

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Tuesday, September 30, 2008*

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

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

Annual audited financial statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company Limited for the financial year ended December 31, 2007. [*The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Mustapha Abdul-Hamid)*]

To be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee

APPROPRIATION BILL**(BUDGET)**

[Fourth Day]

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

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

The Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education (Hon. Christine Kangaloo): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in support, not just of the 2009 budget, but in support of the hon. Minister of Finance, whose presentation last Monday was a red-letter day in the history of women in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

It is by no accident that we witnessed last Monday the historic presentation of the national budget by a female Minister of Finance. That was the natural and unstoppable consequence of developments in the party that has formed the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for longer than any other in the history of this nation.

The history of the People's National Movement has been a history of the rise of many great women and of many great women's movements. I speak of great women like Isabel Teshea, Ada Date-Camps, Muriel Donawa-McDavidson, and Elmina Clarke-Allen, to name a few. I speak of great women's movements like the Teachers' Educational and Cultural Association, the People's Education Movement, the People's Education Group, the Federation of Women's Institutions and the Women's League.

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Mr. Speaker, great women and great women's movements are the rock upon which the People's National Movement is built, and last Monday the nation and the region got to see that our women are not only the foundation of this great party but they are firmly seated at the top of PNM building. Through you, Mr. Speaker, I therefore wish to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance, Karen Nunez-Tesheira for a budget presentation that made the whole country proud, not only by whom it was said but in what it contained.

So, today it is both my duty and privilege to speak up in support of this budget. This is a budget that deserves our full support, particularly in relation to tertiary education. I even thought that I heard the Member for Siparia grudgingly concede that in this budget we have gotten it right on tertiary education. The hon. Member is not alone; there are hundreds of thousands of citizens who are benefiting from Government's tertiary education initiatives, who know that in this area the Government continues to get it right.

This Government continues to get it right in tertiary education because we adhere to two critical principles in this area: affordability and relevance. They have always been among the pillars upon which this administration's tertiary education policy is built. A long time ago, as far back as 1955, these pillars were identified by Dr. Eric Williams when, in delivering an address on the subject, "The Role of a University in the Educational System of the British West Indies", he listed some of the ills of education in those times, the fact that education is based on income not on merit or necessity and is restricted to a few, and that the timetable of the average school is littered with subjects or fragments of subjects that bear no relation to the lives of people.

Neither the NAR nor the UNC administration understood these principles. That is why for many years until tertiary education was rescued by this administration, the country under the NAR and the UNC consistently got it wrong. The NAR felt that tertiary education was just another commodity to be traded and bartered in their dealings with the IMF, and so they introduced cess, which put tertiary education beyond the reach of thousands of citizens. The UNC government with its typical sleight of hand, introduced a dollar-for-dollar programme that never thought about where struggling people were going to find the first dollar to begin with.

I heard the hon. Member for Siparia say that this budget is the great PNM hoax, but I would like to suggest to the hon. Member, that it was her government's dollar-for-dollar programme that was the greatest UNC hoax. The cornerstone of this Government's approach to tertiary education is that it must be

free to every single citizen. Permit me to refer again to the words of Dr. Williams in 1955, and I quote:

"There should be no charges for tuition and our university blaze the trail for the eventual recognition of the principle that education should be free from kindergarten to university."

These are the principles upon which this Government's approach to tertiary education is built. Those are the principles which this budget continues to abide by. In speaking about affordability, which was one of the first pillars, let me go back to Vision 2020.

Vision 2020, as we all know is for this country to attain developed country status on or before the year 2020. To do that, we acknowledge that we must have an educated workforce and a knowledge-based society. In the Vision 2020 plan we have identified that 60 per cent of the school leaving population must move on to a higher form of education by the year 2015.

So, how do we achieve that milestone? The answer is, by making tertiary education affordable. That is why the Government introduced the Government Assistance Tuition Expenses (GATE) programme, where the tuition expenses for students, all undergraduates, were paid by the Government. That is what was done by this Government. In respect of the postgraduate degrees, the GATE programme allows for 50 per cent of it to be paid, once the degrees are being pursued in public institutions and 50 per cent, to a maximum of \$10,000 annually for private institutions. In this budget, we have now introduced that that 50 per cent will be to a maximum of \$20,000 for Masters programmes and \$30,000 for PhD programmes for citizens who are studying in private institutions.

With the advent of free tuition expenses, we saw the numbers of students applying and being registered with the universities increase, and that was not all that the Government did. We introduced the Higher Education Loan Programme (HELP), which was a soft loan programme to assist with the other expenses; the expenses apart from the tuition expenses. Under this programme \$25,000 would be paid a year if you are studying in Trinidad and Tobago, and a maximum of \$75,000 if you were studying in the regional institutions.

This HELP loan was different from the Student Revolving Loan, which existed previously. That student-revolving loan was only for students attending the University of the West Indies, and it is was for degrees that were deemed to be a relevance to the country at that particular time. So, the HELP loan opened up access to students as well. In speaking about HELP, let me just go back to GATE,

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because I alluded to the dollar-for-dollar programme, and I said the dollar-for-dollar was the greatest UNC hoax, and we need to talk about the differences between the UNC's policy with respect to tertiary education and the policy of this Government.

Under the dollar-for-dollar programme, which the UNC boasted about, you had to find the first dollar, it would be matched by the Government and the dollar-for-dollar programme was only applicable to the University of the West Indies, and it was only applicable to first year students. My understanding is that the dollar-for-dollar programme benefited some 2,500 students. Compare that to the GATE programme, which has to date benefited over 95,000 citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

We must also remember that the GATE programme can be accessed by students who are studying at private tertiary institutions, a major difference between the dollar-for-dollar and the GATE. There are 28 approved private institutions, where the students are receiving GATE funding from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

With respect to the HELP loan, since it was introduced, over 5,000 citizens have benefited and have accessed HELP. With GATE and with HELP, we have seen the democratization of education in Trinidad and Tobago. We have broadened the boundaries of Dr. Williams' vision of affordable tertiary education, because the tertiary education is now available outside the walls of the universities, because the tertiary education is now available through the private institutions and all are being funded by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

I think I should say it once more, the difference between dollar-for-dollar and GATE. Dollar-for-dollar was elitist, was not designed for the person who was really in need. The GATE programme is far superior to the dollar-for-dollar programme. [*Desk thumping*]

We have now touched on affordability, so through the GATE and HELP we have seen the tertiary education open up for any citizen who wishes to pursue it, but hand in hand with that we needed to have capacity.

10.15 a.m.

Just look at what has happened with the numbers in our tertiary institutions. The University of the West Indies went from an enrolment figure of 8,000 in 2001 to just about 16,000 this year, 2008. [*Desk thumping*] A 100 per cent increase in enrolment figures. The University of the Southern Caribbean, the enrolment

figures for the University of the Southern Caribbean went from 760 in 2001/2002 to over 3,500 students in 2008. [*Desk thumping*] That is a 400 per cent increase.

Having established the University of Trinidad and Tobago it now has an enrolment figure approaching 6,000 students and COSTAATT, its enrolment figures are now up to 5,000 which is almost a 500 per cent increase from the year 2000. [*Desk thumping*] So we have seen the capacity of these institutions, we have seen the enrolment numbers increasing steadily. Therefore, what do we need to do? We need to expand the universities' development programmes, so, let me move to the University of the West Indies.

As I have said before, its enrolment figure stands at 16,000 at this moment. It is projected to increase to 22,000 by the year 2012. So, what has the Government done? Recently the Government has approved funding for the renovation and extension of chemical engineering block 13 of the St. Augustine Campus. That faculty, the enrolment went up from some 1,000 students in 2000 to over 2,500 students in 2006. So there was a need for an expansion of the physical faculty itself.

The expansion will include new lecture theatres; more lecture rooms so that the teaching in this faculty will not be compromised. The university has also been constructing student halls of residence so the Government recently approved the funding for these two projects in the tune of some \$174,551,684. In addition, the Government has agreed to fund the upgrade and extension of Canada Hall, the upgrade of the senior common room facility at the University of the West Indies, the St. Augustine Campus at a projected cost of some \$60 million.

Apart from that, the Government had already agreed to fund the construction of a lecture theatre and auditorium, the extension of the milner hall of residence and the construction of a teaching and learning complex at a cost of \$152,908,718; all together, funding in the tune of \$390 million for the University of the West Indies, its capital development projects. [*Desk thumping*]

We keep hearing things about the Government and the University of the West Indies, and just to debunk all of those stories that you hear, I feel that I should list the recurrent expenditure that the Government has been funding for the University of the West Indies since 1999. In the year 1999, the recurrent expenditure was \$344,964,405; in 2000/2001, it went down to \$144,192,990; in 2001/2002, it went to \$288,931,860; in 2002/2003, it went up to \$299,815,993; in 2003/2004—I would like you to hear this figure, Mr. Speaker, the recurrent expenditure funded by the Government went to \$468,190,884. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, in 2007/2008, the actual recurrent expenditure of the University of the West Indies is

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\$564,008,000. So all in all \$3.6 billion expended on the University of the West Indies; \$3.6 billion. [*Interruption*]

The University of the West Indies is benefiting from a level of Government support unprecedented in this country's history. Unprecedented and I feel that I should talk about a decision that was recently made by Cabinet in respect of the Faculty of Medical Sciences. There was a Cabinet-appointed committee that had been put in place to look at the reporting relationships among the University of the West Indies, the Faculty of Medical Sciences, the Regional Health Authorities and the Ministry of Health. That committee presented a report to Cabinet and the report made several recommendations which were accepted by the Cabinet and the Government. In essence, the report says that it has now defined what the reporting relationships will be with the Faculty of Medical Sciences and a document will be drawn up which will set out all the responsibilities and obligations of the different parties.

Over the years, there had been some difficulty with the reporting mechanisms; you had the University of the West Indies which is responsible for the academic programmes, you have the RHAs which would be responsible for physical infrastructure, you have the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education that would be funding the university as well. So, you had all of these different issues arising and the Cabinet-appointed committee looked at the whole situation and made a report to Cabinet which was accepted.

The report basically says that a document will now have to be drawn up defining the roles and responsibilities of all the parties. So the RHAs would be responsible for the maintenance of its facilities, the cleaning of the plant and equipment, they would be responsible for the provision of the necessary capital funding, they would be responsible for the provision of adequate coverage for clinical service—all of those things were laid out in the report. The University of the West Indies would be responsible for the provision of supplies and materials which would be required for research, teaching and administration of its activities, the teaching and research functions, selections/admissions and examinations of students would also fall under the purview of the University of the West Indies. Then the Ministry of Health would be responsible for the health policy development, for the payment of stipends and for ensuring that the RHAs would have the necessary funding to meet their obligations to the teaching hospitals.

The Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education would be responsible for facilitating the Faculty of Medical Sciences in maintaining high standards and accreditation and providing funding to meet the recurrent

expenditure of the faculty through grants, subsidies and payments of tuition fees via the GATE programme.

So, Mr. Speaker, as I said, this report was accepted, the report also recommended that funding in the sum of some \$80 million should be provided to offset some arrears that were owed to the Faculty of Medical Sciences and the University of the West Indies. So that an issue that had been troubling the Faculty of Medical Sciences and the University of the West Indies has finally been put to rest and when the document is drawn up with the reporting relationships, there will be a senior planning committee in place that will meet regularly so that all of the issues affecting the hospitals, the university, the ministry and the RHAs would all be settled by this planning committee. It took a long time but the committee came through and the report as I said was accepted by the Cabinet. As I said, UWI is benefiting from a level of support that is unprecedented, and I make bold to say since Independence.

I am sorry that the Member for Caroni East is not here, because things are so good at the University of the West Indies that some members of the faculty do not even want to leave the University of the West Indies. I am speaking about the Member for Caroni East. I understand that the University of the West Indies administration has pointed out to the Member for Caroni East that as an elected Member of Parliament he cannot serve two masters. The rule says that he can no longer be a member of the faculty. He must either be an elected Member of Parliament or he must be a lecturer. *[Interruption]*

I understand that the Member has been made so distraught by the administration's position that he has appealed the decision to no other than the Queen of England.

Hon. Member: What? *[Desk thumping]* *[Laughter]*

Hon. C. Kangaloo: Because he says that the University of the West Indies was established by a Royal Charter. *[Interruption and laughter]* So, the Member for Caroni East has lodged his appeal with the Queen of England. *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Speaker, can you imagine such a thing? That is why I said that the University of the West Indies is receiving such unprecedented support since Independence, but the Member for Caroni East clearly does not understand the history of this country and Independence and what it means. So, I do not know what is the status of his appeal to the Queen, *[Laughter]* but I am sure we will learn about it at some point in time.

Mr. Abdul-Hamid: It is on the Queen's desk. It is in the Queen's in-dip. [Laughter]

Hon. C. Kangaloo: Mr. Speaker, as I move on and as we talk about discussing things local and we talk about—we move on from the Member for Caroni East, I am so sorry because I was going to tease him so gently about his pending action, but I suppose when he comes I can chat with him.

In discussing things local let me move on to the University of Trinidad and Tobago. It would seem that for those on the opposite side, particularly the Member for Caroni East, they have a peculiar difficulty with things local. So it is that the University of Trinidad and Tobago has been their political football, being kicked left to right in the hope of scoring a few political points. In so doing they have not only done discredit to themselves but they have threatened to damage the institution and the hopes and aspirations of those who attend the institution.

Permit me to set the record straight. Just as with GATE and HELP, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has addressed the issue of affordability in tertiary education, so it is in relation to the University of Trinidad and Tobago that the Government has addressed the issue of relevance. The University of Trinidad and Tobago was established to expand opportunities for the nation's youth for university level education and learning, and to deliver quality programmes which are relevant to the development of Trinidad and Tobago. Student enrolment at the University of Trinidad and Tobago now stands at 5,242; [Desk thumping] with projected enrolment for 2009 standing at some 6,600. [Desk thumping]

Currently the University of Trinidad and Tobago offers programmes as follows: PhD programmes, 21; Masters, six; Bachelors, six; the diploma or national engineering technicians diploma, 17; certificate, two. There are currently 235 post graduate students, and this therefore means that the university has built up 235 post graduate students in a short space of time. [Desk thumping]

10.30 a.m.

It shows that the University of Trinidad and Tobago is going to have a buoyant research and development capacity. Several projects are now being undertaken by the large body of post-graduate students and these projects promised to identify the University of Trinidad and Tobago as a centre of excellence in research. Some of the projects being undertaken are:

- research in carbon dioxide sequestration;

- the development of a novel method to generate gas hydrates for transportation of natural gas;
- the feasibility of carbon capture and storage in Trinidad and Tobago; and
- the development of buffalypso for animal protection.

All of this is being done at the University of Trinidad and Tobago. But permit me to talk about one of the programmes that is going to come on stream in 2009 in the University of Trinidad and Tobago and that is the faculty—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: All hail the queen. *[Laughter]* *[Desk thumping]*

Dr. Gopeesingh: I will respond.

Hon. Member: Long live the king.

Dr. Browne: Prince of Caroni—*[Laughter]*

Hon. C. Kangaloo: I am very happy to see the Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I am delighted to be here.

Hon. Member: We are honoured by your presence.

Dr. Gopeesingh: *[Inaudible]* *[Laughter]* I am not a full time employee as you are in Government. My colleagues work— *[Inaudible]*

Hon. C. Kangaloo: Mr. Speaker, the University of Trinidad and Tobago will be establishing a centre for biosciences, agriculture and food technology, which will seek to make a major contribution to the efficient production of food for the nation.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to give a little background to the setting up of this centre for biosciences, agriculture and food technology, because we have been hearing from the Opposition much about high food prices. We have been hearing about agriculture and they have been pointing fingers at this administration about agriculture and what they see as not happening in agriculture. But let me just point out that there was a flagship faculty of the University of the West Indies known as the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture; it then became the Faculty, I think, of Agriculture at the University of the West Indies. Do you know what happened in 1997?

In 1997, there was a merger of the Faculty of Agriculture and Natural Sciences in the University of the West Indies, and what did that cause? That merger served to de-emphasize the importance of agriculture and there was the

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inevitable competition for funds in the department of mathematics, physics, biology that attract a large number of students.

Mr. Speaker, it would interest you to know, what was the contribution of the agricultural sector to the National Gross Domestic Product at that time. In 1997, it was 3.48 per cent; in 1998, it was at an all-time low of 2.98 per cent. Now, the Government had meetings with the University of the West Indies; the Government went to the meetings and if the government at that time had been interested in what was happening with agriculture, certainly, they would have not allowed this merger to take place, they would have made some efforts to keep the Faculty of Agriculture alive because they knew what the Faculty of Agriculture would do for agricultural production in Trinidad and Tobago. So in 1997/1998, they turned a blind eye. You hear what the figures were for the agricultural sector to the National Gross Domestic Product, but the government of the day did nothing, so the merger took place, and therefore we now have some of those consequences.

So, the University of Trinidad and Tobago will be establishing the centre for biosciences, and as I have said, that centre will seek to make a major contribution to the efficient production of food for the nation. The graduates from this centre are expected to be computer literate, business savvy, entrepreneurial spirited, technologically competent, knowledgeable in global trade and competition, creative in thinking. That is what the graduates of this centre will be.

