time I have.

Mr. Speaker: Eleven minutes.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: The next issue is water management. In 2008, \$15 million was allocated for water management and flood control. So far, many persons have suffered severe flooding and have had very little or no compensation for their crops. Farmers have lost vegetables; some of them have lost livestock and so many other things. In the light of all of this, the Revised Estimates 2008 was reduced to \$10 million. The sum of \$15 million was allocated for water management, flooding and so on. It was reduced to \$10 million, that is, the Ministry of Agriculture went to Government and said, take \$15 million, we cannot use this; we do not want this; we do not have use for this, while people are suffering from flooding. Their crops are flooded out and their livelihood is

flooded out. I am sure by the time we get the final estimates, that \$10 million will be much less. Mr. Speaker, is this Government really serious about agriculture?

We have a situation in Trinidad where we have two seasons, the dry season and the rainy season, but people will not survive on doing farming for six months for the year and it is possible to do farming in Trinidad and Tobago for 12 months. Once you have proper management policies, you can do agriculture for 12 months. That is, that during the rainy season you trap the water, and then during the dry season you can release the water through proper irrigation systems and so on and you can do agriculture for 12 months. If you do that, then agriculture can become lucrative and so you can attract many more people into the sector.

I want to move quickly because there is so much to cover. The cost of inputs—The inputs into farming, you have to get seedlings, fertilizers, weedicides, insecticides; you have to prepare the lands, animal feeds and so on if you are into livestock and so on.

10.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, over the last few years, the prices of all these have increased astronomically. Just as an example, one of the very popular fertilizers, blaukorn, a 50 kilogram bag in December of 2007 cost \$230; in July of this year, six months later, that has gone up to \$500; double the price.

Hon. Members: Oh God!

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Urea as a fertilizer, which is being manufactured right here in Trinidad and Tobago, incidentally, in 2006 that cost \$50 per bag; in July, that same bag of urea was \$380.

Hon. Members: Oh good!

Dr. H. Rafeeq: One of the more popular weedicides, insecticide as well, Umectin, in 2007 that was \$600 per litre; in July this year, \$1,020 per litre. These are inputs in the agricultural sector—\$1,020. Tomato seeds are \$1,000 per ounce; this is what you are dealing with in the agricultural sector. Most of the people here are not aware of that, when they talk glibly about the agricultural sector they are not aware of the astronomical cost of the inputs into agriculture. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, you have got to give incentives to the agricultural sector if you have to attract new players into the sector, new farmers and new investors. A lot of incentives are given to the energy sector; a lot of incentives are given to the manufacturing sector; a lot of incentives are given to the tourism sector. What

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about the agricultural sector? You have got to give incentives, including tax incentives, to the agricultural sector, if you have to move that sector forward.

In addition to that, as I mentioned earlier, agriculture is a risky business in that you could plant, but, at the end of the day, you could reap nothing, because of flooding, diseases or so many other factors. You need to have some kind of crop insurance for farmers. You need Government sponsored crop insurance, and you need to have it supported by Government, because there are hardly any insurance companies that would want to insure crops now. It has got to be supported by Government.

Dr. Moonilal: Trinre could do that.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: So the farmer could have the comfort in knowing that after he has invested tens of thousands of dollars, if he gets nothing at the end of the day, at least by insurance he would have something to start over his farming.

Praedial larceny—we have a situation where if you call the police station when somebody is getting murdered, they would tell you that they have no vehicles. Do you think that if somebody is stealing a goat and you call the police they would come? There is absolutely no hope of getting any kind of assistance from the police for praedial larceny. People plant their crops, they nurture it, the crops mature and then somebody else comes and reaps it; that is very, very heartbreaking. Animals: goat, sheep, all these things, people just come and take them away. Not only that, people steal boat engines, spray cans and all these kinds of equipment and machinery that people spend so much money for. The Government said that it would get the private sector involved in managing praedial larceny. We hope that the Government is serious about that, because that is probably the single most important problem in dealing with agriculture, praedial larceny.

Fishing—Last year in the Development Programme, 2007/2008, \$9.5 million was allocated for fishing. The fishing community has a whole litany of problems; if you speak to them, a whole litany of woes. The fishing community in Trinidad and Tobago does not have proper storage facilities and proper security. They have so many problems, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources was allocated \$9.5 million. Out of that, \$6.5 million was sent back to the Government. The Ministry of Agricultural, Land and Marine Resources said, "We do not have use for this money; take it back. They were left with \$3 million. When the actual figures are in, I am sure that \$3 million would be a lot less. You have so many difficulties facing the fishing community. You are allocated the

money, and yet at the end of the year you were not able to spend the money to alleviate the difficulties faced by the fishing community.

One of the areas was an allocation of \$5 million for the construction of a jetty at Kings Wharf in San Fernando; not one cent was spent. The entire \$5 million went back to the Government. The upgrade of the Orange Valley wholesale fishing market, \$250,000 all went back; they did not spend a cent. Orange Valley, where you have so many needs by the fishing community.

Hear this one: \$20 million—Member for Mayaro—allocated for construction of the Moruga Fishing Complex. Last week the Government came and the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources returned the \$20 million. They said, "We do not have use for this." Mr. Speaker, \$20 million allocated for the construction of the Moruga Fishing Complex, sent back to the Government, because the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources said, "We do not have use for that." Is that how you are going to run the agricultural sector? Is that how you are going to provide food security for the nation?

Coffee and cocoa—Let me just read two paragraphs from the *Review of the Economy*. Cocoa production during October 2007—April 2008, was a total of 197 kilograms, a decrease of 57.9 per cent when compared with the corresponding period the year before. Cocoa, which is the best in the world; our cocoa is the best in the world. We have demands for cocoa from all over the world, yet there is a decrease in production of 57.9 per cent.

Coffee production totalled 30.7,000 kilograms, 80.4 per cent less than what they produced for the corresponding period. So they have killed the cocoa industry, they have killed the coffee industry and they have almost killed the fishing industry.

Let us talk about the megafarms. These days that is the big hoax, the megafarms in Trinidad and Tobago. The Government said that it would establish 16 100-acre farms in Trinidad. The purpose of these megafarms would be as demonstration farms, whereas they could teach the farmers in Trinidad. First of all, the Cubans who are coming here can teach the farmers in Trinidad and Tobago nothing. [*Desk thumping*] The farmers in Trinidad and Tobago have gone through the worst periods in farming and they have always been successful. The Cubans can teach the farmer nothing.