There will be degrees, diplomas and certificate programmes which include the Bachelor of Science, the Master of Science, the Doctoral of Philosophy in food, science and technology, a Bachelor of Science, a Bachelor of Technology in crop science and technology, a Master of Philosophy in plant production and protection, Bachelor of Science, a Bachelor of Technology in animal science and technology, a Master of Science and in biotechnology. It is hoped that this centre will produce a new generation of the food and agricultural entrepreneurs and biotechnologists who can undertake the development of food and agricultural sectors, leading to the goal of wealth creation, food security and food safety.

The graduates of the UWI faculty normally end up in the Ministry of Agriculture or seeking university employment. This centre for biosciences will be seeking a different kind of graduate. Mr. Speaker, to bring about this centre, extensive discussions were held with stakeholders, both in the public and in the private sector. The advice of Prof. Christopher Lu, a distinguished professor of Agriculture and Food Production at the University of Hawaii, with extensive experience in the development of agriculture in Oman and in Taiwan, his advice was sought and the advice of other renowned persons in agriculture, Prof. Spence. The advice of Prof.

Spence was sought as well. I think I should point out that Eastern Caribbean Institute of Agriculture and Forestry (ECIAF) currently offers diploma programmes in agriculture, forestry, animal health and ornamental horticulture.

In 2007, there were 156 applications, but only 105 could be accepted because of the space constraints. In 2008/2009, there are 143 applications, but only 88 could be accepted. A key element of the activities of the centre will be relevant research and development projects.

At the University of Trinidad and Tobago, there is a programme called the Pre-university Programme and what this programme does, is allow many nationals who would not have had the opportunity to transition from secondary to tertiary level studying. So, it offers pre-university or foundation courses in order to widen the matriculation net. It accommodates students with vocational qualifications and those who had not been able to meet the formal requirements of the university. Examples of international universities which offer the pre-university programme are:

- the University of California in San Diego;
- the Great Lakes College of Toronto;
- the University of Adelaide;
- the University of Sydney;
- the Trinity College;
- the University of Melbourne;
- the University of New South Wales;
- the European University of Ireland;
- the International Foundation of Year of the Northern Consortium of United Kingdom Universities; and
- Cambridge University.

This programme, as I have said, allows students who would not have had the opportunity, it gives them the opportunity to reach up to the level that they can now move across to tertiary education. I believe that there are 700 students enrolled in this programme at present; there were 500 graduates of this programme to date.

The University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) in its pursuit of excellence has also established alliances with the world renowned institutions and organizations,

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such as the Technological University of Denmark, the University of Cambridge, the Johns Hopkins University, and the University of British Columbia. As an integral part of its engineering and maritime programmes, there is a requirement that a substantial period over the four years of the programme be spent in the workplace and in industry and this has been welcomed by industry. In this year, the University of Trinidad and Tobago has introduced a “learning-through service: compulsory element, where all students have to spend three weeks a year in community service.

What the University of Trinidad and Tobago did, they met with the NGOs to develop the particular module. So what we are seeing, Mr. Speaker, is that the University of Trinidad and Tobago is producing a graduate, who has been exposed to the best in academic instructions and now will be imbued with a sense of giving back of service and patriotism. That is the kind of citizen that will produce a 2020 nation; that is the kind of citizen that Vision 2020 is committed to developing.[*Desk thumping*]

So, Mr. Speaker, you realize that under the stewardship of this Government, education in Trinidad and Tobago has taken a quantum leap forward.[*Desk thumping*] Compare this unfortunately, with what the UNC had when they were in office. If I could just say that under the Panday administration, education took quantum leaps backwards and one of the most glaring examples of this was the initial establishment of NESC and the Trinidad and Tobago Institute of Technology.

In 1994/1995, under a People's National Movement administration, the national training foundation was established, which was to provide skills training in conjunction with the private sector. My understanding is that there was a \$12 million grant from Ferrostal. When the UNC government assumed office, it seems that, and I have to say it like this, they were so determined not to follow through on any initiatives of the People's National Movement administration, that they established the National Energy Skills Centre (NESC)—their own foundation. Their own Minister of Energy, Mr. Finbar Gangar, was appointed chairman of the board, and the \$12 million that had been allocated to the national training foundation was taken from that foundation and allocated to NESC, against the objections of the donor.

Mr. Speaker, let me just tell you some of the persons who sat as directors of that particular board at the time. Let me call the names for you. I have already told you that the then Minister of Energy, Mr. Finbar Gangar, he was appointed chairman of the board, and I believe that at some point in time he made himself president and chairman, but let me leave that alone.

Mr. Abdul-Hamid: And Minister.

Hon. C. Kangaloo: But let me just point out some of the others. Steve Ferguson; Sadiq Baksh, who was the Minister of Works and Transport, I think at the time— *[Interruption]*

Mr. Abdul-Hamid: Best I go on T&TEC board.

Hon. C. Kangaloo: Harry Partap, *[Interruption]* who was also a Minister at that time; Ganga Singh, who was also a Minister in Government at that time. So Mr. Speaker, what is that about? We have been hearing all sorts of attacks; we now have a training institution, something established to provide skills training to citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and you have how many sitting Ministers, one, two, three, four, sitting on the board together.

10.45 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, it is very odd, but it gets worse. The National Energy Skills Centre (NESC) proceeded around June 2000 to establish the Trinidad and Tobago Institute of Technology.

Dr. Gopeesingh: From which the UTT was born.

Hon. C. Kangaloo: The Trinidad and Tobago Institute of Technology first offered some degrees for which they had shopped around. That is why I said that education took a few steps or a quantum leap backwards. Do you know that one of the degrees that TTIT offered— they said it was aligned to the University of Houston—would you believe that one of the requirements of the course was for the students to learn the history of Texas?

Hon. Members: What?

Hon. C. Kangaloo: I started off my contribution by talking about affordability, by talking about relevance. *[Crosstalk]* When we established the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT)—*[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. C. Kangaloo:—we said that it must be relevant to the needs of the people. I am showing you the difference. How relevant is it to me to learn the history of Texas in Trinidad and Tobago?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Texas is the house of energy.

Hon. Members: Ooh!

Dr. Gopeesingh: Houston is the State of energy; you must know about that. I am disappointed. You must learn about energy.

Hon. C. Kangaloo: I am very disappointed to hear my friend, the Member for Caroni East, who is a lecturer at the University of the West Indies, until his appeal is dismissed, or whatever happens with his appeal. I am disappointed that he would be giving that kind of argument for students studying, having to learn the history of Texas. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it is quite early in the morning. Could you allow the hon. Member to continue her magisterial discourse, please. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Kangaloo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When this administration came into office, the course offering was changed; the bachelor of technology degree was changed and offered in collaboration with the University of the West Indies. No longer did the students have to learn about the history of Texas. That is just to give you an example of what—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to. [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Would you give way?

Hon. Members: Tim, sit down and relax.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Please give way, you are honourable.

I thank the hon. Member for giving way. I just want to elucidate on something she said. While I was in the car coming up I heard it. I am sorry to have been late; I had an emergency to deal with this morning. [*Crosstalk*] The University of the West Indies is under a Royal Charter. Any changes of rules for senior administrative staff, lecturers or professors have to be changed under the Royal Charter. While as a Member of the Senate you do not have to resign your position as a Member of Parliament, as an elected Member of Parliament the rule is that you have to resign. Now that is unfair because all Members of the Opposition are not in full-time employment in the Government service. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Dr. Gopeesingh: They are in full-time employment because they have ministerial positions or parliamentary secretaries. My colleagues in the Opposition are allowed to carry on their work. So I indicated to the university that I should be allowed to continue my work. I was advised by senior counsel that if I go through to the local courts they would refer me to the Royal Charter to Britain, Her Majesty the Queen. I took senior counsel's advice to go under the British Charter to the Queen.

Hon. Members: You went to the Queen?

Mr. Manning: "What she tell you?" [*Laughter*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes, I got a letter from the Queen. [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*] The Queen has advised that she has appointed a visitor who is the Chancellor of the University to investigate the matter and make recommendations under the Royal Charter. So the Chancellor of the University of the West Indies, Prof. Sir George Alleyne, has been asked by the Queen to investigate the matter. [*Interruption*] This is a precedent. Why should we have to resign?

Hon. Members: All right, all right. That is abusing royal time!

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. C. Kangaloo: Mr. Speaker, if you would just permit me, that was a royal waste of time. [*Desk thumping*] I could not resist, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, if I could just move on to speak a bit, the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTAATT) operates as a community college and as the bridging institution within the tertiary education sector, which serves to broaden access to tertiary level education and training and to prepare students for employment at the para professional technologist and mid managerial level, in a variety of disciplines. Mr. Speaker, COSTAATT is also to provide remedial courses for academically under-prepared students, create a bridge to post secondary programme, to prepare students for future enrolment in undergraduate programmes and to offer short course programmes that meet the needs of the communities they serve.

There was an approved plan for COSTAATT, so there is a strategy for the College. It is to deliver five areas of courses: a division of health sciences, a division of liberal arts and sciences, a division of humanities, a division of foreign languages and a division of performing and creative arts and culture.

In the last fiscal year, COSTAATT has increased its enrolment by, approximately, 20 per cent, and has launched a new bachelor's degree in radiography, radiation

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therapy, water and waste water management, services and technology. In the last year as well, COSTAATT has commissioned the Natural and Radiological Science Laboratory at its city campus.

In the upcoming year, COSTAATT is seeking to upgrade its programmes in nursing and health sciences, some to bachelor degree programmes, to the launch of the College Prep Programme and the Prior Learning and Assessment Programme. One of the things I spoke about was the laboratory; that was one of the major achievements of COSTAATT for the last academic year.

The labs have been outfitted, and will continue to be ungraded, with state-of-the-art equipment to provide essential skills training in the areas of radiological sciences, chemistry, biology, physics and environmental studies. As a result of this investment, COSTAATT has been able to significantly improve in the quality of education experiences available to its students in these areas. Since that facility was acquired, it has been used by lecturers and students in the conduct of classes that required hands-on activities in the respective courses. The facility continues to be used at both the associate degree and the undergraduate levels. The students are being trained in aspects of their programmes which could be transferred to the real world setting in their respective clinical and internship training.

I have spoken about COSTAATT just to give you the vision for tertiary education that we have at this time. We have the community college, which is to be the major bridging institution to upgrade the skills of the students. As a community college it will also move into communities and design programmes that are relevant to the particular community. So we have the vision for the community college.

I have spoken about affordability; I have spoken about relevance; I have spoken about the seamlessness, because the community college is part of that seamlessness in the tertiary education sector. Of course, we have set up the Accreditation Council; that deals with excellence in the programmes that are offered to the students. While we do everything, while we make tertiary education affordable for our citizens, we must ensure that what they are learning will not be the history of Texas, but it would all be quality programmes being offered to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Let me just close now and say to you that the hon. Member for Siparia in her contribution spoke about the fact that this budget was not gender based and that there was nothing about gender in it. I submit that what we are doing in tertiary education affects the very single mothers the Member for Siparia spoke about. It talks about the heads of households; it affects every person. Women are all happy

that they do not have to worry about how they would meet the expenses of tertiary education for their children. What we are doing in the tertiary education sector has advanced the cause of women in a most significant way.

As I end, this Government, with what it is doing in the tertiary education sector, is really about matching aspirations with opportunities. If you aspire to be a doctor or a lawyer, whatever you aspire to be, you will have the opportunity to do it, because that is what this Government has given to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you.

Mr. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj SC (*Tabaquite*): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to join this debate. Before I go into my contribution, I take the opportunity firstly, on behalf of the Opposition, to wish the Muslim community Eid Mubarak at this time.

I was not here when the Minister of Finance presented this budget, nor was I here when the Member for Siparia spoke. I, obviously, found out that the Government, through the Member for Diego Martin North/East, tried to take advantage. In not responding to the issues which she raised, he attacked her personally.

Hon. Members: No way! [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: This has been the modus operandi of the PNM. I would like first to congratulate the Member for Siparia for her contribution, [*Desk thumping*] and also to congratulate all the Members of the Opposition for the contributions which they have made, because we have not allowed the personal attacks to prevent us from discharging our duty to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I wish I could have congratulated the Minister of Finance in presenting this budget, but I cannot congratulate the Minister, because the budget which she has produced has really got an economic policy which has shown that we are really in an economic crisis in Trinidad and Tobago. I know it is not her personal budget, so I do not blame her personally; I know that she is new.

We have seen in that budget statement, and from the records, that this Government has disregarded every advice from all the experts: State, within the State and internationally—and has continued its wild spending, although there have been warnings and cautions for them not to do that.

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11.00 a.m.

The Government in this budget has not shown any respect for that advice. On the contrary, it has shown contempt for that advice and it has continued by going along with its policy to have wild spending. I agree with the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West when he said yesterday that inflation is probably one of the most important matters we have to look at, at this time and that is what our Members have been saying too. Because with inflation—and the inflation is going to go up because there is nothing in this budget, apart from “ol’ talk”, that you are not going to have a diversified economy; there is nothing in this budget to show that we are not going to go along with a gas-based economy which is, in effect, you are exploiting the natural resources. That is an irreplaceable asset and from the scientific reports, as I would show, from Ryder Scott—two reports—that no matter what they said, it is only a guarantee of 12 to 13 years.

So what this budget is based on is an economic policy in which the Prime Minister is hoping that more gas and more oil would be found, and we will go into that in greater detail in a short while. I want to concentrate first on, when you listened to what the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre has said, it is quite clear that this Government does not have an economic strategic management plan for the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. As a matter of fact, let us look at what she said this morning. She was talking about how much money was spent on education; how much is given to the University; what is given to UTT; how many faculties.

That is not the issue! The issue is whether the education system is geared to a knowledge-based economy and what are the results. If you want to have a diversified economy and not to depend upon oil and gas, you have to have progress and steps taken to have a knowledge-based economy. You must have it! We have not heard how many people emigrate after going through the education system; over 70 per cent of tertiary.

So the questions are: What are the objectives? Where is your target? What is the research that you are doing? Where have you reached? As a matter of fact, there is a recent book, *The Dragon and the Elephant* which deals with China, India and Singapore. I had the privilege of going to Singapore and looking at the economic system there. Do you know what they did in Singapore? They did not just have everybody going to school and becoming educated; they had a plan and the plan was what would be the needs of the education system in order to achieve the strategic plan of the government for economic transformation.

Therefore they knew how many professors they wanted; how many scientists; teachers and taxis. Therefore, you had to have a plan in which you will go to the population; you will tell them what is your plan; you will get the public behind your plan; you will have support because the people will know and you will have an education system, as you would have a health system, to gear for the new society that you want to transform.

I am not talking about just having a plan in writing and just spending money, I am talking about showing the Parliament how the money is spent to achieve the objective. If you do not want to listen to me, the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West yesterday told you that Vision 2020, even, he would have expected to have some target, some idea as to where you are going with Vision 2020. You are not just spending money.

That brings me to this point. It is no defence to the Opposition criticism for the Government to say, "Well, you all only spent so much money on education, but we spend so much money." You have to understand that the money that you have is not because of your innovations or your management, it is because of the price of oil and gas. So the extra moneys that you are getting—the windfall—the UNC government did not have that. So the issue is whether you are using the people's moneys to the best advantage for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is the issue! The issue is not what UNC spent; how much they spent; the issue is what you are doing with their moneys. The question is not that there is economic growth. Any ABC child in Trinidad and Tobago will know that there is economic growth and the economic growth is not because of the vision of the Prime Minister or the management of the Prime Minister and the Government. It is automatic; it comes as rent. The rent from the energy sector drives the economy. It comes automatic! That is what is happening!

So the question is not economic growth; the question is whether this economic growth is fuelling human development; whether the lives of the people are being improved; whether the moneys which you have spent, the \$220 billion that you have spent—over the last six to seven years, whether anyone in Trinidad and Tobago can say that, "my life has been improved; my children's future has been improved"; whether they can say that the standard of health care is better, that "I can see the money has given me a better and easier life".

When we talk here about corruption and crime, you cannot have any human development or maximum human development if the Government is closing its eyes to corruption. You cannot have it! As a matter of fact, you cannot have any Vision 2020 if you are blind to corruption, or if you are "coki-eye" to corruption!

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As a matter of fact, the hon. Member for Caroni East yesterday talked about Trinre. You were here, but you did not tell us that the Prime Minister's palace is also insured with Trinre. You did not tell us that! [*Desk thumping*] I want you to tell us that! Somebody rang me this morning—somebody close to you—and said: Ask the Prime Minister that question. He should have told you that yesterday.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Ramnarine, Jerry Narace.

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: As we are on it, I want you—Mr. Speaker, I am asking the Prime Minister, because you are talking and everybody here is talking about what a great budget, a loving budget, a caring budget. But how could you have a loving budget if you know people taking the people's moneys—your citizens' moneys—and you are not doing anything about it? You are closing your eyes to it.

Look at what happened in America yesterday. The Congress was not prepared to support corrupt CEOs. What are we doing in Trinidad and Tobago? We are promoting them! When I say, we, I mean the Government, promoting them; the country promoting them. You are giving them more positions, more power, more jobs, more projects! And you want to talk about caring and love? This Prime Minister loves these people so much that when they had floods, he did not go down with tall boots with them, you know; he “gone” on a private jet to see Prime Ministers in the region to discuss regional union. And you love them? Prime Minister, you “doh” love them; you love yourself.

The corruption in the Government is so great now and the Prime Minister and his Government, by turning a blind eye to what is happening, have created in the Government ministries a culture of corruption. [*Desk thumping*] Nipdec, which is headed by Calder Hart, has now become the vehicle to facilitate corruption. As a matter of fact, I ask you to ask the Minister of Works and Transport and to tell this Parliament, that is there not a report in the Ministry in which in the Highways Division in respect of contracts which have been given, that a lot of the contracts have been broken up; some have been passed through Nipdec and the report has—from my information—reached the Minister of Works and Transport.

I would also ask you to ask him whether in the PURE projects—the pure has become impure—that Nipdec is again being used as a vehicle, that contracts which are supposed to be subjected to tender—supposed to be pure—but UDeCott and Nipdec are used as the pipe line in order to facilitate these contracts to be given to hand-picked persons.

As a matter of fact, I want to tell the Prime Minister, through you, Mr. Speaker, I do not have a copy of the report, but I was shown the report. I was told

that if you got up and you deny it, that I would get a copy of it. So I would ask you to make some enquires. I also want you to know that in the Ministry of Works and Transport, Highways Division at Caroni, there is major corruption with overtime and employment. There is an employment register which persons are supposed to sign if they want jobs, but the department does not employ these persons at all. The persons who are in charge and who occupy positions in the Ministry of Works and Transport in that division, they hand-pick their people.

I have the name of the person and the address; I would not call the name. But in one case you have the lady working there, then her husband gets a job; then her daughters get a job; then her sons get a job. So you had the whole family working, whereas persons who are signing every day to get jobs are not getting jobs. Do you know why that is happening? I will tell you why that is happening. It is because they see at the top level the Prime Minister is not interested in fighting corruption; they see at the top level the Prime Minister is condoning corruption; they see at the top level the Prime Minister is promoting people who are allegedly corrupt; they see at the top level that in this House in the presence of the Prime Minister, facts were put forward which showed that Calder Hart's family got a contract which they should not have got in accordance with the rules.

The Prime Minister gets up in this Parliament and he says that that is the cause for me to appoint a commission of enquiry, but he nor his Government does not make a statement; UDeCott does not make a statement denying it and things are going on as usual. Do you think people in Trinidad and Tobago are stupid?

The Minister of Planning got up yesterday after that statement was made by the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West and said: "Listen, all yuh have to wait for any answer, because yuh not getting any answer until the commission of enquiry start." The Prime Minister has undermined that commission of enquiry. He announced it; he waited months before he named the chairman; then he waited a length of time before he names the other members of the commission.

11.15 a.m.

In the meantime, UDeCott functions as usual. Everybody was telling him that he cannot appoint a commission of enquiry and not appoint a team of forensic experts to work with them because it would be a useless exercise.

I was in London last week and many of the lawyers—a lot of big briefs will be given to lawyers, Queen's Counsels from England. Plenty money will be spent, but the whole object of the commission of enquiry will be frustrated because the Government procrastinated and the Prime Minister has refused to appoint a team

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of forensic experts to work with the commission of enquiry. I invite the Prime Minister to tell this House when he replies why he does not want to appoint a team of forensic experts like Lindquist in the Piarco enquiry.

Mr. Speaker, before I go into the meat of my contribution, I would like to make a point, and this is an important point for the people of Trinidad and Tobago to note. The oil and natural gas do not really belong to the Government; it is held by the Government in trust. The people of Trinidad and Tobago have those mineral rights; they own them.

In Alaska, the income from the gas and oil goes into a special fund and in addition to whatever investment is made, every year the people of Alaska get a dividend cheque. The reason for that is that it is regarded that the minerals of the country, the oil and gas, belong to the people.

This Government has not been telling the people what are the different prices for natural gas which foreign companies are paying. It is public knowledge that to some of them the price is subsidized but the Prime Minister owes a duty to the citizens of this country to tell them what price the natural gas is being sold at and what benefits the foreign companies are getting. Otherwise, the taxpayers are funding these foreign companies and the profits are being taken out of the country and, therefore, the mineral rights are not being used for their benefit. I ask the Government to make that information available to the population.

Year after year, from 2002, we hear the Government saying almost the same thing—what they are going to do; how much money they are spending. I looked at the debates from then to now and every year the Government recognizes that there should be a diversified economy and that agriculture should be a platform, but there have been no serious efforts made for agriculture to be a platform for a diversified economy or there has been no serious effort for there to be a diversified economy. There is urgent need in Trinidad and Tobago for the reconstruction of an onshore, non-energy sector. If that is not done, we are in serious problems and we face serious threats.

I have tried to see how best to explain, in a graphic way, the moneys being spent and the fact that the people are not getting the benefit—so that the people in John John, Beetham, Never Dirty, Laventille, Couva and Tabaquite could understand.

The Prime Minister is like a Chief Executive Officer of a company. Let us imagine that Trinidad and Tobago is a company and 1.5 million citizens are shareholders of that company. The Prime Minister, as CEO, was given, over the last few years, \$220 billion to spend for the benefit of this company. What has

happened? With \$220 billion, the shareholders are getting kidnapped, their families are being murdered, crimes are being committed and the shareholders are living in poverty. There are floods. They cannot go to a proper hospital; they have to sleep on the floor in the casualty departments. They see their children murdered, and what does the Prime Minister do? No big thing! Over 400 murders? No big thing! Collateral damage.

Not only will they fire the CEO very quickly, but I want the people in Never Dirty, Laventille and other places to know that if this \$220 billion in the capital assets of Trinidad and Tobago were properly managed, they would not be living in the kind of house in which they live. They would have been living in a good, nice house with a good, nice car and money in the bank. They would have money to pay for health care. They would not live in slums; they would have no problems.

I have studied the small oil-producing countries and when you look at those in the Persian Gulf, the citizens are basically rich, basically happy. In some of those countries, there is a higher population, but it is properly managed. In most of those countries they have diversified their economies. I mean real diversification.

Dubai, for example, is a diversified economy, so you cannot use Dubai and say you want to have an international financial centre and put it here. You have to show how this international financial centre will drive the indigenous economy that you want to create, and it cannot do it. Dubai is in the middle of wealth-producing countries. The capital from those countries is being used, but Dubai is already strong. It is so ironic that you want to have this international financial centre, but you want to bring the same CEOs and expertise who created the problems in America to Trinidad and Tobago and keep Calder Hart.

This budget does not have a human face. I do not want to use words like “dotish” and stupid. I want to know how this budget would help the people of Trinidad and Tobago who are experiencing uncontrollable murders, mayhem, rape, robbery; people are not safe in their homes. I want the Minister of Finance in a reply to tell me how the budget will curtail that. This budget will not make children feel safe at school. It will not prevent human blood from flowing on the streets and from being poured into their homes when their loved ones helplessly bleed to death.

I want this caring Government and the caring Minister of Finance to tell us—one of them said yesterday that you must not only say you love, you must show you love—how this budget will show that they love the people of Trinidad and Tobago to prevent that. This budget will not prevent the present situation in

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which the criminals commit crimes, walk free and laugh at the Government and the Prime Minister. They think the Prime Minister is a “soft” man. They think he cannot fight crime. They think he cannot do anything to catch them.

The murder rate has reached an all-time high. I invite the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance because I know what they will do—they will attack the messengers. I want them to focus on the truth for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. You have an all-time high crime rate. Mr. Prime Minister, you have never shown care and compassion for the people who have been killed and those who are suffering as a result of crime. Show some compassion this morning.

Let me read these figures to you. From 2002—2007, the police statistics show that 106,683 serious crimes have been reported and that only 26,694 have been detected. Imagine that! And you are talking about developed status! You are talking about spending \$50 billion of taxpayers' money and criminals who have committed serious crimes—rape, murder—are outside and you come here shamelessly to ask for approval to spend \$50 billion.

Mr. Speaker, during that same period, 1,810 murders were reported, but only 503 were detected. Thirteen hundred murderers are outside there prowling around and committing more murders. You ride on aeroplane; you want to buy a private jet and you come to this House to tell us that you love and care and that this is a budget for developed status. What “dotishness”!

For the period January—June 2008, this year, with your people being killed by the criminal elements, the statistics show that 8,893 crimes were reported but only 1,583 detected; police statistics. You do not need legislation to detect crime; it is management. Today, you have to tell this country what you did in 2002, where you have reached and what is happening.

There is no accountability. There are no targets, no plans. There is no evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses; there is no SWOT analysis. You are operating by “vaps”, politic economics by “vaps.”

The Minister of Finance and some of the other Members who spoke said that this budget would help people with high food prices? I would like to know how. They have not told us yet. Probably the Prime Minister will tell us. I want to know and the people will see that the budget will not help them to get better health care or a reduced cost of living; will not prevent them from sleeping on the floor in the casualty departments; will not bring relief to mothers who have to scramble to get milk to feed their babies.

Walk in Laventille, Tabaquite, John John and there are people asking you for a dollar or \$20 to buy baby milk. This budget will not help them with that.

11.30 a.m.

This budget would not help the fathers who weep and wail at the cost of bricks, gravel and sand to build or repair their homes for their families. Who is this budget going to please?

This budget is for the political elite in Trinidad and Tobago. Do you know who the political elite are? As a matter of fact, literature defines the political elite in a country as the informed, fickle and prejudiced enclave that has no intention of allowing the public at large to tell them what to do. I applied to it, the building of smelters, steel plant, ports, a budget that ignores the economic reality and a budget which will destroy the unique ecosystem of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is the mission of the political elite. The objective of this elite is simply to get the public to vote the government in, so it can exercise its will; the will of the elite. The elite satisfy the basic needs of their supporters with handouts, subsidies and demonstrate how these could be curtailed, but the supporters are discriminated against if they were voted out of power. The elite include the select few from the governing political party and founders of the ruling party that have captured the State, which benefits handsomely from the sale of our natural resources.

Even our entrepreneurs have to develop special relationships, so as to obtain jobs and contracts. This state of affairs is the kind of state that encourages corruption. The unwritten mission of this Government then becomes self-aggrandizement and the accumulation of financial rewards for the political elite. That is what this budget is about. That is who is directing the show.

As a matter of fact, in one of the interviews that the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West gave, he said that there is a clique in the Government. Yesterday he said what the PNM people voted for. He went through it. They did not vote for lack of openness, lack of transparency and a corrupt government; they voted for good governance.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and his Members of Cabinet are not living on this earth; they are living on a different planet. They are not in tune with the problems and the everyday torture of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Mothers have to beg for money to buy milk and nourishment so that they can have milk in their breasts to feed their babies.

This Government comes here and talks about caring. A lot of our fellow citizens cannot buy basic bread and cheese and they sometimes have to put dry

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bread and pipe water in their kids' school bags. This is what is happening outside there. I have made a resolution to myself that from next month, I would be spending more time on the ground in the constituency of Tabaquite and other parts of Trinidad and Tobago, because that is where people need help. The policies of this Government are not going to help the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It may be that the Prime Minister should do what he did in the election campaign; go and see the voters, ask them their problems and be the "Mahal" of Trinidad and Tobago.

How would this budget help the citizens who suffer from torture everyday because of the gridlock traffic situation? Children are denied proper education because of a broken education system. People are suffering and dying from dengue. Their homes are being flooded out but the Minister who says that the Government cares. These are only some of the problems which this budget would not be able to solve.

I want to deal with the threats to our gas-based economy. One of the aspects of peak oil is the decline in the production of oil for geological and economic reasons combined. In Trinidad and Tobago, the production of oil has indeed reached its peak and despite the much acclaimed oil find of bhpbilliton, now nowhere the level that it was hoped for, the production of oil in Trinidad and Tobago continues to decline. We import oil to allow our refinery to operate at full capacity. Hence, Trinidad and Tobago is depending on its natural gas to maintain its present economy.

We have had two Ryder Scott reports. The first told us that, at the present production rate, we have 12—13 years left of gas resources. The second in effect said the same thing, that at best, we have replaced the gas we have used over the last year, but still have about 12—13 years left of gas resources.

It has also been discussed that one of our contactors has found some more gas, but nothing like what we require, if we are to support the plans of this Government with the gas industry, which includes building aluminium smelter plants, steel plants and running pipelines throughout the region to deliver natural gas.

Though the country is encouraging bids for new exploration, the risk that nothing would be found as bpTT experienced in their last dry hole is surely with us. bpTT is now talking about reworking the old well with new technology. They are now expecting large new finds. Further, the easy-to-find and cheap-to-explore produce of natural gas has already been found. Hence, if any natural gas remains, it will be costly to explore and produce. The economic and fiscal returns to this

country would therefore be progressively reduced. We are already getting requests from the oil companies for more tax concessions to cover costs and hedge their risks that will surely reduce our rents for the further production of our natural resources. Hence, a major risk is that a threat to the present industry would be that we do not find natural gas in the commercial quantities required to support this Government's plans. If this failure indeed materializes, then there is even a greater concern of energy security for this country, particularly in our ability, in the foreseeable future, to generate electricity even at prices that reflect the real cost of input, natural gas and our ability to support the small manufacturing industry. That depends on clear energy for its competitive advantage in the region.

Mr. Speaker, we have to use some of the rents, therefore, from the present energy sector to transform our economy. Any other option is to wait, hoping that we would find more natural gas. Any mismanagement of this position today will impact negatively on our attempts to reconstruct the non-energy sector onshore.

The Minister of Finance recognizes that the energy sector will continue to shape the economic future of Trinidad and Tobago, well into the next decade and that energy security and climate change are among the most critical challenges facing the world and us, if I may add. Yet, the Minister boasts that we are the fifth largest exporter of LNG in the world, supplying more than 70 per cent of the US domestic needs, even though our share of the world's gas reserve is a mere 0.3 per cent. In light of the need for energy security, this rapid drawdown of our resources appears to any reasonable person to be reckless. The energy sector earns 90 per cent of the foreign exchange earned by the country at large. It employs only 3—4 per cent of the labour force. The energy sector provides some 45 per cent of GDP. It is clear to see that we stand aside and allow foreign investment to take the risk and provide both financial and intellectual capital in exploiting our resources.

We see that the Prime Minister has recently signed to build a gas-to-propylene plant worth US \$2.5 billion, which will produce 450,000 tonnes of propylene and 450,000 tonnes of polypropylene. This is a commodity plant for export, since our private sector can only use a very small part of this. Is this what those on the other side call a plastic industry in Trinidad and Tobago? What we do is that we continue to earn rents, as I have said, in exchange for the drawdown of our natural resources that are irreplaceable. We are not replacing this depleting wealth by any capital assets as Dubai has done, but in the long-term can continue to earn us income. The Government is keen on referencing Dubai, but that country of desert sand, in recognition that the energy resources are going to finish, has restructured its economy in which up-market tourism, financial services and new knowledge creation in alternative energy, are the new economic pillars of its development.

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Dubai owns 15 per cent of Nasdaq Stock Exchange. The Government, with its head buried in the sand, is still talking about expanding the energy sector and paying lip service to the restructuring of our economy, instead of doing and proceeding how Dubai has proceeded. From those figures, one sees that not only do we depend on oil, but how we have to diversify our economy.

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. [*Dr. H. Rafeeq*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: Much obliged. I thank hon. Members for giving me some more time. Any government, faced with these threats and risks and has the interest of the population at heart, would make a deliberate intervention to an onshore, innovative and entrepreneurial economy. It is interesting to note that Mr. Robert Riley of bpTT has also alluded publicly to the need to construct such an economy. More importantly, he mused that we have no confidence in ourselves—obviously referring to the Government also—and that to do so; we have to stick to what we know, the energy sector.

I have looked at the budget. I have looked at what is going to be spent. Some of my Members and the Member for Siparia mentioned all of that. The Member of Parliament for Caroni Central went into it last night. What is going to be spent even on agriculture and what would be spent on a knowledge-based education system? What are the plans? I do not see any. The economy, outside of the energy sector, is virtually unproductive. It is inefficient and unsustainable without input from the energy sector. Running down our natural gas resources as fast as possible simply aggravates the situation. As I said, we need to rebuild an onshore sector such that it generates its own wealth, make our people more productive and economic-efficient.

11.45 a.m.

It is general knowledge what elements of such an economy are. I could refer to some of them and they are: an excellent education system that provides its graduates with the ability to think critically and to be inventive in order to cope with the economy which we want to produce; research and development institutions that continually provide new knowledge; business development systems that produce new and innovative small and medium enterprises; a finance system

that provides a range of services like venture capital, R&D grants, stock exchange; and a marketing and market developing system.

Mr. Speaker, the literature refers to this as putting in place an experimentally organized economy. Those on the other side will be quick to say that the Government already has some, if not all of these in place, but these are only effigies. What they refer to as effigies are a poor education system or research institutions that have produced very little, if anything, with respect to economic development; the lack of finance, for example venture capital; the ineffective stock exchange with respect to encouraging SMEs; and the non-existence of national marketing and market development thrust.

My colleagues on the other side would refer me to the Capital Incentive Programme, but there are now two companies under this programme, and the amount of money raised is minuscule. But of more importance is that these companies do not provide venture capital to innovative start-up entrepreneurs.

The present situation contains examples of the outward signs of a developed society. What is missing, and what the Government has to do is the coordination among the elements but, most of all, the articulation and implementation of the various processes that would kick-start such an innovative and entrepreneurial economy and nurture the various elements as they grow.

Mr. Speaker, in the midst of a powerful plantation economy as ours—it is surely a plantation economy, because oil and gas has replaced sugar and citrus fruits. It is foreign generated. In effect, that is what it—it is surely uninformed to expect a haphazard conglomeration of non-integrated subsistence to create this new economy.