The other point is that you are putting the Cuban farmers on the demonstration farms in Tucker Valley on the best agricultural lands in the country. You are going to show the farmers in Trinidad and Tobago how to do farming, how to

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produce in the best agricultural lands, and then send them to lands in Caroni (1975) Limited where you have clay soil and tell them, "Go there and produce." How do you expect them to produce? Why did you not give the Cubans the clay soil in Caroni Limited and tell them to go and farm there and show the farmers how to be successful farming in clay soil? You are putting them in the best soil in Tucker Valley and letting them produce there, giving them all the incentives, all the assistance, all the help they want and telling them, "Show the farmers how to produce." Then you would send the farmers back to the clay soil in Caroni and tell them, "Go and produce." How will that work?

The Minister in her budget said that the Tucker Valley Farm is well on its way and would produce 4,000 tonnes by the end of the year. Let us see what the reality is. I quote from the *Sunday Express* of September 2008.

“The Tucker large farm project which is benchmarked for harvesting by the end of this year is far from its target date. When the Express visited the proposed 280-acre farm yesterday, that was after the budget was presented, less than 15 acres of land had been visibly cultivated with cassava.”

Hon. Members: What?

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Mr. Speaker, 15 acres out of the 200 acres. This, according to one of the labourers there, was only planted in August and would not be ready for another nine months. [*Crosstalk*]

Let me read on:

“A visit to the site by the Express over the past two days revealed overgrown bushes, deserted field office and a ruptured water line on the vast majority of the 200 acre spread designated for the project. But yesterday the CDA project manager Anselm Walters was asked about activities in the farm, he maintained there was work going on.”

That is not paperwork which you could hide in a draw; those are things in the field that you could actually see. How are you going to hide that? [*Laughter*] Could you hide that in an office, and tell people that you are not showing them? It does not end there.

A group of Cuban farmers had visited the site earlier this year to survey the land for preparation government selected, since the Tucker Valley project is to be modeled on Cuba's own megafarm project. However, after 50 years of State run agricultural programmes, the Cuban Government ended its exercise earlier this year, [*Desk thumping*] by dismantling their megafarms and handing over the lands

to various private individual producers. [*Crosstalk*] This would be hilarious if it was not so serious. What other people have rejected, after so many years, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has taken up.

Mr. Speaker, you see this megafarm project, that is going to be a colossal failure in this country. [*Desk thumping*] A lot of money is going to be spent, a lot of money is going to be wasted on that project and, at the end, it would be abandoned; nothing would come out of it. I am making that prediction here tonight. I know that we will all live to see that is going to be a colossal failure.

I want to wrap up here. If the Government is serious about agriculture, serious about stimulating the agricultural sector and growing more food, let them set targets so that we could monitor them. Let the Government tell us how many plots of agricultural land they plan to deliver in one year. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Dr. H. Rafeeq: They say that they want to accelerate the giving out of land tenancies, let them tell us how many agricultural tenancies they would give us in one year. Let them tell us how many kilometres of agricultural access roads they would fix in one year. Let them tell us by how much they want to increase the food import bill in one year, two years, three years or five years. Give us some targets, so that we could monitor your performance.

11.05 p.m.

Let the Government tell us how many plots of agricultural land it plans to deliver in one year. It says it wants to accelerate the giving out of land tenancies; tell us how many agricultural tenancies it will give us in one year. Tell us how many agricultural tenancies it will give us in one year; tell us how many kilometres of agricultural access roads it will fix in one year; tell us by how much it wants to decrease its food import bill in one to five years. Give us some targets so we can monitor your performance.

Tell us how much you want to increase agriculture's contribution to GDP in one year, two years or five years. Agriculture's contribution to GDP now is less than one-half per cent. When the UNC was in office, agriculture's contribution to GDP was 4 per cent or 5 per cent.

Let the Government tell us by how much it wants to increase agriculture's contribution to GDP within one to five years; tell us how much of each crop it wants to reap in one year. We will monitor the Government and then we will know if it is serious about agriculture, or if it is just making joke, coming year

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after year and making all kinds of vague promises is a colossal waste of time. Come here with concrete proposals; give a few projects, tell us the targets and we will be able to monitor the targets to see if the Government is serious.

Mr. Speaker, the Government will have to decide whether it wants to pursue agriculture as a serious option for the diversification of the economy and as a means for reducing food prices. If the answer is no, then forget it and let us move on, but if the answer is yes, then the Government must have the political will and demonstrate its commitment by building this sector.

I have mentioned all that is required to move the sector forward, the underlying factor however, is that Government has to implement what I have described in order to attract new farmers and to keep existing ones and this can only be done if the potential farmers know that they can make a decent living by being involved in agriculture.

This means you will have to give them an incentive package and do all the things I have mentioned including tax incentives. If you do that and release your stranglehold on the lands in Trinidad and Tobago, then you will begin the process of moving the agricultural sector. To the extent that is not done, then this budget is a waste of time and a failure.

I had planned to deal with some constituency matters, but time does not permit. If you will just give me one minute Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the Mamoral Dam—the Minister of Works and Transport does not want to hear. Every year for the past five, six or seven years moneys have been allocated for the Mamoral Dam and nothing has been done.

Farmers have been flooded out, residents have been flooded out, millions of dollars have been lost on a yearly basis and yet the Minister, even though he had money last year, did not use it and sent back all to the infrastructure fund and the people continued to suffer.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister must get more serious, he must stop being frivolous, stop clowning with serious business and do the people's work.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: I have noticed that several Opposition speakers on coming to the end of their contribution lamented the fact that they are running out of time. Perhaps if you will spend a little less time on the Member for Diego Martin North/East—

Mr. S. Panday: Do not beg for him.

Mr. Speaker: One minute, please. There is something called tedious repetition. All I am saying is that you can use your time better.

Hon. Member: “Doh beg for him.”

The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs (Mr. Junia Regrello): Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to this debate for the period under review. I came to this House with a very open mind and high expectations but it was not long before I had to do a reality check as contribution after contribution were rhetoric with statistics over and over as the Members on the other side would say same-old, same-old as they go from the sublime to the ridiculous.

Mr. Speaker, in my view, politics can be a noble profession but Members on the other side come with no facts, and I want to make reference to the Member for Princes Town at last week’s sitting when he produced an article from the newspapers commenting that a very senior police officer was supporting a drug lord. And when we on this side asked for the evidence, there was the Member shoo shooing, giggling and hiding in a very childish manner.

Mr. Speaker, I take this job very seriously. [*Desk thumping*] and I think this childish behaviour is unacceptable. We must understand that we have a responsibility in this House and these sessions are beamed live to the homes where young people are looking at us and we must be exemplars. [*Desk thumping*] I am of the view that the Opposition’s approach is to make the Government look bad, but what they should really be doing is trying to make it more efficient.

I had the privilege to work with the Minister of Finance at Tidco as a director around the period 2000—2003 and we served on that board and we were also on the subcommittee of the tenders committee. The Minister at the time was the Chairman, and I was the deputy and I saw the prudent way in which she structured that committee and put stringent measures in place. So I had no doubt last week when she made her presentation that she was capable of doing a good job, so I compliment her.

Mr. Speaker, last week the Member for Mayaro, my colleague, my brother in the arts, my relative—yes, we are related. In another place he goes by the moniker “Gypsy”. He came to this honourable House and I think his claim to fame is that he is a former extempore king and for those who do not know what extempore means, it means putting things together on the spot. That is what he tried to do last week in this hon. House.

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If you have to extempore, you must be able to rhyme, but as he went along he did not rhyme, he lost his rhythm and he was even off key. And the last thing I expected to hear was “sans humanite” and that did not come. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, he spoke about some issues relating to pan and I warned him, I told him not to go there so I want to clear those issues up. He cannot help it, he is wrong about everything; he is even on the wrong side. [*Desk thumping*]

He spoke about the Pan Trinbago Headquarters and I want to take the opportunity to tell this honourable House that under the leadership of Minister McDonald, our committee met with PanTrinbago in March 2008 to clear the air on the issues pertaining to the PanTrinbago Headquarters and I want to inform this honourable House again that moneys were allocated for that structure.

Government did not renege on its responsibility, nor is it proper to say that PanTrinbago “bad spent” the money. What may have happened is that they may have concentrated on other projects, but the money was well used and well spent. Coming out of that, contractors were assigned with the responsibility of visiting the structure and verifying its integrity because one must understand that that building was standing there for about two or three years exposed to the elements.

Based on the report coming back to the ministry, the Minister got approval from Cabinet to complete the structure and it is listed in the Draft Estimates of Expenditure for completion in 2009. As we speak, work on that building has started, with a completion date of March 2009.

The other issue the Member raised was something to do with pan in the classroom. Again I want to inform you that out of the moneys allocated to Pan Trinbago from the Tesoro settlement, PanTrinbago started that arrangement for pan in the classroom and that programme continues. In our meeting we had with PanTrinbago early this year, the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs made some arrangements for the Executive of PanTrinbago to meet with the Minister of Education so we can continue the involvement of PanTrinbago and the project of pan in the classroom. [*Desk thumping*]

He also raised the question about the pan museum, obviously if he had followed the documents which were given to them, Estimates of Development Programme Expenditure 2009, page 185 it is listed. [*Desk thumping*] You do not read, you have to read. In one of his famous songs, “Little black boy go to school and learn”, it is unfortunate he did not apply that to himself.

Hon. Member: That is your family?

Mr. J. Regrello: Mr. Speaker, he also spoke about the National Culture Centre and I am to inform this honourable House again that work on the centre in the Queen's Park Savannah will start in November of 2008 with a completion date of July 2010. We are also saying to the stakeholders that there will be no cultural events at the Queen's Park Savannah for carnival 2009 because there will be a structure going up on the premises.

Mr. Speaker, he also enquired about the Home for the Performing Arts, I will tell you that the Minister and I with a team visited these premises about two weeks ago on a site visit and I will share some information with you. The Home for the Performing Arts has a seating capacity of 1,346, a conference room with 300 seats, there would be four levels, two restaurants, a hotel with 52 rooms, a stage 75 feet by 48 feet by 30 feet, a foyer and an outdoor theatre and a university for talented people. [*Desk thumping*] It would not be based on academics.

Mr. Speaker, the interesting thing about that stage at the Home for the Performing Arts is that it can open and allow, for instance, if they are referring to the steelband while a band is set up on stage, another band can be set up below and that stage opens in two, goes down, allows the one below to come up. That is progress.

Mr. Speaker, the culture division has been working assiduously on the development of a cultural policy which seeks to address development in the area of creative arts, cultural industries and heritage preservation. The draft document has been forwarded for consideration before submission to Cabinet. The ministry is currently reviewing its policy on subventions and grants, inclusive of the guidelines for accessing such funds. And as the Minister outlined earlier on about the problems with reference to the Parang Association, it is not business as usual, we are restructuring this ministry.

11.20 p.m.

This Government's track record in the area of support to national cultural and religious organizations and cultural organizations, in general, in the country is unsurpassed. Never before has an administration extended the level of financial support to the range of cultural and religious organizations that this Government has done. [*Desk thumping*] Many of us will recall that not too long ago the head of the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha had cause to comment that he had never before received the level of support as what he is getting now.

In the past fiscal year 2007/2008, the Division of Culture has continued to support the work of national cultural and religious organizations through the disbursement of grants and subventions. I will now list some of the major festivals

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for which funding has been provided by our Ministry in the past fiscal year. I will break it into two groups: The African community for the Emancipation celebration received \$3 million and the East Indian community received \$3,412,600. [*Desk thumping*] I can break it down: Eid ul Fitr got \$366,550; Phagwa got \$609,000; Divali got \$1,261,550; Ramleela got \$360,000; Indian Arrival Day, \$815,500, a total of \$3,412,600. Nevertheless, as I indicated previously, as a responsible entity, the Ministry is currently reviewing its policy on subventions and grants inclusive of the guidelines for accessing such funds.

If culture is the rhythm of our growth and development, then carnival is the heartbeat of our people. In 2008, the expenditure for the national festival was \$87,297,466. This sum also included increased allocations for prizes to mas bands, from \$3,097,800 in 2007, to \$4,133,800 in 2008, an increase of \$1,036,000 and the payment to pannists from \$400 to \$1,000 in 2008.

What happened there, previously a pan player would have gotten \$400 for the entire season and when the Minister came into office and we sat with Pan Trinbago, we thought it was ridiculous to give any pan player \$400 for an entire carnival season, so we moved that to \$1,000. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Peters: What you give calypsonians?

Mr. J. Regrello: But we said it earlier on. In addition, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago supported the work of several cultural and social organizations which hosted carnival-related activities, through the disbursements of grants totaling \$9,611,581.

I also wish to inform this House that a new board of commissioners has been appointed for the NCC. Within the past couple of weeks and months you have been hearing talk about: when are we going to appoint an NCC board. You have been hearing people saying that, for instance, bills cannot be paid. But the board expired in March 2007; NCC television has been running; the staff at NCC is being paid and we are paying all our bills because the permanent secretary of our ministry is a signatory to the NCC account and there is a CEO down there to ensure that all bills are met.

As a matter of fact, carnival is a template. We know exactly what the carnival dates would be next year; we know when Panaroma would be; we know when Dimanche Gras would be, so we could go ahead and plan carnival. It has nothing to do with the appointment of an NCC board. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Have you appointed a chairman?

Mr. J. Regrello: We have, and the Minister at the appropriate time next week will be holding a press conference to reveal all the names of the members of that board.