This is not the place to present a blueprint for the reconstruction of the onshore economy, but some of the processes required deserve some mention for example, what and how we decide on the areas of activity that can make us globally competitive in providing goods and services for the local and international markets. Surely, we have to exploit our natural resources; agriculture and tourism, but our new economy via innovation must be able to develop higher added value products and services as compared with what we do now.

Mr. Speaker, even presidential hopeful Obama, is asking his people to again become innovative, given the threat from Asia in technology. We also have to address our energy-related opportunities as they present themselves in particular, those due to oil and gas depletion, climate change and alternative energy.

It is clear also that we have traditional businesses, though many of them may be geared to the production of non-tradable goods and services, and construction

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distribution services, some of them with business reconstruction can be used also to provide tradable goods and services. This is particularly applicable to the marriage of the tourism industry and the Caribbean Airlines but, more important, is how do we provide indigenous research and development and how do we choose these areas.

The Prime Minister is aware of what I am telling this House today, but he has neglected to tell his Ministers this. At the Exporter of the Year Awards Function, the Prime Minister said:

In the light of the present international scenario, including the reciprocity in emerging trade arrangements EPA, we need the spirit of innovation and inventiveness to permeate our entrepreneurial ability. We must recognize that without invention and innovation...

If I may add, an innovation system.

“there could be stagnation which, if prolonged could lead to a decline.”

Mr. Speaker, it is not that the Prime Minister does not recognize what he has to do, but he obviously has not translated it into action. Therefore, there must be an emphasis on research and development which needs much more resources that are presently allocated at both public and private levels. He said:

“I give you the assurance that the Government intends to tackle this matter in a meaningful way, and I am sure that we can arrive at creative ways to encourage the private sector to place greater emphasis on this aspect of national development.”

Mr. Speaker, where is that in this budget statement? Where is that in the policy? The only thing I noted is that in the PSIP there is a heading “Developing Innovative People” and the sum of \$1.8 billion was allocated for this. However, the money here is provided for infrastructure in general education, primary, secondary, tertiary, skills training and some of the money for NIHERST under the sub-heading, “Science and Technology and Innovation”. NIHERST has been attempting for some foresighting studies, an activity that is contained in an innovation system, but virtually useless on its own. The other moneys may be producing skilled people, but it is generally accepted that general education is insufficient in the economic rebuilding of an economy.

For years now, in all the budget statements that I have read, there is talk about the development of the pillars of the onshore economy, food and beverage, ICT, tourism, printing, packaging and marine, but there is little evidence in any of these to suggest that an innovation and an entrepreneurial system is in place to drive the development of what the Prime Minister has told us at the awards function. The

Minister of Finance has virtually ignored the Prime Minister's reference to innovation and creation.

Mr. Speaker, I would not expand on the other point that I wish to make, because some of my colleagues have expanded on it and that is agriculture. Agriculture is an important vehicle to creating a diversified economy. It is very significant that this Government got rid of the most important vehicle and human resource to promote this sector. If you were to step back a bit, you will observe the general comment that the lack of an innovative and entrepreneurial system can be related in particular to the sordid state of our agricultural industry.

It is true that at the University of the West Indies (UWI) there are extension offices through agriculture as a part of the faculty. It is true that we have government agricultural research stations, but we have access to limited funds. All these are just effigies and there is nothing happening there in order to drive the agriculture industry.

Mr. Speaker, I ask myself, how it is this Government can talk about caring and love when it seems as though Tabaquite and other areas like Tabaquite are like forgotten areas in Trinidad and Tobago. It is as though they are not part of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. They have been left out completely.

In my constituency which I got in the last election, I can say that it has been one of the most neglected constituencies in Trinidad and Tobago. The people of Tabaquite do not have access to medical care in the constituency of Tabaquite. Whatever they have or whatever they may get is totally inadequate. In Tabaquite there is the lack of public transportation in most of the areas. Since I became an MP, I have been begging for a transportation system for Gasparillo and Poona Village.

Mr. Speaker, I know that you know San Fernando very well. At Tarouba, which is near to Gasparillo, there is a bus service and the people just have to walk out by the road to get a taxi or a maxi-taxi or any kind of transportation. They did not put a bus service in Gasparillo, Poona Village and those areas, and we have been begging for this, but they love the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I have written to the Minister of Local Government and that Minister is the only Minister who has come out publicly and stated at a meeting that the roads and the local government service in my constituency are very bad. She has promised me that she is going to deliver, so I am going to wait.

I want to use this debate to highlight the roads and drainage in Tabaquite because they are very bad. As a matter of fact, the BMW that I had before I got

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into politics has collapsed, because for six months I have been on the roads in Tabaquite. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, I may have to get a bull cart or I may have to ride a bicycle. I do not know what to do. You cannot have proper motor vehicles on the roads in Tabaquite because of the Minister of Works and Transport. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, in the constituency of Tabaquite there is need for police security. The Minister of National Security knows of the problem, but the people are suffering. Yesterday, I appealed to the Prime Minister when statistics were being given. I want his intervention to ensure that my constituency is treated just as good as his constituency or even better.

Mr. Speaker, in Tabaquite, there are three food baskets of the nation: There is one at Lightborne; there is one at Tortuga; and there is one in Tabaquite and it is known as the “Taback Farmers”. If this Government is interested in promoting agriculture and making it part of a diversified economy, I invite the Prime Minister to look into this matter. I have drawn this matter to the attention of the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and in fairness to him, he has taken some corrective action, but much more has to be done.

Mr. Speaker, I want to deal with the crime situation. When you read the budget, you are going to find very nice language. At page 2 it says:

“The vision is premised on the optimal utilization of resources in the energy sector and on the meaningful diversification of the non-energy sector so as to ensure sustainable economic growth.”

What I have been saying is something that has been recognized by the Government and which it has premised the economy on, but in reality we are not having it translated from the economic statistics that there has been any progress in the meaningful diversification of the non-energy sector.

12.00 noon

Mr. Speaker, then the next paragraph says: “Our vision commits us to nurturing of a caring society.”

I want to know how we could have a caring society if we have a judicial finding given by the High Court that the URP and CEPEP programmes are the breeding grounds for criminal gangs and we have a situation where the Government has done nothing about it.

There is nothing which the Government has done here to show that there is a reduction in the criminal gangs. There is a strategy that has been employed to

prevent the multiplication of the criminal gangs, there is nothing that has been said here to show that the criminal gangs have been dealt with in accordance with law. As a matter of fact, we have not seen any statement made by the Government that any of the gang leaders have been appearing in court or prosecuted in accordance with law.

Mr. Speaker, so when you have a Government fuelling and financing the criminal gangs, it is obviously indirectly promoting and financing their activities, because if you know these gangs exist, you know who they are, but you are giving them positions in the makeshift employment programmes of the Government, what you are doing is indirectly using taxpayers' money to feed, promote, and energize them to kill and commit crime against the taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker, that is how it is, we have to talk frankly, and now there is a new thing and that is when you criticize the Government. I am saying it as we in Trinidad say it: "A new ting." That is, when you criticize the Government, you are criticizing the country, and when you do that you become unpatriotic, so this is the new kind of democracy the Prime Minister wants you to have. You cannot criticize the Government because if you do that, you are criticizing the country and then you are unpatriotic and not fit to be a Member of Parliament, you are not fit to be a citizen because you are undermining the country.

As a matter of fact the democracy is based on openness and transparency. I want to read from a book entitled *Sustainable Development Law* because we are talking about sustainable development. And not only what is politically recognized, but what is recognized in international law, and at page 101 it says:

"The principle of good governance is essential to the progressive development and codification of international law relating to sustainable development. It commits States and international organizations:

- (a) to adopt democratic and transparent decision-making procedures and financial accountability;"

That is what the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West was telling him yesterday, that he cannot say he is not answering questions, he has to tell the people, give them the answer, and that is what we have been saying too.

Now you have a top Member of the PNM, a gentleman who has told him this is what he did when he was in Opposition, this is what he expects to happen when he gets into Government and he is telling him what is the duty of the Government and the contract which he entered into with the people of Trinidad and Tobago at election time and that he has broken the contract with the people. That is what he is telling him.

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It continues:

- (b) to take effective measures to combat official or other corruption;
- (c) to respect due process in their procedures and to observe the rule of law and human rights; and
- (d) to implement a public procurement approach according to the WTO Code of Public Procurement.

Civil society and non-governmental organizations have a right to good governance by States and international organizations.”

And then it says:

“Good governance requires full respect for the principles of the 1992 *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*.”

Mr. Speaker, so when you look at all these principles one has to ask oneself: How does this Government really care for these people? Look what it did with the Commissioner of Police appointment, and up to now it has not brought the required legislation it said it wanted to bring to Parliament to have the new process for a new Commissioner of Police.

What it will do is wait until it is too late so the Prime Minister can have his choice to give another contract to whoever he wants. [*Desk thumping*] So the Prime Minister by his inaction with UDeCott has undermined and subverted the commission of enquiry by his inaction with respect to the appointment of the new Commissioner of Police which he said he wanted the Opposition to support.

Mr. Speaker, the Government cannot talk about this being a caring budget. As a matter of fact, I want the Prime Minister to get up now and answer the Member for Diego Martin West question, he wanted two questions answered on corruption but he will not do that. He will put some of his people to talk and wait until no one can reply to him and then he would come and gallery and say all sorts of things. He is the prophet, he is the messiah, and he is the emperor, whatever he says the society must accept. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell him that when it reaches the stage where a motion of no confidence is filed in the House and he can pay people to come to Woodford Square to support him, he is finished. [*Desk thumping*] He only exists in form but he is no longer the Prime Minister of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, he is only a name and he no longer has the confidence of the People’s National

Movement. He is there only in position, but in substance, he is not the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting of the House is suspended for lunch and we will resume at 1.15 p.m.

12.07 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.15 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

The Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development (Hon. Rennie Dumas): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in this honourable House to contribute to the 2008/2009 budget debate. It is the first budget of this new administration and I would like to begin by thanking the hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira for the excellent presentation of the Government's 2008/2009 budget to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

I congratulate the hon. Minister not only for her efficiency, but also for being the first woman ever in the history of our country to present a budget. Indeed, I am proud to be a part of an innovative and creative Government who recognizes the value and intellectual capacity of the women of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] The capacity of our women is increasingly evident amongst the young women of this country as they continue to be high achievers in their intellectual and other pursuits.

Women throughout Trinidad and Tobago have successfully challenged employment and other opportunities in various sectors, particularly construction and energy, service and tourism, in many ways and in many areas previously considered to be a man's world. The hon. Minister of Finance has provided yet another goal for the women of this country to achieve. It is said that she has shattered the glass ceiling on governance and management of the country. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, by the way, the people of this country would surely join with me in congratulating the Prime Minister for his wisdom in providing the required leadership that allows the Minister this historic opportunity. [*Desk thumping*] It is not context, but I would like to begin my contribution at the Minister's conclusion of her presentation, because the words ring through and answers many fallacious statements that were made to us.

Let us be clear and listen exactly to what she said:

“We will satisfy the wishes of the people for ongoing improvement in the quality of their lives; significantly improve levels of efficiency and productivity in

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this country; strengthen sustainability in our economic and social development; and enhance national security and stability.”

In other words, the matters raised by the Opposition were raised in the presentation by the Minister, and we can pretend we did not understand and did not hear, but let us go again.

She also uttered these words:

“The Budget will further strengthen the fabric and foundation of our society. And it will ensure that we continue as a progressive, prosperous nation, proud of our place in the world.

Mr. Speaker, all plans and programmes in this Budget will be conducted, as is the practice of a Peoples’ National Movement Government, with the utmost transparency and accountability. [*Desk thumping*]

The Government is committed to ensuring that all our citizens have access to all the country can provide. We believe that no one should be excluded because of their economic circumstances.”

Mr. Speaker, no valid challenge to these words of the Minister has emerged from all the days on all the contributions to the debate that we have heard inside and outside of this House, since the delivery of those powerful words of purpose from my colleague.

1.20 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister should be saluted in raising the standard of the PNM well and gloriously on the field of political battle. [*Desk thumping*] She has flown and continues to fly that flag to the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

The next words of the Minister also grounded the Minister's historic presentation. These words were a signal of the intent of this new administration, joining them firmly to the working people of this nation, leaving no doubt as to who is expected to benefit from this budget. It is clear that the beneficiaries of this budget were expected to be those people who inhabit the households across the land in Trinidad and Tobago.

A household will benefit—the Minister assured us—as follows: Senior Citizens Grant, Minimum Public Service Pension, Public Assistant Grant, TTCard, free bus and ferry service, and the good news for the family continue. We were assured and I verily believe, as the population firmly believes, since they know that the PNM promises are bankable.

Our spending allows us to provide a wide range of opportunities for self-development, retraining and upward mobility. Opportunities which all families and all individuals of this country can take account of and take advantage of, whether it is from nursery to tertiary education, textbooks and other educational materials, meals at all our schools, free transport to students to and from school and scholarships for study at tertiary level. Then she went on to speak of honour scholars, grounding the scholarship activity clearing and seeking to attain the highest possible standards in whatever institutions you are admitted to.

We then spoke of a 2 per cent mortgage interest rate to low income earners to purchase a home. We spoke to free health care, access to CDAP, no Value Added Tax on most basic food items, subsidies on all fuels and one of the lowest electricity and water rates in Latin America and the Caribbean, and of course, one of the lowest personal tax rates anywhere in the world. Where else could this budget be grounded but on the working people of Trinidad and Tobago at the head of all various households. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister invited all our citizens to continue to work with this administration. This administration of progress, this administration of opportunity, as we travel towards 2020 and developed country status. In the best parliamentary tradition of accounting for the people's money, we were given an account of the money spent in 2008, and it bears repetition, because we must ground this discussion firmly in what is presented here.

I heard all sorts of flights on fantasy, but none of the contributions grounded their criticisms on what is being provided, what was being projected, and certainly not on the complex and multi-varied programme as this Government put before the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

On the expenditure side, contrary to the Opposition claims, because they say all sorts of things on what was spent and what was not spent, although the figure is placed in black and white before them, everybody have it in their package, but still, they say different numbers and different things which they know is not true, but they seek to confuse the people with repetition of error.

The total central government expenditure amounted to \$42.3 billion, excluding amortization and transfers to the two main statutory funds. It is in terms of accounting for the people's money, the original budget figure of \$40.3 billion was compared with the results of supplementary appropriations approved in May and September of \$3.5 billion and \$3.9 billion respectively.

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We were told and we know that we had an overall surplus of \$7.9 billion, not a deficit. However, if you listen to the people on the other side, the people speaking in different places calling themselves experts, you would believe that we had a deficit of \$7.9 billion rather than a surplus. Of this, \$4.72 billion has been transferred to the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, and \$2.33 billion in net transfers to the Infrastructure Development Fund. Where in the world could putting away \$7.9 billion be considered wastage, carefree, shoddy expenditure? I think no matter what yardstick you put on it you have to admit sagacity, saving and careful husbandry. [*Desk thumping*]

The working people leading the ordinary households in this country need to notice and remember the main areas where this \$42.3 billion of Government expenditure was allocated. You see, I am hearing loud, stern and even strident admonishment to cut the Government's expenditure drastically, and in the face of that we must let all our people know what cut advice means.

You see, as they are telling us to cut, nobody is telling the population what will be the impact of cutting Government expenditure. What is the intended benefit? All we are told is, cut the expenditure and you are hardened. What would that mean?

With respect to current expenditure, approximately \$7.1 billion or 17.7 per cent of that \$42.3 billion, represented personal emoluments. Personal emoluments are specific to wages and salaries of workers and the payments of NIS and other benefits. Are their position and their advisors suggesting that we cut the wages and salaries of workers or the contributions to the benefits, which the workers of this country should enjoy?

I want them to tell us. Do not just tell the Government to cut, tell us whether you are willing to have the salaries cut. You see, I am old enough to have been here in the House and watch a gentleman faint there, and he was caught by the present Member for Couva South, who is not in this House. He was caught because he was travelling under the burden of having to cut public service salaries, which they at the time, the predecessors of this membership of the Opposition, had to face us then and cut our salaries even in the face of other advice. I am sure that the public servants of that era are even now still recovering from that.

This \$4.7 billion was pensions and transfers to individuals. This \$4.7 billion, are we to cut the pensions and transfer payments to individuals? Counting the \$7.1 billion and the \$4.7 billion, gives us \$11.8 billion or approximately 25 per

cent of expenditure going directly to poor and working people of Trinidad and Tobago. Is this to be cut? Is that the advice?

Subsidies amounted to \$2.4 billion, of which \$2.2 billion represented the fuel subsidy. Should we remove the \$2.2 billion that represents that fuel subsidy? Does any one of us have family, friends, relatives, acquaintances anywhere in the world, and know what the impact of removing that \$2.2 billion will be on the working class in this country?

I want the Opposition to tell me if we should remove the \$2.2 billion in subsidy to reduce the Government expenditure. Expenditure and other goods and services amounted to \$5 billion. I would suggest to you that if that represents the purchases of the Government from all the families in Trinidad and Tobago, then certainly at least \$2 billion of this represents goods and services purchased from working class families. I am asking should that expenditure be cut?

Transfers to educational institutions amounted to \$1.4 billion. Should we cut those? Transfers to state enterprises, statutory bodies and local government bodies amounted to \$7 billion, inside of that is the Tobago House of Assembly. So maybe the Member for Chaguanas West would agree we could cut out the transfers to the THA, from his contribution earlier. I am suggesting that every allocation represents the delivery of benefits to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

What is the question that we must get answered from the people who suggest that they should replace us is: which cut, which cut; from which account; by how much and what is the impact going to be if we could then ask you to come and take our places? To me that is a fair question. The Opposition is good at asking questions, they have no answers for any we ask. [*Desk thumping*]

It was in the proposals for fiscal operations for 2009 that the Minister and by extension, the Government showed why this administration must continue to be the architect of the development of our people and the future. While we cannot accept the invitation from the Member for Caroni East, to resign and give them the chair, because again in consideration of these fiscal operations, they demonstrate a total inadequacy in understanding or in managing the economics.

The claims of this being a spendthrift Government, this being a rich people budget has been totally debunked. The truth is shown by examination of the budgetary process and the presentation. The process involved meeting with various communities, various representatives of various sectors and coming together to determine what is the best overall package that can be held together with some coherent policy.

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The first demonstration is that the budget this year is calibrated on an assumed oil price of US \$70 per barrel; a gas price of \$4 mmbtu on a projected GDP growth of 5.6 per cent. Because of these clear upfront assumptions, clear and cogent for projecting total revenue, forecasted at \$49.465 billion of which from the energy sector we expect to get \$19.9 billion, and non-energy revenue of \$29.5 billion is demonstrated.

Mr. Speaker, I am sitting here and I am hearing that the Government has done such a woeful job of understanding the balance between the non-energy and the energy sectors of the economy; that we should be fired for that. You know, I spent a little time in school and there is a concept of a nested equation. In other words, an equation within a larger equation.

And the equation that we have for measuring predicating development, and therefore, planning the development of a country must include a consideration of the interaction among various sectors and certainly in terms of the contribution of labour to the sector.

1.35 p.m.

We are told, it seems, that if we have a commodity which brings a constantly increasing body of income, it seems as though we should abandon that while we wait for the non-energy contribution to catch up. Unfortunately, it does not work like that. The reality in the world is that that area which is your highest revenue earner must be exploited to the extent that you can see in some range in the future what are the benefits you can get for it and how you can use that if you want as much for the next portion of your economy.

If you can put those two together, that is the challenge facing Trinidad and Tobago. Certainly, the question of the balance between the energy sector of the economy and the non-energy sector of the economy is not a matter for amateurs. Unfortunately, I listened to an exposition earlier.

Hon. Member: Unfortunately?

Hon. R. Dumas: Unfortunately. [*Laughs*] Sometimes I wonder if we are trying to confuse our school children if we are trying to sell them wrong goods.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes the competition on that side is interesting. I think we just got the real budget response from the Member for Tabaquite. [*Desk thumping*] I feel that is the problem.

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: That is true. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. R. Dumas: Mr. Speaker, here we have a situation, the Member for Siparia is supposed to be the economic agent over there and at least we can sit and listen to the Member for Siparia. *[Interruption]* Here you have an individual whose political myth which he has built around himself is that of “corruption buster”, but attempting to put together a model for the management of the Trinidad and Tobago economy. A complex economy that has all kinds of things moving through it in a small and quick impact area because of its size, it cannot work.

You cannot read that in a book one day and come here and try to present it on the next day as a model for the development of Trinidad and Tobago. That is what I mean by unfortunate, Member for Tabaquite.

Mr. Abdul-Hamid: That is what you call cram.

Hon. R. Dumas: You cannot cram it, you cannot cram it. *[Interruption]* The question of the appropriations suggest *[Crosstalk]* that we have a situation in which we know exactly what is going to be removed from the Consolidated Fund. We know that some of that appropriation comes from the Unemployment Fund which is a legal establishment and the Green Fund, another legal establishment to treat with some inequities in the earnings in the population on one hand and in terms of our long run heritage and natural capital development that we must treat with. So we know where the sources of these funds are.

I must reiterate that that takes care of the revenue side and tells you clearly where it is coming from. We had the pleasure of looking at what people who do not have any biases—I would want to say—I saw what Ernst & Young had to say, I saw what other commentators had to say, and the question of the sage choice of that figure is well established. Therefore, the security of the revenue given the information we have now is evident. I think we should congratulate the Minister of Finance and her team for choosing that. *[Desk thumping]*

Then clearly, we come to the question therefore, what is this money to be spent for? This Government is on record. This Government went out there and all individuals in this country have a clear view. I was told a while ago that we have not told the country what we are going to do; we have not told the country what our plan is; we have not told the country what our destination is. The question of the contribution of the Member for Diego Martin West was invoked by the Member for Tabaquite, again, trying to make mischief in this family.

Mr. Maharaj SC: No, no.

Hon. R. Dumas: Again, trying to make mischief in this family. [*Crosstalk*] We will not have it; we will not have it. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Maharaj SC: Are you trying to throw that for this side?

Hon. R. Dumas: Why not? We are saying to you that again we are talking about people based, people benefiting expenditure. The allocations are clear, education and training will receive \$7.1 billion. It is people expenditure on the pillar of the 2020 vision that says we shall be seeking to ensure that our people are innovative.

I heard a curious construct again. Again I have to advise, stick to your attempts at corruption busting, maybe that would work. Educational theory makes it quite clear to us that the concept of readiness has to be based on what you have previously learned. Experience will bring out capacities that are not yet invoked from this classroom environment. But classroom environment and the fundamentals that you have learnt are quite useful in ensuring that you can treat with innovation before. I am saying to you that when it is decided, when our population goes to the educational market and comes back with a basket of goods that they did not have before, they are better likely to be able to create that innovative society that we are talking about. [*Desk thumping*] We are suggesting that it cannot be a dollar wasted. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: Explain to him now.

Mr. Warner: Teacher Mildred.

Hon. R. Dumas: Teacher Mildred. Yes, standard three, that is where she taught me. I was three years old when I went to teacher Mildred school. [*Inaudible*] Right! [*Interruption*]

Infrastructure: Mr. Speaker, \$6.6 billion. It is designed for people's comfort; it is designed to allow businesses to operate in a way that is an improvement over the period before the infrastructure was not there. Therefore, if the money is being spent—\$6.9 billion—on infrastructure then that facilitates people development, facilitates business development, facilitates institutional development [*Desk thumping*] and certainly it is not a matter that we can sneer. It includes works, transport and public utilities of all types.

I want to know if we are being advised to cut that. In the matter of health, and I do not know if the Member for Caroni East knows that all that he is doing when he speaks about health more often than that. He keeps saying something that I do not think he understands. He keeps saying it is all about management, poor management, but then he keeps saying put doctors to run the hospital. It is a

contrary statement. When we hired the doctors to run the hospitals, the people end up on the hospital floors, people end up in negative situations, people end up as he is saying with a doctor putting two people in the same room and carrying out operations at the same time. He is telling us that.

I am wondering whether the Member for Caroni East is volunteering to lead all the investigations into medical malpractice suits that the Government should bring on all the doctors of this country. [*Desk thumping*] I want to know, are you volunteering? Because all the instances that he speaks about are instances in which the doctors must be guilty of malpractice. [*Interruption*] Yes, I am saying that. If I give you a hospital to run, you are the Chief Medical Officer running that hospital and people are dying there, do not tell me the Government is guilty of murder. I would hang the doctor first. Yes, you may hang me afterwards, but certainly, I am starting with the doctor.

I am saying, unless the Member for Caroni East is willing to discuss with us ways in which we can ensure that the people who we hire and pay real well—one of the best paid in this country. [*Interruption*] If you are willing to treat with that let us discuss that. When you come throwing stones at the Government in this one, I am saying I am not taking that, because you are also claiming the right to run your space. You said doctors must not take orders from nobody. You stand up here and you said what? Cloth sellers and all kinds of things you said.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Do not misrepresent me.

Hon. R. Dumas: Or, something like that. Something like that. Yes, and I am saying therefore the question or the connection between the profession and the responsibility must also occur. I am suggesting that when we seek to spend that \$4.3 billion, we are speaking about trying to ensure that people are free from pain, from discomfort, from fear for their lives and from short-term brutish lies. That has to be proper intent, has to be proper expenditure.

National security: I hear people come and say what is happening? I think Minister Martin Joseph should have a medal.

Hon. Member: I agree with you. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Dumas: Yes, the kind of abuse that that man has taken. He has stood up and stood his ground in terms of trying day after day to push Sisyphus stone up the hill and every time—[*Interruption*] of course by the nature of Sisyphus stone, he has to fail. By nature, but he is not failing in his taking charge and taking the responsibility. He is not doing that. [*Interruption*] No, he is not doing that.

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The scenario is that we know that that will take time to turn around. You would tell me the ammunition, the weaponry, the vehicles, the hardware to carry this matter is not going to change. Then we stand up and say, we want to blame him, we want to hold him responsible, but then we say do not call the station, do not intervene, do not pay any particular hands-on way of managing this thing, manage it through people, manage it through a commission; keep politicians far away. I read your website this morning, this issue of national security and the abuse that you put on this country over this issue of national security. I want to suggest and I am sure that the suggestion continues that we need to get together on this one.

I heard some things being said about who is responsible and the whole question of gangs and so on. I ran URP for four years. *[Interruption]* Four years, and nobody ever wrote any letter and said I send anybody to kill them. Nobody did not do that, nobody did not tell you I was involved in stealing any money anywhere; nobody did not tell you that I paid anybody to stick up anybody or stop any work anywhere. Nobody told you that. I am saying that to just malign the people and malign the system, when really what we need to understand is none of us is far from the bullet; none of us is far from the knife; none of us is far from the criminal activity, and therefore we need to get together and protect ourselves. *[Desk thumping]*

As I said the last day, the minute the criminals begin to believe that officers of the State, whether on this side or on that side, anytime they begin to believe that officers of the State are fair game, all of us gone. All of us!

Agriculture: Food for our people, \$2.175 billion. Do we want to cut that? Housing, \$1.6 billion, shelter for our people. Do we want to cut that?

1.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I heard the Member for Tabaquite ranting, what is this for. I want to suggest that the fiscal measures further demonstrate the understanding that the Minister and this PNM administration share with the nation's citizens, as all of us face life on a daily basis throughout this country. Whether you are from Charlotteville, Chaguanas, Chaguaramas, Cedros, we all share a daily life here and we are suggesting that this Government has a better understanding of the reality of life in this country, than anybody on that side. *[Desk thumping]*

You see, the Member for Tabaquite was asking—and this was written before you spoke, Member for Tabaquite—what does the fiscal measures treat with? I want to remind him what this says. He said he was not here, so maybe he missed

it. The provisions address matters across a significant even critical range of concerns including:

- public transportation and the impact it has on productivity, stress and decline in the quality of life.

I heard the Minister address this matter on subsidy and gasoline pricing, including the savings from the measures estimated at \$200 million, as well as signalling to the country that we all need to check our behaviours. Maybe that extra expenditure on that little higher octane fuel could bring a saving, so we are encouraging savings on this side. That is the reality. *[Desk thumping]* Of course, we treated with our senior citizens enjoying the inter-island communication and access, which could bring such great benefit to both of us on both sides of the divide. That was there.

Hon. Member: Do you qualify?

Hon. R. Dumas: If I qualify? No, but my father does.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister and the Government addressed the question of intergenerational equity in terms of the Senior Citizens Grant being increased and the estimated \$240 million it will cost, and the estimated benefit to 80,000 persons, that cannot be ignored. *[Desk thumping]*

- The differently-abled physically also came in for mention.
- The relief to the economically challenged to the cost of an additional \$50.4 million, which will benefit an estimated 21,000 individuals.

Who is the budget for?

- Inflation protection to fixed income earners;
- Increasing the minimum pension payable to retired public servants, estimated to cost \$70 million and will impact more than 27,000 people.
- Allowance for contributions to pension or annuity plans raised to \$30,000 and will cost an estimated \$25 million, and that is a continuation from the year before. In fact, if you use this well, if you are working for less than \$85,000, you do not pay any tax.
- Housing affordability, by an increase in the qualified property value, treating with low income housing, as well as first timers.
- The question of increased affordability of tertiary education estimated to cost an additional \$40 million for all people who seek to go to graduate school, treating with the same innovation that we were talking about a while ago.

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- To follow it up, the question of academic research for the country's developmental rate and the programme for the returning graduates to try to keep them here. We adjust the programmes, but certainly, it may just be that we do not believe in locking people into systems that they may not agree to, and certainly, people must agree because this is now a free country.

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, if we take into account therefore, given the range of opportunities addressed in the budget, in which benefits were either extended or created for the first time, without raising any new body of taxation—there was no new body of taxation created—[*Desk thumping*] is it any wonder that contrary to the argument of the Member for Tabaquite, that the budget has received nationwide acclaim as a people's budget? That is true. The only people that have been negative to this budget are people with axes to grind.[*Desk thumping*] That is the reality. Each of them would come and tell you, we asked for one, two, three things and we got numbers one and two; we did not get three, four and five, and they get vex. That is what is going on. But do you know what I said? When you are a child and you go to a fair, as a child you ask for everything on sale; everything you want and you want it now. It requires sane counsel sometimes to say this is enough, maybe that one has to wait for tomorrow. Because even as you advise us to wait, you advise us to cut, you do not want us to say wait on anything. So everything that everybody says—when I listened to the contributions, everything that anybody quarrelled about in the country is thrown at us and says, "You should have done that. Why you did not do that? Why did you not satisfy that one?" It cannot happen, but certainly, you have to have a sane programme of activities which you can follow.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I come to Tobago in 2008/2009. I want to point out that the Minister, first in her reference to Tobago, celebrated the Tobago House of Assembly and its people's hard-won, home-led successes and I quote:

“Over the last seven years, Tobago has experienced tremendous progress and prosperity. All the available economic development indicators show that Tobago is a much better place to live in than it was seven years ago. [*Desk thumping*]

You could even say eight or nine. I continue:

“...with Tobagonians sharing in the prosperity that is evident across this country.”

In other words, Tobago is not isolated from what is happening in Trinidad; Tobago is fully a part of what is happening in Trinidad and Tobago, and so it should be.

The Minister elaborated and illustrated with hard data:

“Tobago's unemployment rate is now just over 3.5 per cent. The tourism sector remains buoyant with hotel and guest house occupancy rates now 70 per cent, compared to 17 per cent in 2001. International passenger arrivals have risen from 49,645 in 2001 to 66,266 in 2007. Domestic tourism is also booming, since the introduction of the fast ferries, with passenger travel on the sea bridge increasing from 351,358 in 2001, to 813,644 in 2007, and is expected to reach one million this year. There has also been significant business expansion, with a continuing boom in the construction sector.”

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is not only to the benefit of nationals of Trinidad and Tobago, living in Tobago, this is of benefit to the whole country. In this 813,000 there area a number of Trinidadians going into Tobago and vice versa. It is a whole compound economic and social enterprise that we have managing, and therefore, it was quite unfortunate that we got the impression that this should not happen.

The Minister attributed the success to PNM relationships and so it— because before those PNM relationships on both sides of the sea were crafted, the story was very different. Some of the people sitting here on this Opposition Bench were party to sundering those relationships in certain ways with other people who they had crafted relationships with. The progress and prosperity which Tobago currently enjoys could not have taken place without the harmonious mature relationship which has developed in the past seven years between the Tobago House of Assembly and the central government. Is that the truth?

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the hon. Patrick Augustus Manning, Member for San Fernando East and Prime Minister and Mr. Orville London, Chief Secretary [*Desk thumping*] for the wise and fruitful leadership they provide to the Trinidad and Tobago governance relationship. It is an equation—

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. [Hon. J. Ross]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. R. Dumas: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and thank you, colleagues. All of that is gratifying, but the provisions made for financing the year's activities

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and the sentiments expressed as they were announced, I am sure—has own the Minister, Tobago's approval and maybe our heart. As a long term political activist in Tobago, a Member of the Tobago Council of the PNM, the parliamentary representative for Tobago East, which I won after a long hard battle with one of the warriors of Tobago, I want to suggest that as a Member of the Cabinet it was gratifying to hear the Minister announce the passage for Tobago as follows:

“In the next fiscal year, the people of Tobago will have access to budgetary resources in the order of \$2.65 billion up from \$2.238 billion in the last financial year, comprising an allocation of \$1.593 million to facilitate the current expenditure of the Assembly; and \$400 million for development programme expenditures and a further \$657 million to be provided for under the Heads of Recurrent and Capital Expenditures for expenditures in Tobago.”

Madam Deputy Speaker, aware as I am of the mechanisms and expressions now being made current by some people in Tobago, some of them fermented and supported by some of our colleagues opposite, the rationale for Government's provision of the aforementioned package was very gratifying to hear. Because it was placed firmly in the Government's willingness and understanding that the progress and prosperity which Tobago currently enjoys is sustained and that together, Trinidad and Tobago could work side by side to achieve country status by 2020. [*Desk thumping*]

The statement went further, that the Government stands ready to provide the Tobago House of Assembly with all the support that it needs to continue the important development work that is currently being undertaken on the island. The Minister made it clear that the PNM government's proposals aim at sustaining the progress and prosperity on the island through economic expansion and diversification, increased social equity and justice, and improving Government's arrangements in order to facilitate even greater collaboration between the Assembly and the central government.