When the National Steel Symphony Orchestra came into operation in 2000 by virtue of the National Steel Orchestra Act, its mandate was to promote the steel pan as the national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago. This orchestra followed several other attempts in the past at addressing the question of national pride and indigenous singularity in the world of music. Nevertheless, on assuming office in 2002, the new Government met a desperate number of persons who were held together only by the love for the instrument, yet with no instrumental framework and vision that guided the day-to-day activities.

It was therefore left to the present administration to create a platform upon which the hopes and aspirations of so many of our gifted pannists could be realized. The National Steel Symphony Orchestra therefore represents a caring administration's response that is focused towards the future in support of our creative people and, indeed, of our society.

As the vision for culture states, our culture is envisioned as the rhythm and catalyst for growth and development of our nation and so in this stead the National Steel Symphony Orchestra was created and at this time shines as a beacon of excellence and hope for the future of pan and pannists, not only in Trinidad and Tobago, but throughout the world. The 38 young men and women who make up the symphony orchestra were selected based on a rigorous evaluation which ensured that their musical skills allowed them to work on a world repertoire of music, including the classics, led by a very skilled musical director.

The G-pans provide the most tangible evidence of our innovativeness as a people. These pans evolved from simple experimentation by the early pioneers as Anthony Williams and Ellie Mannette, who provided the foundation for subsequent scientific experiments by Professor Copeland and his team. With the emergence of the G-pan we now have irrefutable justification for a patent which will legitimize our claim as the creators of the steel pan. In other words, we are now in a position to clearly produce documented evidence of the historical development of the pan and the scientific specification to support our claim. [*Desk thumping*] Not only has the G-pan revolutionized the steel pan genre, the pannists are highly trained professionals who can read music and who are employed on a full-time basis.

My colleague in the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs and the Member of Parliament for Port of Spain South, the hon.

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Marlene Mc Donald, addressed you on the scope, range and success of our programmes. Permit me to expand a bit on the relevance of culture at the community level. The caring nature of the Government has been continuously demonstrated in its commitment to active people's involvement at all level of our society in the protection and development of our national culture.

In particular, many of us will recall that cultural practitioners at the community level exhaled in 2001 when the new Government, which has since remained in power, rescued the Best Village Programme from the jaws of death. Prior to this, under the previous administration, very few community groups participated in the programme which extended over about half of the year. The programme was transformed once more into a vibrant and dynamic one and over 12 months annually since 2001. The programme has attracted participating groups from across the length and breadth of the country, and more recently in 2007 and 2008 over 100 groups participated.

I am sure that the national community is aware that Carifesta X, which was held in Guyana in August 2008, was attended by 250 participants under the astute leadership of the Member for San Fernando West. The contingent showcased the diversity of Trinidad and Tobago's art and culture with our main productions: A theatrical production on the history of the steel pan entitled, "Ogun Iyan"; a Ramleela production; a masquerade production and a special presentation of the National Steel Symphony Orchestra.

On August 23 at the National Culture Centre in Guyana at a full house, the National Steel Symphony did a concert. Two days after, there was an article in the *Guyana Chronicle*—that was Monday, August 25—and I want to just quote the caption on the article: "The G-pan puts the top hat on the steel band". [*Desk thumping*] We are not hiding it; we are showing it. There are two paragraphs I want to share with you and this article was written by Raschid Osman of the *Guyana Chronicle*. I quote:

"Not only did the g-pan revolutionise the steel pan genre. The National Steel Symphony Orchestra of the twin-island Republic has co-opted the best pannists from local steel bands into a 39-man ensemble, all of them compelled to read music, and employed full-time with the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs. The result is an organisation brimming with national pride at achieving what is a major breakthrough in steel band music.

Saturday evening, at the National Culture Centre in Georgetown, the g-pans were heard for the first time here, and were an immediate hit with the audience."

The last paragraph went like this:

“Then came the finale, two pieces by Aldwyn Roberts, their calypso rhythms allowing the players to perform joyfully and with muted abandon.

Concert’s end brought a standing and prolonged ovation from the audience.

It was love at first hearing. The g-pan has won the hearts of music lovers in the Co-operative Republic.

Indications are that the love affair will continue and grow stronger. The g-pan is here to stay.” [*Desk thumping*]

This flagship project is a testimony to one of the pillars of our 2020 vision: Developing innovative people.

A major policy area in the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs is that of heritage preservation. As Trinidad and Tobago moves towards developed country status, the protection and long term care for national heritage is key to engendering national pride and identity. The Ministry therefore sees the development of museums and galleries and the safeguarding of historic properties as integral to the process of attaining the goals of Vision 2020.

Government recognizes, too, that the work in museums and heritage preservation must take into consideration our cultural diversity and the need for sustainable communities. The programmes at the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs in the heritage sector in 2007—2008 therefore have been developed to address these areas. The Ministry has continued to make qualitative improvements in our museum facilities across the country to ensure increased access for our people to the heritage collections.

The national museum, the main museum in Trinidad and Tobago, is housed in the Royal Victoria Institute building. Established in 1892, the museum houses collections of art, history, natural history, archeology and carnival. The building is an historical one and to preserve the monument, renovation works are being undertaken to upgrade its physical facilities to improve exhibit lighting and environmental conditions. The permanent collection was boosted by the acquisition of works by master artist Leroi Clarke and Ralph Baney.

Currently, a suitable location for the museum of the City of San Fernando—in which I have a particular interest—is being secured.

Mr. Sharma: Which part?

Mr. J. Regrello: On the hill of San Fernando, my friend. In the interim, plans are being made to mount a temporary museum exhibit at the San Fernando hill, in the constituency of San Fernando West as well. To date, the National Museum has acquired a number of art and other heritage objects, including the Garnet Ifill collection of archival photographs relating to the history of San Fernando. These will form part of the permanent exhibits at the museum.

The sugar industry—and I know this will excite Members across there when we say sugar—has contributed significantly to the cultural heritage of this country. Let me repeat that: The sugar industry has contributed to the cultural heritage of this country and, therefore, this heritage must be preserved for present and future generations.

Sevilla House on the site of the old sugar factory in Caroni has been identified as the location for the sugar museum. A number of art and other heritage objects, including photographs, implements and tools relating to the history of the sugar industry in Trinidad and Tobago have been acquired and assembled. Additionally, the museum has begun collaboration with UTT for the conduct of research on the sugar industry.

Community museums are being developed with the collaboration of community groups to capture the experience of these communities. Work on the museums at Mayaro and La Brea commenced. Plans are currently being developed for the expansion of the Toco Folk Museum to accommodate new acquisitions.

Mr. Peters: Where is the Mayaro museum?