In the face of the faith that this Government has kept with the Tobago population, the superior philosophy of the PNM and a budgetary package in which Tobago received the means of installing sustainable catch-up capacity, as well as financing this fiscal year, the Opposition spokesman who tackled the issue of Government's ready and satisfactory financing of Tobago's expenses and its development GUP programme, demonstrated why the UNC will never again be able to govern a nation call, Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

The statements of the Member for Chaguanas West, UNC, must be numbered among some of those issued by some Trinidadians, who will always annoy most

Tobagoians on the issue of governance. His utterances demonstrated that under a UNC government or in any Government formed in alliance with the UNC, Tobago will languish as a national backwater, a handmaid to the British sister, an underdeveloped or even an undeveloped waif begging for scraps, a barren desert next to an oasis.

2.05 p.m.

In the face of the provisions of the Patrick Manning led administration, the Member for Chaguanas West could only see intrigue, bacchanal and political manipulation; he does not understand. He claimed that his father was from Tobago; I feel he should not say that again. You will have to refer to your training. Any Tobagonian, even onto the tenth and twelfth generation, would have been proud of the achievement Tobago has made in winning this. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Peters: You could have made much more!

Hon. R. Dumas: I think it was true, albeit incidental, when the Member for Siparia advised us, "Show me your leader and I shall show you who you are." Show me your men and I shall show you who you are. Once again Tobago has been shown who the leader is and who the UNC is.

Mr. Sharma: Come with something original, "nuh"; you are on television. You are not in Tobago on a comedy show. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. R. Dumas: I am the one who walked household after household. Notice what I am saying, Madam Deputy Speaker, household after household, in community after community in Tobago East, and was sent to this House to seek Tobago's best interest. I make no apologies for that. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*]

Mr. Maharaj SC: Would you give way? I know that the people of Tobago were interested in internal self-government within this sovereign democratic process of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Having regard to what you said, could you tell us, tell the country, whether the PNM is prepared to give internal self-government to Tobago. As you would know, we had brought a bill to give full internal self-government to Tobago and the PNM opposed it.

Hon. R. Dumas: "Yuh finish?" I told him that I was a long time political activist in Tobago. I also did not tell him that I was a member of the Executive of the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR). I also did not tell you that I was sitting as part of the negotiating team speaking to your leader, the Member for Couva South, when he came to Tobago, in seeking an alliance with Mr. Robinson.

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Internal self-government will always be an aspiration of the people of Tobago, but internal self-government has best been handled by the PNM. [*Desk thumping*] In every arrangement made, that has always been the best way. [*Interruption*] The legislation was flawed. You and Mr. Robinson sat in a room—the same man people want to kill on that side—and came out with something. You did not put it to the table, I know that.

Hon. Member: The PNM wanted to kill Robbie!

Hon. R. Dumas: I am suggesting, Sir, that we have one mechanism for treating with that issue whenever it comes. [*Crosstalk*] Whenever the issue of self-government comes up, however it comes up, we suggest that we have a team of technicians, professionals working with the population, ensuring that what we have to say there is then brought to this house. Once that mechanism is followed, that would always give us the best option we have, so long as we do not meet people who would not send our representatives and chase them back to Tobago, as you did to Deborah Moore-Miggins and the others.

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: Expose!

Hon. R. Dumas: The budget is no longer a short-term, quick template, year by year. I heard Members saying that they saw the same project one year, two years, three years. Of course, we had a discussion about that, the fact that the budget is a multi-project programme. In fact, it is a multi-programme, macro programme, therefore—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Peters: Multimillionaire programme.

Hon. R. Dumas: Because of the enjoyment of the facilities and the improved way of life of the people of Mayaro, I want to suggest that the representative for Mayaro says thanks for the hard work done in that area. He has done not one thing since he has become a Member; not one thing. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Peters: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. R. Dumas: Yes, but you have not done the work. The representation of those people came from Tobago. I heard the Member for Princes Town talk about “zandolie” looking for hole. I have worked up and down this country called Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Panday: So you are a national “zandolie”?

Hon. R. Dumas: Member for Princes Town, I would want to talk to you about Princes Town another time. [*Crosstalk*]

We have here a coherent programme for treating with the development of Trinidad and Tobago. In it, the model speaks to a role for the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development. We see small and micro enterprise development as part of the transitional activity, where a certain sector of the economy move from being workers in uncertain relationships with capital, to one in which they craft the organization, craft the capital capture and, in fact, go on to build their own capacity to own their own businesses.

In that context, the model says that our charge is to assist in achieving full employment within the framework of decent and safe work in a non-discriminatory and equitable environment. The creation of a favourable industrial relations environment based on freedom of collective bargaining, tripartism, appropriate legal protection, timely dispute resolution and mutual respect. Of course, the third pillar is to encourage and develop a vibrant, medium/small and micro enterprise sector. If we take these three responsibilities of the Ministry, we can report today that the Ministry has shouldered its task and is recasting itself to ensure that it makes its contribution in each area.

Today, we can point to the fact that the OSH Authority and the OSH agency are up and running, with inspections for OSH activity being increased by more than 100 per cent. We credit that to the kind of public exposition, the kind of outreach that we have been doing, and the kind of public education of both employers and workers.

We can report that in a similar period, if we were to do that kind of measure—God forbid that anything untoward happens because we mention the measure—we have seen a reduction of fatal accidents at the workplace, from 10 in the same period precedent to last year, to five in the period in the year immediately preceding this date.

The average unemployment rate has moved from 10.8 per cent in 2001, to 5.5 per cent in 2002. We have seen that our workforce profile has changed, again, because we now have a larger part of the population being participant in the workforce, with an increasing number of men. Now we have a male participant rate of 75 per cent, while women are at 52 per cent; therefore, it means that we still have a 45 per cent dependency ratio which we must treat with.

We have changed the structure of the labour force from one in which you had 200,400 persons with primary education, 337,000 persons with secondary education, and 40,000 persons with tertiary education. We know that in 2007 the statistics show that we now have 166,000 persons with primary education, 389,000 persons with secondary education, and 63,000 persons were tertiary

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education; all of which are, at least, 50 per cent up in tertiary education and 20 per cent and 25 per cent respectively for secondary and primary education persons in the workforce. In other words, in that short six years, the labour force profile of Trinidad and Tobago has changed dramatically. We should pay attention to that.

It means, therefore, that employers now have a different stock from which they could win workers. We, therefore, expect that employers would change the ways in which they go about recruiting persons, change the way in which they go about remunerating persons. In that context, we are making a call for the consideration that decent work drives our participation. Decent work drives the extent to which we are treating with our workers as a body.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the question that arises is that we have been pushing the unemployment rate down from 70-odd thousand persons to 40,000 persons, at this point in time. We have been increasing the number of working opportunities. We have been increasing the level of job opportunities available to the population. As the jobs have come, as the economy has grown, migrant workers have also come onto the scene. The mechanisms for treating with that and managing that we have to plan.

This new approach realizes that we must put in place mechanisms for monitoring these work places in a different way. Therefore, the labour inspection role of the Ministry has had to be enhanced and will continue to be enhanced. We added 18 labour inspectors to the programme and plan to go much further than that. Those first entrants would serve as trainers for the next wave of labour inspectors coming on board.

We have had educational and public relations set of mechanisms for the inspectorate. We want to suggest to you that we would be increasing the numbers. In increasing the numbers of visits and inspections, the move to prosecution as being a first call, or a more frequent call, would occur.

In the question of development of small and micro enterprises, we would know that the NEDCO story is now a success. We now know that it was a critical, strategic intervention made by this administration. It is no longer in its infancy in the way it was before, given that it is now in operation six years. We know that tied to NEDCO is the ETeCK programme in terms of training. Almost 6,000 persons have passed through the training programmes of ETeCK. In terms of NEDCO, approximately 9,200 loans have been made available to small and micro entrepreneurs. These loans have been valued at \$209 million, which means that the period 2002—August 08, 2008—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Peters: I hope you could account.

Hon. R. Dumas: Do not worry about that; we will account for it. Just as you had a godfather who could help you with your gas station, these people may need the State as a godfather.*[Crosstalk]* You do not remember. Nobody in Trinidad and Tobago could get a gas station licence without the intervention of the State; it is just not possible. If your godfather was the State, so be it; you had a godfather.*[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Sharma: Fundamental statement.

Hon. R. Dumas: It is a fundamental statement. It is a reality. *[Crosstalk]* Madam Deputy Speaker, you see there are some persons who do not want to deal with reality. Let me tell you my philosophy. I could give you my philosophy as distinct from anywhere I go. My philosophy is clear, that there is no private sector in Trinidad and Tobago. Every single activity that has been started and promoted in Trinidad and Tobago has been a function of State policy.

Mr. Sharma: Who is your godfather?

Hon. R. Dumas: The State.

Mr. Sharma: I thought was Dr. Rowley.

Hon. R. Dumas: He might have been my political sponsor.

The Government has approved a fundamental equity creating programme, in which mechanisms are being built; mechanisms are being put in place to ensure that a wider body of people, a wider body of small people sector individuals, have access to government programmes and government contracts. We call it the Fair Share Programme. *[Crosstalk]*

2.20 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Fair Share Programme addresses some of what we will be saying because I have heard some of the conversations about access to government's activity and access to opportunities within government's activity.

The Government has agreed and established the programme that suggests a certain percentage of government's procurement should go to small and micro enterprise development. It requires a number of things to happen and those things are put in place now, for example, a small business registry across the country. I hope that this time when the advertisements go out some people would not call it a PNM programme and discourage their people from joining it and enter into—what do you call it—non-participation.

Hon. Member: Civil disobedience.

Hon. R. Dumas: Civil disobedience, and afterwards scream that they have been left out. I suggest to the country that participation in the Fair Share Programme for small business people is something they should work at.

We are willing to do the registration and in turn, the processes and procedures will be made clear. A network of entrepreneurial centres is expected to be put in place to support the development of the Fair Share Programme, as well as the ministry's enterprise development division to play the Small and Micro Enterprise Advisory and Policy creation role that it is required to play.

We suggest that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago continue to encourage employment creation for ensuring that the jobs that are created are sustainable and allow for the development of workers and provide a safe and healthy work environment in which wages and salaries allow for ever increasing and improving quality of life.

Madam Deputy Speaker, co-operatives played quite a critical role in the development of business acumen and practices in Trinidad and Tobago, and in turn over time declined. We are arguing that the cooperative movement is one that seeks to balance the need for profitability with the wider interest of its membership and the society in which it exists and, therefore, the decision has been made that we seek to revive the activity levels of cooperatives once again in Trinidad and Tobago, and towards that end, the institutional strength and practice required for supporting same has been initiated.

We will be coming to the population again with another level of discussion in this matter. We are expecting to search for an increased level of support for the local cooperative movement.

Mr. Sharma: Thank you very much, hon. Minister. Minister, as it relates to NEDCO loans, a number of applicants have reported to us that they are unable to qualify for loans. Can you shed some light?

Hon. R. Dumas: I like your language. There are qualifying requirements and, certainly, if the person cannot qualify for the loan, then maybe we have to treat with the social programme for grants, but there is a provision for loans under NEDCO. There are other provisions for small and micro enterprise grants under the Ministry of Social Development. I am giving you an excuse to speak to the young lady.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Speaker, we are suggesting that to follow the development of the co-operative sector there is need for institutional strengthening processes, enhancement of the

technical expertise available to the division; we have already started to include development officers, business analysts, legal officers and additional cooperative officers. We are also putting the necessary IT structure in place to support interaction between the divisions and the potential stakeholders.

I want to advise that already in the various communities as the discussions occur, more and more communities are indicating that they are willing to get into the cooperative venture which would deal with both productive and consumer cooperatives.

In terms of friendly societies, we have found that there is a body of friendly society members numbering just over 30,000 persons with an asset base of \$30 million and quite a significant amount of property holdings that we need to explore ways in which we can move with the movement to seek ways to reenergize the friendly society movement.

Mr. Speaker, we have the issue of matching opportunity for employment with the offerings on the employment market, and in that context, the National Employment Service is crafted and is developing. We are therefore developing a system of labour exchanges strategically located throughout Trinidad and Tobago at Port of Spain, Chaguanas, San Fernando, Siparia, Tunapuna, Sangre Grande, Point Fortin and Tobago.

These labour exchanges are expected to play a role in identifying labour opportunity and in matching requests from individuals seeking those opportunities. This is to be managed through the National Employment Services located at these labour exchanges as we pointed out.

We have had the experience of being able to treat with the employment of approximately 1,300 persons successfully finding employment for them and as we improve the capacity of the National Employment Service, we will be asking for greater and greater opportunities both from those who seek jobs and those who are offering jobs.

The ministry also manages the seasonal agricultural worker programme which has continued and brought quite a substantial amount of earnings to workers. At this point in time, we have just about 1,200 people on this programme. It had been declining and the intention here is to widen the scope of the programme away from agriculture to other opportunities and we have already received some approvals and hopefully that will grow, providing a larger body and a wider variety of opportunities for the people of Trinidad and Tobago to experience the different ways in which different people do things.

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There are two other factors I want to quickly mention; one is the Labour Market Information System. I heard a number of people saying some things and in saying these things it is quite clear they are not aware of what is happening. I do not want to think that people are deliberately misleading. We are working on the labour market information system which we expect to improve, we have already had approvals to hire some people, advertisements have gone out and the process of selecting those people are being put in place.

The second mechanism again is the mechanism for finding labour and distributing it through the system, this is also under consideration including labour for—I heard a call this morning for reform of URP, reform of CEPEP and from murmurings I have heard that Members of the Opposition have received information as to what is being planned although it is not yet decided. So they are throwing the projected name across the road.

The final statement I want to make is that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago as was said by the Minister of Finance, is looking closely at the productivity levels and our competitive levels across the country and in competition with other countries within the region and internationally and we are working deliberately on that, and are now waiting for the denominations of the different tripartite sectors and we will report to this House at a later time.

I thank you for the opportunity to contribute, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Vasant Bharath (*St. Augustine*): Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, having reviewed the budget in detail, in fact, page by page, line by line, and having listened to the previous speaker and those before him mouthing very puerile defences, I now know what “Stepping up with Patrick” really meant.

Mr. Speaker, if you remember the PNM’s noisy chant before election last year was that “We are stepping up with Patrick”—and they went to great lengths and spent a great deal of money, some \$200 million, much of which was taxpayers’ money—drumming this mantra into the people’s psyche and consciousness. But despite all that money being spent, we must remember that the PNM actually got a minority of votes in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] More people voted against them than for them despite the millions of dollars they spent.

Mr. Speaker, this in fact is the first budget presentation or offering of a minority regime and it illustrates the lack of vision of this lame-duck PNM administration. The budget outlined by the starry eyed Minister of Finance, is also the showpiece of this Government that speaks very airily about Vision 2020 even

though one-third of the population in this country is unable to put food on its table. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Diego Martin Central, I think you have already contributed in this debate and I do not want you during the contribution of the hon. Member for St. Augustine to be sitting there and contributing. So let him contribute, he is on the floor.

Mr. V. Bharath: Thank you for your intervention, Mr. Speaker. Maybe he is trying to emulate his other colleague from Diego Martin North East.

Mr. Speaker, the presentation of this critical economic policy document was left in the hands of a political neophyte; one who by her own admission has spent the majority of her professional life in legal circles. In fact, if you remember, when she was first appointed as Minister of Finance, she herself expressed surprise and shock. But then I guess Mr. Speaker, that was the best the hon. Prime Minister could have done with the bungling pack of cards he had at his disposal after he had summarily dismissed and fired the most capable of his Cabinet because they dared to challenge his one-manism and his draconian leadership.

Mr. Speaker, for three hours last week Monday of what seemed like an eternity—and I am sure it would have been the same for many others to listen on the radio and television—I sat here and subjected myself to such agony by way of listening to the budget presentation that this honourable House seemed to be transformed, instead of being a place of serious discussion and discourse, into some kind of medieval torture chamber, one where the grim reaper ominously records and catalogues the who is who of lost souls entering his kingdom in his own budgetary exercise.

Mr. Speaker, I came here to listen to a budget reading of the Government's accounting of its income and expenditure for the next year and instead, all I heard was the miscellaneous abracadabra, mumbo jumbo recital of an old shopping list. The hocus pocus recital that accompanied the voodoo economics that we heard last Monday would do injustice even to a CAPE student in a business studies class who had gotten the paper before the exam but still turned up and was unable to do justice to it.

2.35 p.m.

It was even repentance unworthy of the ears of a priest in a confessional booth, even though what was presented here was more of a confessional than a financial statement; a confession that the Minister of Finance is way out of her league in determining how the patrimony and resources of our country should be

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spent. Furthermore, what emerged was that the Ministry of Finance should not be used as a classroom for OJTs [*Desk thumping*] receiving an economics tutorial, but that in normal circumstances when good sense prevails, the Minister of Finance should be informed by the great intellectual minds of finance and of economics and not by a cursory read of *The Economist* or the *Business Week*.

This is not some kind of mock Parliament with high school students engaged in mock parliamentary debate, although from what I have heard for the last couple of days the students would have done a much better job. But when we are dealing with our billions, our Prime Minister has a duty to know that the choice of Minister of Finance, or for that matter any other Minister, cannot be left to the toss of a coin; cannot be left to the pulling of straws; cannot be left to the whims and fancies of sleeping bedfellows, but that some gravity must be attached to the selection process.