Mr. J. Regrello: Shall I repeat it? Community museums are being developed with the collaboration of community groups to capture the experiences of these communities. Work on the museums at Mayaro and La Brea commenced. Plans are currently being developed for the expansion of the Toco Folk Museum to accommodate new acquisitions.

The National Museum is also working with the Laventille Tourism Organization on compiling the story of Laventille, as well as material for that community's museum. A similar project is being undertaken at the Belmont community.

Globally, technology has impacted the development of museums, allowing online visitors to view exhibits and to explore cultures and history virtually. At a recent meeting in Trinidad at the Pro Tempore Secretariat for the forum of Ministers of Culture of Latin America and the Caribbean, it was agreed that the forum should actively pursue such a museum for the region.

11.35 p.m.

The creation of a virtual museum in Trinidad and Tobago will facilitate this country's input into a larger project. In this regard, the National Museum has already digitized 1,000 objects and acquired specialized computer equipment.

In the area of historic preservation, the restoration and upgrade of historic buildings on heritage sites is a priority. Work continues on the national heritage site at Nelson Island which was the first point of entry in the 19th century for indentured immigrants. The project entails building restoration and research and design for special museum exhibits. To date, final drawings have been completed as well as topographical and hydrographical surveys. A jetty and footpaths at the site have also been completed and the reconstruction of the building known as Butler's Cottage is near completion.

While the process of historic restoration is slow and often painstaking, I am pleased to say that a number of other heritage sites are now under restoration. These include buildings known as the Magnificent Seven as well as the Red House. Restoration works commenced on Mille Fleurs with the reconstruction of the annexed building and civilization of the main building. Restoration work at Queen's Royal College and the Red House continued over the past 12 months. Final drawings for restoration of Stollmeyers's Castle and Whitehall are nearing completion.

In 2009, the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs will deepen and broaden its work in the culture sector by strengthening its technical capacity for the division of culture to achieve its articulated goals; building the institutional capacity for the national cultural legislation towards increasing the number of citizens actively involved in the visual and performing arts and working in collaboration with the relevant stakeholders to plan and execute the first triannual national visual and performing arts festival.

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

The Ministry will be fast tracking its effort at establishing a board of management for the National Steel Symphony Orchestra.

It is also important to note that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has recently concluded the signing of cultural agreements with Cuba and El Salvador and is involved in negotiations with several other nations namely, Ghana, India, Botswana and South Africa to conclude cultural agreements. The Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs in its role as facilitator of these agreements will work in 2009 to implement these agreements and at the

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same time, achieve our objectives for developing our cultural industries and will work towards establishing close ties with the cultural industries existent in these nations.

In the area of museums and heritage, the Ministry will continue to support the work of the national trust which will oversee the development of the national heritage site at Nelson Island, an extremely important historic restoration project as it relates to our cultural diversity. The trust will continue to monitor and encourage historic restoration not only of the buildings within the Magnificent Seven but also monuments and sites around the country. The Ministry proposes to bring on stream the virtual museum and to expand physical museum facilities to include additional space for the National Museum and Art Gallery and community museums in other locations.

Culture is not only about the arts, but our environment; the way we think, behave live and relate to each other.

Thank you.

Mr. Harry Partap (*Cumuto/Manzanilla*): Madam Deputy Speaker, it is now 21 minutes before midnight and I promise that I will not keep the House beyond my 75 minutes. I welcome the opportunity to make a contribution to the Appropriation Bill 2009 which seeks to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago, for the financial year ending September 30, 2009. Firstly, let me commend the hon. Member for Siparia for her incisive and clinical analysis of the 2008/2009 budget presented by the hon. Minister of Finance. The hon. Member for Siparia correctly analyzed the current financial environment and exposed the nakedness of the budget and the attempt by the Minister of Finance to hoodwink the population into a false sense of security. The hon. Member for Siparia did it with charm and finesse and not once did she yawn or give half a yawn during her contribution. We are indeed proud of her. I also congratulate my other colleagues on this side who have joined the debate and given an equally brilliant account of themselves.

I take the opportunity now to congratulate two outstanding female students at the North Eastern College in Sangre Grande. They are Faliyah Zorisha Khan and Meera Bisram who won open scholarships to further their education. Miss Khan comes from Biche and Miss Bisram hails from the Coryal district in the constituency of Cumuto/Manzanilla. I congratulate them and their parents. I wish the students well in their studies at a higher level. The Minister of Education had nothing to do with that because her Government punished secondary school students from the Biche district by forcing them to travel long distances to and from their homes in order to get to school, while there was a solid secondary

school built in Biche. That building is still standing despite all the things that were said by the PNM Government.

The hon. Minister of Finance could have saved herself 90 per cent of the time spent in reading the budget statement. All she had to do was to refer us to the pages in the budget statements for 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008 from which she lifted all the promises made then but were never kept. The PNM has a serious credibility problem. [*Desk thumping*]

Be that as it may, I propose to focus my attention on some critical issues relating to public housing and then other pertinent matters affecting my constituency, Cumuto/Manzanilla. Before I go there, it will be remiss of me if I did not comment on some of the propaganda and public relations falsehoods said to this honourable House by Ministers who spoke earlier. The hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East was a total disappointment. His political blinkers deprived him the honour of absorbing and understanding an excellent critique of the budget statement.

He compounded the deprivation by hurling insults instead of finding an avenue to support his colleague, the Minister of Finance. I felt sorry for him at that stage. I understand his predicament. He relies on clownish behaviour to deflect and hide his incompetence and failure as a Minister. [*Desk thumping*] He feels that by entertaining the Prime Minister and his OJT colleagues on that side with his obnoxious behaviour, he would be able to pull through another sterile and non-performing term of office.

He may be able to fool you on that side, but he cannot fool the people of Trinidad and Tobago, because they have assessed his incompetence and lack of leadership in the Ministry of Works and Transport. They know that every time they hit a pothole in the road or get caught in a frustrating traffic jam or find themselves splashing through rising flood waters or sitting on the roof of their houses to save their lives, the Minister of Works and Transport had been making fun of them. [*Desk thumping*] He is such a bad example in this House. Such a bad example! Nothing that comes from his mouth is worth repeating or could be cited as worthy of emulation. That is a sad thing. [*Desk thumping*] He reminds me so much of what my grandmother used to say. She used to say that if you walk “pass” garbage for too long, chances are you will smell like garbage. I am afraid that is what is happening.

The Member for Diego Martin North/East has no credibility. If I say so it may be an understatement. He is like a bag of wind coming into this House and dreaming about a set of link roads throughout the country that had been proposed

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since 1991. He thinks that the country is taking him on. Nobody believes him and nobody trusts him. On Friday June 30, 2006, the Member for Diego Martin North East in another incarnation, I think Diego Martin East, as Minister of Works and Transport told this House in response to a question which I posed to him that the Plum Mitan Main Road would have been realigned to avoid the cluster of landslips at the 7.5 kilometre mark. He further told the House that this project would have commenced and completed in fiscal 2006/2007. Not a thing was done!

Mr. Imbert: I now come.

Mr. H. Partap: I could start over again if you want.

On January 25, 2008, again, I raised a matter with the Minister because residents were about to make a 12-kilometre walk to highlight the problem. The Minister sent me this note. Hear what he said:

Barring unforeseen circumstances work will commence on the Plumitan Road in May 2008 and would be completed by September 2008, between the 7.5 km and 8.5 km mark.

It was signed Colm Imbert and dated January 25, 2008. He signed it.

With all that “ol’ talk” that he gave on Friday, you would have thought that the people of Plum Mitan would have been driving through a realigned road at the 7.5 kilometre mark on the Plum Mitan Road. Well, no such luck. Not a blade of grass and not a stone was removed to make way for this road. Nothing was done. The Minister has no credibility. He broke two promises to the poor people in Plum Mitan.

11.50 p.m.

All I can say now is that the Plum Mitan people are coming into town. I cannot tell you when, but they are coming. If the Minister is not listening to them, then they are coming to find out why.

I turn now to the Member for Tunapuna, the distinguished Minister of Education. My colleague, the Member for Princes Town, was right to describe those opposite as “OJT Ministers”. This description was reinforced by the Minister of Education who, in no uncertain terms, demonstrated that she was suffering from a bout of newness during her contribution to the debate on Friday. The Minister was raising questions about the UNC's well-established and tested performance in the Ministry of Education during the Basdeo Panday administration when the hon. Member for Siparia and Sen. Dr. Adesh Nanan were Ministers. [*Desk thumping*]

Minister, you are being misled by your officials. They have given you information designed to embarrass you. The UNC built a total of 100 schools and they are both primary and secondary schools. These schools are scattered throughout the rural and urban areas of Trinidad and Tobago. We can point to them. I will send you a list. In fact, the constituency of Nariva, now the constituency of Cumuto/Manzanilla, alone received five secondary schools.

Minister, since you came to office, you have not opened schools; you have closed schools, and people must know that. You kept the Biche High School closed and you closed the Caigual R.C. School in Manzanilla about three months' ago. So you close schools. We built and opened schools. [*Interruption*] I am not giving way.

You have stalled the construction of the Elswick Presbyterian School. [*Interruption*] I will send you the list. They are giving you a bogus list. You have stalled the construction of the Elswick Presbyterian School, the Lengua Presbyterian School and right here in Port of Spain you have stalled the construction of the Belmont Boys' R.C. School. [*Desk thumping*] They have to be outside there protesting. [*Desk thumping*]

So where are the schools you built? Are they in Mars or are they in St. Vincent? Tell us where. [*Desk thumping*] You have a very bad record when it comes to providing safe and educationally conducive schools for our children and teachers.

Miss Le Gendre: Sit down!

Mr. H. Partap: You have a bad record. I do not want to hear nothing. You will talk whenever you have some time.

The estimates show that over 19 primary schools were earmarked to be built in 2007/2008. I have the schools listed here. You completed none. [*Interruption*] [*Crosstalk*] [*Laughter*] I am not giving way. [*Crosstalk*] [*Laughter*]

Dr. Moonilal: The market opening in three hours. [*Laughter*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, one would have thought that as we approach Tuesday, you would be a little tired and sleepy, but somehow— [*Crosstalk*] Would you please allow the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla to make his contribution? [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. H. Partap: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was saying that in the 2007/2008 fiscal year, you were supposed to complete 19 primary schools—none was completed. [*Desk thumping*] Do you know why? They have been repeated in the 2008/2009 development programme so none has been built.

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The Swaha Hindu College in Sangre Grande was under construction when we left office in 2001; when that man of moral and spiritual values threw us out. Do you know what happened? That school is still under construction six years later. You should be ashamed of yourself, Ma'am. And you come here to discredit the sterling performance of the UNC in education. [*Desk thumping*] No! You cannot do that. [*Desk thumping*] I have some advice for you, Madam Minister.

The officials around you do not want you to look good and you cannot understand that. If you look good, your predecessor, the Prime Minister's wife, will look bad. [*Desk thumping*] You may wish to consult the former Sen. Christine Sahadeo before you take any other action or say anything. [*Desk thumping*] [*Madam Deputy Speaker stands*] [*Mr. Partap sits*] [*Silence*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: This sounds much better. Continue hon. Member.

Mr. H. Partap: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. So they do not want the Minister to look good. Indeed, they cannot let her predecessors look bad therefore they are tying her up like a Sunday crab in the Ministry. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*] Madam Minister, the Ministry never looked as bad as it does under you. That is what they are doing to make the Prime Minister's wife look good and you cannot understand that.

It is as if the Ministry of Education is on autopilot. You are headed for a failed Ministry because you are allowing the public servants to do what you should be doing. Thank God for the principals and teachers at some of our secondary schools, who, despite the heavy odds against them, have led their schools to outstanding success in external examinations. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Minister, you can show me what you want. Schools under you now are a battleground, so get your good self from your high chair and start doing the work and do not let them tie you up to protect the Prime Minister's wife. [*Interruption*] Madam, have some dignity. People like you still and do not let them tie you up. [*Loud talking*] [*Laughter*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, please!

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am tempted to do just that because something has to be happening as we approach 12 o'clock midnight. [*Laughter*] [*Loud talking*]

Mr. H. Partap: Madam Deputy Speaker, I am sorry the Prime Minister is not here, but I have noticed that on diverse occasions the Prime Minister would sit in

his seat and not lift a finger to stop the Member for Diego Martin North/East. The Prime Minister would allow him to carry on with poisoned tongue and then grin and enjoy the verbal barbs thrown at us.

I have no problems with that. If the Standing Orders allow him to make himself a disgusting spectacle, so be it. [Laughter] But what I take objection to is that on several occasions, when we *return* the favour to the Member for Diego Martin North/East, the Prime Minister would rise holier than thou and paint us as bringing the House into disrepute, blaming us. The Prime Minister pretends that the Member for Diego Martin North/East is an innocent victim and he needs his protection.

Well I will tell you something this evening. We will not broach any lecture from the Prime Minister as to our conduct in this House until he can rein in the Member for Diego Martin North/East. The Prime Minister has tried to blame us for bringing the House into disrepute, while shielding the Member for Diego Martin North/East. We will have none of it. If he wants to use his seniority in this House to guard the House's integrity, he must start with the Member for Diego Martin North/East, [*Desk thumping*] then he can turn to us. Enough is said. I am finished with that.

The Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment came here this evening and made a most profound statement which has left all of us stunned and shocked. She revealed that by merely turning the sod for a housing project, all the houses are counted as built already. [*Laughter*] Have you ever heard so much nonsense in your life? In other words, units in a proposed housing project are checked as completed even though not a brick has been laid, a nail gone through a board, or a post hole dug; no foundation. The Minister is saying all you have to do is dig a hole in the ground and a house sprouts up.

In my lifetime, I have heard ridiculous things, but “oh gosh” man, not this one coming from a Minister of Government who says that she has three degrees. I cannot believe that at all. [*Interruption*] That is what happened. The Minister turned the sod and she feels she built 19 schools. Maybe this is the reason why they break down people's houses, because they do not understand how to build houses. People build their houses because they cannot get houses. [*Interruption*] I will tell you about that later. Hold on.

So, the Minister's revelation today makes us wonder: Can we trust the statistics coming out of the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment? No, we cannot. We cannot trust anything the Minister says—but there are a few

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across there we can point and say they are okay; but there are others we cannot even trust. And I am getting to distrust the Minister of Education. I had liked the lady, you know, but I do not know. I feel she is taking bad habits from the Member for Diego Martin North/East.

This is why the Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment is claiming that they built 32,000 houses. However, the Prime Minister, speaking in this House last Friday mentioned 26,000. This morning, the former Minister of Housing said 26,000. Now, we cannot build that,"eh".

12.05 a.m.

I went through all the available papers I could get in relation to housing since 2002. I went to the Ministry of Housing's website and all I could have counted was 21,000 houses. I believe what I saw when I checked. They built only 21,000 houses; they turned the sod for the rest and counted them as being built. I tell you! My advice to the Minister is that she must stop talking nonsense and know she must direct the people in her Ministry to provide her with the correct information. I would have thought that lady with three degrees would have understood that she cannot come in the House and say a thing like that. She exposed the whole PNM. She exposed them to ridicule and they would get ridicule. *[Interruption]*

Dr. Moonilal: She exposed herself.

Mr. H. Partap: She did. The hon. Member for Siparia made reference to the fact that low-and middle-income earners cannot access adequate and affordable houses because they do not fit within the income requirement. The Minister stood there and tried to defend it and again, she tied up herself like a Sunday crab. Regardless of what the Minister says, the income requirement mentioned by the Member for Siparia is correct. You cannot tell me that you are building houses costing \$450,000 and \$835,000 and you expect low-income and middle-income people to gain access. The income requirement is not the same as the low-income ones.

What happened? The Minister said that the income requirement is \$30,000. When she remembered that the Member for Siparia said \$30,000, she said: "No, no, it was raised to \$35,000. Like an auction, it moved from \$30,000 straight to \$35,000. What are they trying to do with the people of Trinidad and Tobago? She is blaming us for trying to discourage the people out there. I cannot remember the words she used. She said: "When we say these things, people outside there get discouraged and we are sending them out. They are doing it to themselves. They are—I cannot say lying—misleading the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I was looking at the budget statement by the hon. Minister of Finance and she devoted 44 lines to housing, at page 32. Of the 44 lines, only six contained one matter that is new. The 38 other lines were a rehash of the old promises. It was a clear admission—the Minister admitted it today even though she feels that she did not—that the Government’s housing programme has reached a saturation point and they are struggling to meet its target of 10,000 units per year. The Member for Diego Martin West did allude to it today, because he knows. He did not know that you can turn sod and a house comes up. This is why he asked you to find the 6,000.

The Minister came here this evening and she said nothing new. However, what the Minister did not say is that the houses are too expensive for the low-and middle-income earners. The next thing that she did not say is that the houses that are already built are already falling apart. Contrary to what the Prime Minister said last week, the houses are falling apart, not because of any soil-type, but because of naked corruption. The Prime Minister cannot tell us on this side that the NHA, now HDC, did not conduct soil tests before they put down the housing projects, because I am sure that these people would have done the soil test. There is no soil problem. It is bad workmanship. I would tell you what happened.

The National Housing Authority (NHA) had given out lucrative contracts to build houses; these contracts were given to PNM members who lost elections. I do not want to call their names now. If you press me I may call it; people who lost elections and councillors in PNM councils in San Fernando. I would call it in time. Some of these people who got contracts did not own a wheelbarrow, but they were awarded contracts. They did not have a hammer, but they got contracts worth millions of dollars. That is how the corruption is going on and staying within the PNM family.

The wife of a former Minister of Works and Transport and a former chairman of the PNM is a contractor, building houses. All she has is a teacher’s diploma from one of the teachers colleges that had been shut down by the PNM. She was a teacher. She is now building houses in Princes Town, Buen Intento.

Mr. S. Panday: “An she eh know hard wood from soft wood!”

Mr. H. Partap: And there are now serious structural problems in those houses. I am told that the pillars of the houses that she is building are of such low quality, that they are shaking and they have now put iron frames around them to reinforce them. What is this? What is happening with our money? The new houses are being propped up and we are told that eventually those houses would have to fetch a price of between \$250,000—\$330,000. These buildings are a

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liability and they would cause untold hardships to those people who go and buy them. What happened? It is because of corruption, nepotism and favouritism coming from the PNM's side.

That is not all. There is a scandal now in the Corinth Hills apartments in the Prime Minister's constituency; a serious scandal. I am told that unfinished apartments have been distributed to people who applied and these apartments do not have toilet facilities. "Tell meh something, wat yuh want dem to do, do their business in a brown paper bag and den fling it over de fence?" Is that what you want? Why are you not providing the people with a finished house? They have to pay for it. We call on the Minister of Housing, Planning and the Environment to launch an investigation into these allegations. I do not care if she tells us what is the outcome of that, because she would come and say that nothing is wrong with the houses. She must take corrective action. Let those people who build the houses come back and do what they are supposed to do in the correct way.

The next thing I want her to do is stop the corruption in the HDC. We are not very optimistic about the review of housing allocation policy that is now being proposed, because the parameters set out in the budget statement for that review do not satisfy our concerns about discrimination, favouritism and nepotism, not to mention corruption coming from that side. The declared intention is that they are going to review the salary ceiling, the date of application, the number of dependants and the age of the dependants, but these will not solve the discrimination and corruption in the allocation process. They will not.

We are told that senior PNM officials in San Fernando had been engaged in offering HDC apartments to persons who can pay a goodwill. [*Interruption*]

Mr. S. Panday: Bribe!