The hon. Minister of Finance began by displaying the juvenile performance and conduct of someone who was doing it for the first time. She was giggly; she was heady; she was easily distracted and she was quite excitable. She often lost focus and appeared at times to trivialize the very important exercise which she was spearheading. The Minister had promised us a brief exercise but she went on for all of three hours and seven minutes, which may have given us some insight into her durability but said quite little about the substance that she unveiled.

In between the sheets—the paper sheets, that is—she was inept, vacuous, lacked a philosophical underpinning and was generally reckless and negligent of the country's growth and development. Where the Minister was not sloppy and slap-dash, she was carefree and irresponsible, not addressing in any meaningful way whatsoever, the scourges of crime, poverty, traffic woes, food production and cost of living. She punished the middle class for no apparent and deserving reason. She was contradictory on national savings, clumsy on the creation of an international financial centre, sheepish on the diversification of the economy, repetitive on the development of public utilities and completely out of sync with the realities of education. She was brazen on health, dreadful on poverty, rash on housing, confusing on the gaming sector and palpably shameless on national security. [*Desk thumping*]

More than that, there was no explanation whatsoever for the justification of Government's horrible track record of under-performance and absence of implementation, and for cost and time overruns and lack of accountability and probity in respect of multi-billion dollar expenditure by this Government. It was, in other words, a typical PNM budget.

Year after year we go through the rituals of listening to what is essentially a broken record, playing the same tune year after year, over and over again, and one would have thought in this age of technology, in the age of dubbing and lip syncing, that one would wonder why the Government even bothers to turn up here to read the budget when, in fact, I am sure the Minister of Information from Lopinot/Bon Air can easily provide them with some kind of device where they just hit the replay button and the budget will be read from previous years.

Yes, I suspect that the hon. Minister may well want to forget her first time. The theme of the Minister's presentation was: Shaping our Future Together. But after the PNM has spent over \$220 billion in this current decade alone, with citizens still having to confront major hardships and burdens, it may have been more appropriate to dub the statement: How the PNM underdeveloped Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Our already anguished nation should now steel itself for a year ahead of further record-breaking murders and food prices; shortages of basic foodstuff and more bumper-to-bumper traffic. Yes, these are the hallmarks of "stepping up with Patrick".

The hon. Minister presented her fiscal package against the backdrop and in the midst of major international financial turmoil to which she devoted all of a single paragraph in her entire lengthy speech. As I mentioned in this honourable House only last week in another debate, most of the developed countries in the world are now in deep financial crisis. In the space of just two short weeks, the face of Wall Street and Main Street has changed forever.

Companies that we know and have known for a very long time, like Bear Sterns and Merrill Lynch, have been bailed out. Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs have had to reorganize their business so they now become holding companies, regulated by the federal reserves. Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the two huge mortgage organizations in the United States and the insurance giant, AIG, have been propped up by the federal reserves. Lehman Brothers have gone into liquidation and with the failed bid yesterday by Washington policymakers to inject \$700 billion into the financial markets in the US, the Dow Jones industrial average dropped by 778 points in one day, the single largest decline in the history of the Dow.

In fact, in a few short hours, while we were sitting here in Parliament, Wall Street lost \$1.2 trillion in value on its stock markets. On the other side of the Atlantic, in the United Kingdom, Northern Rock Building Society has been bailed out by the Government. Bradford and Bingley, one of the largest mortgage

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providers, yesterday announced that they are to be nationalized. And the Halifax Bank of Scotland has been absorbed by Lloyds TSB.

Only this morning, Fortis and Dexia, Belgium's two largest banks, have now received a bailout in the order of US \$25 billion only in the last 24 hours. In Asia, the Bank of Japan, the Reserve Bank of Australia, the Bank of Korea and the Taiwanese government, have all stepped into the money markets to contain liquidity shocks. The Bank of Japan yesterday pumped two trillion yen, that is US \$19.2 billion into the system yesterday alone, having pumped money into the system on nine consecutive days.

The stock markets across the world, including those of the emerging markets, have tumbled in recent days. Several of these world economies are now in deep recession. We heard only on Thursday of last week that Ireland, a country that has experienced strong growth in the last five or six years, has now joined the list of those countries now officially in recession, having experienced two consecutive quarters of negative growth. All of its European neighbours: Britain, France, Italy, Germany, Spain are all on the brink of recession, with Denmark already having fallen prey to this recessionary spiral.

All of these economies are now taking the decisive measures to deal with the unfortunate problems and realities that now confront them. So why do I tell you all of this? It is because almost every country in the world is importing the America financial crises. No country is immune. That is the backdrop against which this budget was delivered last week Monday; the worst financial crisis the world has seen since the great depression of 1929. Our own Central Bank Governor has intervened and made comments that the entire financial crisis is not good news for investment markets around the world, including Trinidad and Tobago.

For this Government, however, it is business as usual; spend, spend, spend. You know, the Member for Tobago East was being very disingenuous when he tried to insinuate that what we were saying is to cut expenditure completely. We are not saying that. We know that there are necessary services and goods that need to be paid for in Trinidad and Tobago. What we are telling them is to cut out the reckless expenditure, the expenditure that goes into non-productive output; [*Desk thumping*] the expenditure that is being misspent; the moneys that are being corruptly taken away from the Treasury. That is what we are saying, to stop that. So for him to stand up here and suggest that we are saying stop all expenditure on needy social services, we are not saying that for a moment.

But you know, this Government and all of its Ministers continue to bray in tandem that Trinidad and Tobago is not going to be affected by the financial crisis. They would have us believe that we are isolated from the rest of the world; we are cocooned and we have a cushion that will ensure that we are not affected; that, in fact, they want us to believe that we do not import nearly \$4 billion worth of food, or will be this year; that we are not tied in any way to the US dollar; that the US dollar is not losing value against all major currencies.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day we also have to remember that our Caricom neighbours, seven of whom represent the largest indebted nations in the world as a percentage of GDP—those countries, our Caricom neighbours—owe Trinidad and Tobago large amounts of money. They owe our merchant banks a large amount of money, and what is going to happen when those countries go into recession? Because remember that their economies are tied to tourism and when there is a recession as far as tourists going to those countries, what is going to happen to the debt that those countries owe to Trinidad and Tobago? They are not going to be able to repay and we are going to end up having either to write it off or to reschedule that debt.

So to say that the global meltdown and the financial woes of the world will not affect us, is totally untrue, and when these economies fail that we trade with, because they are our major trading partners, if we do not have economies of scale because we have no markets to sell to, then the proposed EPA legislation that this Government is in a hurry to sign is not worth the paper it is signed on, because we will not be able to compete with those markets. [*Desk thumping*]

In the midst of all of this, the message and the actions of the Government are no different—absolutely no different—than they were in the boom and bust years of the 1970s and 1980s that took us to bankruptcy; that took us to an empty treasury and into the waiting arms of the international lending agencies.

But even before this financial crisis came to our doorstep, Trinidad and Tobago had been slipping miserably on every international economic indicator. As my colleague from Siparia mentioned in her brilliant response to the budget, in 2001 this country ranked 35th in the business competitive index; today we are ranked a miserable 84th. In an assessment of the quality of the national business environment and the ease of doing business in Trinidad and Tobago, we have slipped from 38 in 2001 to 80 in 2008.

What this means—for those across there who may not understand it—is that there are 79 countries in the rest of the world where it is easier to do business than Trinidad and Tobago. That is what it means. And you know, it brings into sharp

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national focus the increasingly critical need for financial discipline and prudent management of our economy.

The world's financial experts are telling us that this is the greatest crisis since the 1929 great depression and there are dire implications for the rest of the world, but also for us, for our tiny island state. Yet our hon. Minister of Finance devotes all of one paragraph to the gravest financial nightmare of our times. The Minister acknowledged, and I quote:

“...the need to place adequate risk management strategies to protect from adverse developments. I will expand on this later.”

End of quote and that was it. The Minister never returned to the discussion.

2.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister never dealt adequately and competently with the need for urgent legislative reform and for institutional regulatory tightening; not a single word of commitment to financial leadership. The giddy-headed Minister failed to announce a solitary measure aimed at wetting our house when our neighbour's is on fire. In fact, when asked about our exposure to risk by the Member for Siparia, let me tell you what the Minister said. I quote from the Minister's winding up on September 19, 2008:

“One of the things that the Member for Siparia mentioned is Lehman Brothers; there are a number of other huge financial institutions that have crashed in the United States on serious difficulties as a result of the subprime mortgage crisis. But the point that was being made I believe, was when Lehman Brothers was mentioned was with regard to Central Bank, and the concern that the Member for Siparia expressed”—it is a little disjointed here, Mr. Speaker—“with regard to the concern as to whether...the Central Bank had invested in Lehman Brothers and perhaps others, and therefore was concerned to how it is going to impact on our financial position.

...The Governor of the bank has informed me that the bank has no holdings...by any of these institutions...

I do not want to make light of what is happening...but I just want to say if that gives any measure of comfort to the other side...in specific reference to the issue raised and the question raised by the Member of Parliament for Siparia. No, Lehman Brothers, we have no investments in Lehman Brothers and that comes from the Central Bank.”

That is what the Minister of Finance said on September 19, 2008 in response to a question from the Member for Siparia.

On Saturday, September 27, last Saturday, one week later:

Central Bank rescues US \$85 million from US crisis.

The Central Bank rescued US \$85 million of the country's foreign savings when American investment house Lehman Brothers collapsed two weeks ago as the United States market faced the worst financial crisis in almost a century.

The US Federal reserve also played a role in salvaging 60 per cent of this country's reserves when it took control of failed mortgage houses Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, Central Bank Governor Ewart Williams said—6 per cent of official reserves invested in Merrill Lynch works out to about \$480 million based on the official reserves of US \$8.5 million.

Williams said, Lehman Bros was one of the country's external managers but since its collapse the Bank decided to end the investment management arrangement. Lehman Brothers managed about 6 per cent of the country's total portfolio with the bulk of the resources invested in Treasury securities of G7 countries.”

So, Mr. Speaker, who are we to believe? The Governor of the Central Bank or the Minister of Finance? We are in a situation where at least one financial powerhouse in Trinidad and Tobago is in trouble and hundreds of millions of dollars are at risk and investors are also at risk. Our Finance Minister has thoughtlessly skipped through the issue with regard to this matter, without any comprehensive analysis of the causes and fallouts even here in Trinidad and Tobago.

There was not a statement on the most pressing financial dilemma of our times. That has to be ignorance and complacency; this, from an administration that is ceaselessly talking about developed nation status and about the establishment of an international financial capital; this from an administration that promised—

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: Thank you very much, Member for St. Augustine, for giving way. I just want to clarify something you are saying. You said that not a statement has been made by the Minister with regard to two things. We made a statement on two things: the issue of the inflation rate and the immediate impact of the international financial turmoil on Trinidad and Tobago, both the financial sector and on the economy. That statement was given and issued about a week ago to all media houses and the *Trinidad Guardian* published the statement.

Mr. V. Bharath: Mr. Speaker, all I can say is that obviously the statement the Minister made is at odds with the position of the Central Bank Governor. This

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kind of ignorance from an administration that has promised the electorate good governance, people-centred development and institutional strengthening. That is what "Stepping up with Patrick" was all about.

Where are the comfort and reassurance for jittery investors and the guarantees to local and international financial firms? Where is the agenda for fine tuning the relevant laws and regulatory agencies and the strict adherence to best practices and financial procedures? It is no wonder that this budget has received universal and resounding condemnation from all the financial community on this and other critical aspects.

Mr. Speaker, it would not surprise me in the least if international investors who are looking on at Trinidad and Tobago will be doing so in astonishment at the ineptitude and the ham-fisted response of this administration to this major crisis. This stillborn approach to the financial crisis is also manifested in the Minister's handling of virtually every sector and area of Government's pursuit and endeavour.

Take, for example, foreign policy. This Government continues to speak of Trinidad and Tobago's growing international importance and influence of developing global partnerships. That presumably is why \$500 million of our money is being spent to host two international seminars next year. That supposedly is why our venerable Prime Minister is jetting up and down visiting international capitals on a weekly basis spending millions of dollars. That, Mr. Speaker, is presumably what is going to bring money into the coffers of Trinidad and Tobago by virtue of the number of people who will attend these conferences and the publicity we will get.

Yet, the most vital annual policy document of the year does not make a single mention of foreign policy, not a word; not an utterance on the need to realign our foreign missions to meet the rigours of the international economic shifting sands. You would have expected that a sensitive and competent Government would have reviewed the 15 missions with the objective of determining whether they still have value in its current context. You would have anticipated that greater diplomatic and trade emphasis would have been placed on doing business with India and China in the light of their ever-increasing economic importance in the world.

Yet our first-time Minister remained curiously mum on this subject. Indeed, I am told that there is a foreign policy review document—unfortunately, the Minister is not here today—prepared by an eight-member team of experts that is gathering dust at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In fact, when the Member for

Point Fortin was asked by reporter Andy Johnson about this report, she allegedly said to him that she had more important issues with which to deal. In the meantime, I understand all 15 Diplomatic Missions are starved of expert staff.

Mr. Speaker, as it is with foreign affairs, so it is with agriculture. We are all brutally conscious of the critical state of food production and high prices. My colleague, the Member for Caroni Central, spoke last night at length on the agriculture industry. In light of the soaring prices of food and the hardships that people are facing at this time, one would have expected laser beam focus on the agriculture industry. [*Desk thumping*]

Again, we would have been disappointed. This is the second year that this budget talks about plans to establish a praedial larceny unit. It has taken at least two years to set up a team of security officers to deal with crop thieves and that after years of cruel neglect to an age-old problem. That, Mr. Speaker, is government that works. That is how we are stepping up in this country with Patrick.

If it takes 24 months to put together a crop thief squad, how long will it take for this simple-minded administration to implement its more complex promises? Is it any surprise that this Government still cannot formalize the handing over of lands to ex-Caroni workers? They have talked about this ad nauseam, from budget to budget, and yet there are no lands to the ex-Caroni workers.

It is a matter of public record that the courts have instructed the Government to deliver the lands within a specific time frame and yet it is continuing to move in classic PNM style, with a combination of rank incompetence and malicious and mindless spite against the innocent and devoted farmers whom they perceive may not have supported them politically. With this approach, is it any surprise that last year's lofty promises of megafarms and more lands for farmers, proper pricing policy for fertilizers, better marketing arrangements, venture capital projects; all of these remain exactly what they are—PNM pie-in-the-sky ideas?

This Government continues to treat agriculture like pumpkin vine family. In the 2007/2008 budget presentation, the hon. Prime Minister spoke about earmarking agriculture for intensive focus and he detailed plans to curb the cost of food. The Prime Minister announced the establishment of a prices advisory committee under the auspices of the Member for Princes Town South/Tableland, but this advisory committee has just been looking on as a helpless spectator as prices continue to rise.

If budget promises were not enough, the PNM spoke in its election manifesto about revitalizing agriculture and of putting more acreage into production use. But

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what is the Government's track record in food production over the last 12 months? The Review of the Economy document that I have here paints a dismal picture on domestic agriculture. In the face of the dire need to increase food production, the output of vegetables actually declined. Tree crop production, for example, fell dramatically short of targets. In fact, we should now be performing the last rites on the copra industry; another example of Government's gross neglect.

Dairy and beef production is down and these farmers are now enduring the bitterest period of their lives. In fact, many have been forced to exit the industry at the hands of this unrelenting regime. The sugar industry, of course, is now dead and buried, but there is still no official announcement as to how the very expensive equipment and machinery that belonged to the sugar companies and were valued at millions of dollars will or have been utilized. Word is that most of these resources have already been spirited away by friends of the PNM.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, through you, for a proper account of these costly pieces of equipment and machinery. At the same time, I ask that he properly explain the current and future functions, duties and responsibilities of the Sugar Manufacturing Company Limited.

I want to provide one other classic example of Government's abandonment of agriculture. In 2006, the Prime Minister announced the cocoa revitalizer to support the revitalization of the cocoa industry. The current Review of the Economy documents reveal that cocoa production fell by 57.9 per cent and coffee by 80.4 per cent during the last fiscal year from already dismal production levels.

3.05 p.m.

This is at a time when, again, the Review of the Economy says that there is an increase in the demand for Trinidad and Tobago's cocoa, which is considered to be one of the finest in the world. In fact, these age-old industries are now all but dead, even though the quality of our product here in Trinidad and Tobago has ranked second, only to Tanzania, historically. That is a government that works. That is what the country meant by: We are stepping up with Patrick.

On the thorny issue of inflation, it is now painfully clear that this PNM regime is numb to the ringing pleas from the Governor of the Central Bank; experts, both nationally and internationally; and the private and public sector, who have been proffering ceaseless advice to them about their reckless spending habits. The latest figures from the Central Bank indicate that inflation rates have moved from 11.8 per cent in August to 13.5 per cent in September. This Government's policy on inflation is clearly to spend as much as possible and as quickly as possible.

Lest we forget, let me remind this honourable House of what the Prime Minister said in his most recent budget address:

“The target announced in the 2007 budget was to reduce inflation by 7 per cent by the end of 2007 and 5 per cent thereafter.”

Today, we stand at 13½ per cent. Twelve months later, there is a 93 per cent increase in inflation. Everybody knows that there are really only two ways to control inflation: fiscal discipline and tight monetary policy. We know what the Government’s fiscal policy is, reckless spending, corrupt practices and a flagrant disregard for the rule of law; a policy that has led us to the doorstep of this inflationary spiral and has threatened the lives of hundreds of thousands of our citizens.