Mr. H. Partap: I call it a goodwill of \$5,000—\$6,000. If they paid that, they would get an apartment. I am not talking from the top of my hat. If you listen to the radio today, or search the papers, you would have seen where the HDC has issued notices in the newspapers and on the radio warning citizens not to pay money to unauthorized persons for HDC apartments. They are from the Prime Minister's constituency office. I think one name is, I hope they remember, Abigail Cox. One was a former mayor who has died; may her soul rest in peace. The culprits are PNM officials in PNM constituency offices. These are the culprits. The Minister does not have to look far. If she wants, I can tell her who they are. We are certain that the review of the allocation process will not stop the PNM operatives from that frenzied feeding at the trough. They will not stop.

Under the former Minister of Housing, 10 per cent of the housing had been allocated, so that Members of Parliament could have reported an emergency case, the Minister would have considered it and he would have acted at that time. The new Minister has stopped that. It is regretted that facility has been stopped. As I speak, there are two pensioners Cyril Pierre, his common-law wife, Mabel Williams and their mentally challenged daughter, who has now been taken into the hospital, so she is out of it. They are now in a parking lot in Barataria, because there were evicted from their apartment by the HDC at Building No. 33, Trou Macaque. That is government housing! They have thrown out these two old people, senior citizens. “All yuh talking ‘bout all yuh care for people?” I really do not care if those people had defaulted in the payment of their rent. I am not concerned about that. In fact, that is no reason for a government to throw them on the streets. What are they going to do? Because they owe you a couple thousand dollars, I do not know, you would throw them on the streets? They have nothing over their heads and they are in a car park. These people are old people who suffer from arthritis. What do they do? That is what their caring Government did for them.

12.20 a.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, they are concerned because they hear the Prime Minister built a mansion for \$173 million; he spent \$259,000 to charter a plane to Jamaica to have dinner; he spent \$550 million to inaugurate himself; he spent \$500 million to establish two secretariats for two international conferences that are not going to assist us in any way; and he has wasted so much money on the Brian Lara Stadium. These are two old persons and they have sent them away.

What did these people do? They came to the Leader of the Opposition for help, because they do not trust them. They have no credibility in their eyes, so they did not go to them. They went to the Leader of the Opposition, because they know that the Leader of the Opposition spent his adult life serving the poor and the landless. [*Desk thumping*] Even though the PNM is using their majority to keep him out of this Parliament, the people feel that he is still the person to help them, so they have gone to him for help in their troubles, because you have no credibility.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition can no longer help, because the Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment has removed that 10 per cent out of the hands of—well, we did not have it, but we could have recommended people for housing to the Minister, but she has removed that. So, Mabel and Cyril will have to remain in the car park until the UNC can find a place

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for them or until we get back into office. What I am telling the Minister is to check that out and see what kind of assistance she could give to Cyril and Mabel so that they can come out of the car park and live in peace in their last days.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to come now to this random draw that they want to review. I want to ask the Minister: Where did they get the software for that lottery draw? Was it imported from Canada, the United Kingdom or the United States of America? Where did they get that computer software for that draw? You see, the ministry's computer for that draw seems reluctant to pick up East Indian names. [*Desk thumping*] So, there is an inbuilt discrimination in the process. I want you to try something.

If you do not believe me, try typing "Peter Roberts" on your computer. That is an Anglo-Saxon name, and that will be okay. If you type "Ramesh Baboolal" or "Ramesh Maharaj", immediately there is a red line under those names. The reason for that is the computer does not recognize that there are East Indian names, but it recognizes Anglo-Saxon names.

I believe that the Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment at the HDC is aware of that. Maybe that is the reason the Minister has consistently refused to give us a list of the names of the persons who benefited from the housing distribution. [*Desk thumping*]

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. [*Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. H. Partap: Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you and I want to thank the House for allowing me to complete my contribution. I have a few constituency matters that I have to raise and then I would leave. I want to return to the housing matter. Now, the Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment has refused to provide the list of names. She cited something and said that she cannot do it, but we know the reason. What I find strange is that the names of persons who have applied for the \$15,000 grant to repair their houses are published in the newspapers. So, it is the same public funds. Why do you publish the names of persons seeking the grant of \$15,000 to repair their houses and you cannot provide us with the names of persons who are receiving houses from the Government stock? You know your reason.

The response given by the Minister for not releasing those names is hogwash, especially when taxpayers' money is involved. I want to remind the Minister, the HDC and the Prime Minister what their own Vision 2020 document says in the Draft National Strategic Plan at page 143. I am going to read it. That is your plan. There are eight pillars and the one that I am picking out for you says:

“That equal opportunity in obtaining housing must be given to citizens regardless of gender, race, religion, disability and political affiliation.”

That is what your plan says. You could put that in your pipe and smoke it. *[Interruption]* I have to correct that another time. Your Prime Minister did not say so.

Madam Deputy Speaker, let me just raise some constituency matters. One of the matters was already raised by the Member for Mayaro, but I just want to reinforce it. *[Interruption]* I cannot understand the Government and, more so, I cannot understand the Minister of Education. She is saying that we cannot count. Do you know something? There are 22 children in Biche that need transport to get to Rio Claro. The Minister had promised to send them to Rio Claro because they closed down the school. *[Interruption]* Do you know what the Minister did? She sent a 12-seater maxi-taxi. So, what do you expect them to do? Do you expect them to jump on the roof? *[Interruption]* The number of children that need transport from Biche to Rio Claro is 22. *[Interruption]* Did you act on the letter?

Hon. Members: Shame on you!

Miss Le Gendre: Yes, I did.

Mr. H. Partap: If you did, I am not going to go further, and I would move on now to the other matters. The Minister promised to fix the St. Marie Emmanuel Road, during the election. The PNM candidate was on a truck saying that he is going to fix roads. The people want St. Marie Emmanuel Road fixed. They also want the North Oropouche Road, Fishing Pond Road, the Genda Road, Caijual Road, Marquis Road, Tamanie Hill Road and Sin Verguenza Road. What do you want them to do? They want these roads. One of your top honchos closed off a road in Caratal; the Rose Gaspard Road. He dug a drain across it and put a chain there. The former Treasurer of your party, Mr. Monteil, stopped them from going on that government road. You could call him and tell him to move the chain and give it to you so that you can use it in the night. *[Desk thumping]* Madam Deputy Speaker, I withdraw that.

There is a serious depression on the Los Armadillos Road and the people are getting a lot of trouble. *[Interruption]* It is not under you, but it is under the

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Minister of Local Government. But you could pass on the message for me. So, stop fooling the people in the constituency of Cumuto/Manzanilla. You paid them to vote in the last election and they did not vote for you. They took your money and they fooled you. At some other time, I am going to tell you about that.

The people in the Cumuto/Manzanilla district are in urgent need of road repairs. A lot of things are being done there through the community, and we need to get the roads fixed. So, stop fooling the people and please come down to Plum Mitan and give them the road, because they want it.

Madam Deputy Speaker, with these few words, I want to thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Deputy Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to today at 10.00 a.m.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 12.33 a.m.