The emasculated Governor of the Central Bank has been battling vainly by introducing measures to absorb liquidity in the system by the issue of Treasury Bonds. Who pays for these bonds ultimately? It is the people of Trinidad and Tobago who pay for these bonds, because every time a Treasury Bond is issued in Trinidad and Tobago, interest has to be paid on these bonds and the interest is funded from the Consolidated Fund. It is taxpayers’ money that is being used to prop up this incompetent Government for its fiscal mismanagement.

Mr. Speaker, you would recall that in July of this year, when the Government came to this House to issue Treasury Bonds, to sap up further liquidity in the system, the cost to the people of Trinidad and Tobago then was \$891 million in interest costs; money that could have been better spent in building more schools, putting more beds in hospitals, fixing leaks in the water system, providing medication for the sick people and incentives for farmers to grow more food. Interest costs are a direct cost of inflation control and only serve to further increase our public debt.

Additionally, because of the Government’s reckless fiscal stance, the Governor of the Central Bank would have no choice; in fact he would be forced to increase the repo rate. The repo rate has increased nine times, since May 2006, in an effort to tighten liquidity in the system. In August 2004, the repo rate was 5 per cent. Today it is 8¼ per cent, an increase of 65 per cent. As a direct result of an increase in the repo rate, prime rates of interest have increased to 12 per cent and we fully expect, in the coming months, that is going to increase further to possibly 14 per cent, thereby increasing the cost of doing business; a cost that would invariably pass on to the consumer and again ensure that the inflation spiral continues.

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Those of us, unfortunately, who may be on flexible mortgage rates, will find that there is an increase in the cost of our mortgage on a monthly basis, when the cost of interest goes up.

Additionally, the Governor would have to increase the reserve requirement ratio, probably from 15 to 18 per cent, in order to take more money out of the hands of the commercial banks. In so doing, the banks will probably raise interest rates, because they now only have \$0.82 on the dollar to lend, as opposed to \$0.85; all of this because of the Government's irrationality, a lack of prudence and simple incompetence in handling our country's affairs.

Add to this, the latest pronouncement from the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Sen. The Hon. Mariano Browne—I am not sure where he got his training from—at a meeting with businessmen last Friday. He said if the Government were to reduce spending, it would lead to a recession. Listen to where we have reached in this country. This is the level of irresponsibility and ignorance to which this Government is prepared to stoop, to continue to justify its reckless spending; if we reduce spending, we are going to a recession.

Let me remind this honourable House of the inflation rates in the good old days of the UNC government. The inherited rate we got from the previous PNM government in 1995 was 5.3 per cent. Within the short space of one year, the UNC's first year in 1996, the inflation rate was brought down to 3.3 per cent. In 1997, it was 3.7 per cent. In 1998, when inflation rose to 5.6 per cent, the government took swift and immediate action to reduce capital expenditure and they brought the inflation rate back down to 3.4 per cent in 1999. In 2000, the rate was 3.6 per cent. That is what is referred to as fiscal discipline, being responsible with the people's money. Like a village drunk, this Government has lost its way on inflation and every other aspect of managing this country's economy and could not be bothered at all about tomorrow.

During the forthcoming 12 months, the next fiscal year, this Government plans to spend a further \$6.5 billion on infrastructural development, but is sure to further spike the cost of building materials and related costs to the small man. People who plan, I want to put them on warning, to build or expand their homes should prepare to dig deeper into their pockets to afford cement, iron, steel and other construction materials.

With this wild and wanton spending spree, we should not be surprised at all and the population should base themselves for an inflation rate of 15 per cent within the next few months. This, in turn is bound to fuel inflation-based wage

negotiations, which is going to make our manufacturers even more uncompetitive than they are currently. They already suffer problems of the availability of labour and inflated wage rates, as a result of built-in expectations of inflation in their negotiations. This is going to further ensure that the manufacturing sector in Trinidad and Tobago becomes more and more uncompetitive.

Put that in the context of the fact that even though we have protection of the common external tariff in our Caricom market, we are still going to be uncompetitive in those markets, further threatening any negotiations or agreements that we are going to sign as far as the EPA legislation is concerned.

On this score, the Minister was less than forthcoming in quoting countries with similarly high inflation rates. The truth is that Trinidad and Tobago's inflation rate, according to Trinidad and Tobago global competitive standing 2007/2008, ranks 101 in the world out of 131 countries ranked. All developed countries are in single digits; most of them with inflation rates less than 5 per cent. Mr. Speaker, nearby Barbados, and even most of the OECS countries—the same islands that the Prime Minister is jet-hopping back and forth and to and fro and seeking to bail out—have inflation rates that are half of this country's. That is governance PNM-style. That was meant by: We are stepping up with Patrick.

With the Government's lack of interest in food, as I mentioned before, surely, we must brace ourselves for an inflation rate that goes through the roof in the coming financial year. While I hate to be the bearer of bad news, I put the nation on alert that the cost of food, in a number of instances, is likely to rise by as much as 50 per cent in the next fiscal year.

The paltry amount that is handed out to the elderly and disabled is a pittance by what would have been given to these people. The \$300 that they have been given can no way make up for the loss of purchasing power for the last seven years. We all know that.

I have been told that there are maxi drivers who work for the Ministry of Education, taking school children back and forth from schools in the rural areas, who have not had an increase in 15 years, while the cost of living has quadrupled in that time. *[Interruption]*

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. V. Bharath: Thank you to my colleagues. Every time a poor man looks at an item on a grocery shelf or a supermarket and he is unable to purchase it for his family, he should note that it is this Government's reckless actions, reckless policies and stubborn refusal to deal with inflation. He should also take note that this merciless PNM regime has refused to adjust the minimum wage to give the small man some kind of a breathing space with the soaring cost of living. He should know that this cold-hearted Government prefers to spend millions of dollars on a mansion for the Prime Minister and jets and glass towers for Ministers of Government, rather than give them a working and realistic wage—spend, spend, spend. Nothing has changed, spend, spend, spend. This is governance PNM-style. This is what we call stepping up with Patrick.

Despite the financial crisis that looms on our doorstep, this Government has refused steadfastly to save for a rainy day. By pegging oil at US \$70 per barrel and basing Government's expenditure on this—there is nothing wrong with pegging oil at US \$70, but when you base Government's expenditure on what you are pegging the oil at—the Government has signalled its intention of ensuring that no money is put into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, because the gap has been closed between actual cost and budgeted cost and as a result you would find that less and less money, over the next year, would be put in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund.

Currently, we have US \$2 billion in the Heritage and Stabilization Fund. In the event of an output shock or any other shock such as a price shock, that represents one year's cover. What that means is that we would be able to pay our bills for one year.

The IMF as well as many prominent financial experts have estimated that we are required to have at least US \$40 billion in the fund to be comfortable; 20 times what the Government has currently put aside in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, and they still now intend to reduce the amount that is going into the fund.

As bad as the Williams and Chambers administrations were, they at least put aside three years of savings. Three years of this country's wealth was put away by the Williams and Chambers administrations. After seven years, this Manning Government has only managed to scrape together one year's worth of savings, at a time of unprecedented wealth in our country.

We all know when this Government presents us with a budget, it is all a charade, a farcical exercise in Machiavellian duplicity; not only in terms of the nice promises that they make that sounds nice to the ears of our population, but because we all know that none of these promises will ever materialize.

With this in mind, permit me to discuss the wholesale duplication of various promises in successive budget presentations; promises that the Member for Tobago East referred to as bankable promises. Mr. Speaker, in my days at primary school, we called the offence that I am talking about, which is wholesale duplication, fudging and it was punishable by the guava whip. In most cases you had to go and pick your own guava whip. If you came back with one that was too thin, you had to go back and pick a fatter one. When you came back, you got extra blows for picking the thin one and trying to scry.

3.20 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I have often wondered whether the person who initially wrote these grand promises that the PNM rolls out every year is entitled to some kind of copyright fees. [*Laughter*] He would have been a wealthy man by now. Maybe the Government should be charged for wholesale fudging. We know that CXC and CAPE students have been prosecuted for similar offences.

Allow me to cite a few examples of empty promises that were blatantly and indiscriminately lifted from previous budget addresses. When the hon. Minister of Finance spoke of a grandiose array of highways and major roads, the country issued a collective yawn, because we had heard it all before. In fact, the planned freeways from San Fernando to Princes Town and from Princes Town to Mayaro, as my good friend from Mayaro told us earlier in the debate, date back to Dr. Eric Williams' era. All of the other announced road networks are as old as the hills.

Mr. Speaker, if this hapless and hopeless Government cannot widen the Churchill Roosevelt Highways east of Arima after four years, when, pray, would they be in a position to build a freeway to La Brea, a highway to Manzanilla and a first class road to Moruga? If this administration is unable to get a simple water taxi going, after years of promises, when will they construct a highway from Penal to Guayaguayare?

Mr. Speaker, still on the issue on infrastructure, the hon. Prime Minister said in his budget presentation last year:

“We intend to tackle the problem of flooding in Trinidad and Tobago head on.”

Talk of broken promises; and loose talk! Mr. Speaker, the promise is as barren and flippant as the plan to build a dam at Mamoral or to dredge vital watercourses in this country.

The Prime Minister also announced last year a comprehensive drainage project, and yet it floods at South Quay within a few minutes of a drizzle. Last

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week, Hi-Lo at Gulf City was flooded after 20 minutes of rain. Residents of Penal, Debe and other rural areas must brace themselves as soon as the clouds start to gather. That is PNM-style delivery and PNM-style governance. That is what is meant by stepping up with Patrick.

The master plan for the water supply has been cut and pasted, over and over from budget to budget and still 40 per cent of the piped water escapes and only 7 per cent of this population has a supply of water 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We now hear of a plan to inject a further \$10 billion into the system to be put in the hands and to be administered by the same incompetent WASA management that the Prime Minister so strongly condemned and criticized some months ago.

The Minister spoke about taking CEPEP from under the wings of SWMCOL for it to be placed in its own special purpose company. Would this company be like UDeCott with no accountability and money rushing through it like a dose of salts? If the Auditor General found that there was \$1.6 billion in discrepancies, while CEPEP was managed under SWMCOL, what would be the case when it is a free agent to dispense PNM's largesse?

More and more, this PNM regime is removing governance from under the purview of rigorous transparency and probity and making it a disciple of political handouts. Mr. Speaker, that is PNM governance for you. This is another example of stepping up with Patrick.

The pronouncements on education were another classic example of reheated promises. Permit me to cite one example. The hon. Minister spoke of the construction of 150 Early Childhood Care and Education Centres, but three years ago the Prime Minister revealed that 600 such centres would be built. By the line Minister's own admission, the last count of completed centres was 19 in three years. That is what she said. We do not even believe that it is 19, but I am going to take the Minister's word. Most of these centres were erected in PNM-controlled districts. Mr. Speaker, at six centres being built per year, you can do the maths. They promised 600 and they delivered six in three years. It is going to take 100 years to deliver 600. That is another example of empty promises, loose talk and pipe dreams.

Mr. Speaker, the calamity in the health sector is matched only by the disaster of national security. My colleague, the Member for Caroni East, yesterday went into great details about the health sector. Regrettably, both sectors account for the lives of innocent nationals. With respect to health, an untold number of persons

perish at public health institutions, several of them, recently, as a result of an outbreak of dengue that the Minister of Health has refused to acknowledge. Even by PNM's standards, this Minister of Health is a catastrophe of monumental proportions.

As with other measures in the Minister's litany of promises, those relating to health were reeled out from several budgets just like all of the other promises. The newest measure which is planned is the national health scheme. So, we hold our breaths to see what is going to happen with regard to this national health scheme.

The Minister's pronouncements on national security are in similar vein to that of health care and agriculture—in fact every other sector. They are hackneyed and clichéd. After the Ministry of National Security spent \$4.6 billion of taxpayers' moneys during the outgoing fiscal year, and has now come back for another \$4.7 billion, the only item that the Minister thought important to mention to the national public was that the plan was there to establish a Specialist Crime Academy by SAUTT. That was the sum total of the PNM Government's assault on crime.

In fact, the cold, bitter and hard facts are before us all. Over 400 homicides arise in virtually every serious crime in this country and there is a total collapse of the criminal justice system and, yet, this Minister of National Security still has a job and came before us on last week Friday with another litany of woes and excuses as to why he could not get the job done. Although I do not know the Minister very well, to me, he comes across as a gentleman and a very decent man—of course, he has been commended for a medal by the Member for Tobago East. Well, if incompetence determines medals, every single one of them across there should have not just one, but two medals. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Members: Gold medals.

Mr. V. Bharath: Mr. Speaker, I want to submit to you today and to this honourable House that with the murder figure likely to cross 500 this year, the Minister of National Security is by far the most incompetent, pathetic and clueless Minister in Trinidad and Tobago's modern history. He is an embarrassment, not just to the PNM, but to all nationals of Trinidad and Tobago and to our international image.

On behalf of the United National Congress Alliance, I extend condolences to all families and victims who have been victims of murders, rapes, kidnappings and other serious crimes during the course of this and previous years.

I end by stating that this budget is simply a microwaved package of political scatter shots, lofty-sounding ideals, rehashed and regurgitated ideas and time-

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worn concepts. It is an untidy mishmash of ideas and ambitions by a regime with a dreadfully pathetic track record of delivery and implementation and a disdain for transparency, decency and accountability with the public purse.

Mr. Speaker, I am reminded of a story I heard recently about the Prime Minister reaching the Pearly Gates and being greeted by St. Peter. St. Peter asked the Prime Minister: Where do you want to go, Heaven or Hell? He said I did not realize I had a choice. St. Peter said, of course, you do. As a former Prime Minister, I am going to give you 24 hours in heaven and 24 hours in Hell and you could come back and tell me where you would like to go.

So, the Prime Minister presses the button and goes down to Hell and as he opens the door of the elevator he is greeted by dancing girls in grass skirts bearing cocktails in long tall glasses. As he looked out beyond them, he saw some of his old friends like Johnny O and others, sipping champagne and eating caviar. He looked a little further out and he saw a lovely sunset with blue seas and white sands, and he robbed his hands and thought: “My God, this is life, this is not Hell, this is Heaven.” Anyway, having already promised St. Peter that he would go to heaven, he decided to bid adieu a due to his friends and he promised that he would see them shortly. Of course, he went back and keeping his promise he went to heaven. When he went to Heaven, of course, the doors of Heaven opened. It was very peaceful and scenic and he saw in the corner a couple people eating some doubles, a fellow drinking a red Solo, an angel playing the proverbial harp and he even bumped into Mr. Panday. [*Laughter*] He thought to himself, “This is not for me. There is no choice in this.” So, he goes back to St. Peter and he says, “St. Peter, Hell it is. I want to go straight to Hell.” St. Peter dutifully puts him in the elevator and presses the button and down he goes. As the doors open what he saw in front of him was a barren, dirty, deserted place, dusty hot and arid and people dressed in rags trying to clothe him as he tries to get out of the lift. In horror, he runs back into the lift and presses the return button and went back to St. Peter and said: “St. Peter, how could you do this to me, you lied to me. The promises that were made to me, and what I saw last week are nothing by comparison to what was there today when I went there.” St. Peter scratches his head and said: “Ah, the day you visited they were campaigning.” [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: That is a stale joke.

Mr. V. Bharath: Mr. Speaker, in a nutshell that sums up the PNM—smoke and mirrors, extravagant PR, heavy on rhetoric, low on reality, another package of promises that will never, ever see the light of day.

It is an awfully poor way to spend and manage almost \$50 billion of our money in Trinidad and Tobago, and let me also add the \$3.9 billion that they put away last year and they are going to bring forward sneakily to hide into the budget.

The prescribed measures will simply not improve the quality of life of anyone in Trinidad and Tobago except, of course, the PNM fat cats who enrich themselves to dizzying heights during the forthcoming months.

Mr. Speaker, I want to advise my friends on the other side that you cannot sell promises for too long, and governments that have huge majorities in one term have been known to get wiped out the very next term in disgust. We do not have to look very far in our past to see this happen. George Chambers had the same 26 seats in 1981 and what happened to him and his government five years later in 1986? An avalanche of alpine proportions buried that PNM government alive. “Only you Georgie, only you Georgie” soon became “never again Georgie”. That is what happened.

You know, the only survivor from that burial is here with us today in this Parliament rewriting the script for the sequel. But while *Avalanche II* is in production and may be launched quite shortly, those of you on the other side who sit smugly and arrogantly, believing that the connection that you have to those chairs is until death do you part, let me warn you that in 1986 there were people who were made of much sterner stuff than you. When the crash came, they went down without so much as a whimper.

Mr. Speaker, this budgetary package brings more pain and misery to the working class, threatens to wipe out the middle class and would subject everyone in this country to being murdered or starved or left to die at any public health institution. It is a budget without a single saving grace or redeeming factor. It is a budget that is anti-poor, anti-success, anti-progress, anti-happiness, anti-growth—in fact, it is anti-everything!

3.35 p.m.

That of course is governance, PNM style and that is how this nation is expected to step up with Patrick. It is yet another cruel demonstration of how the PNM continues to underdevelop Trinidad and Tobago.

In her contribution, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre made several references to the late Prime Minister, hon. Dr. Eric Williams, but I want for her and this Parliament to read some words that go back some 27 years. A cryptic message it may be from the past. The final budget offering of the late Dr. Eric Williams, that

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is as relevant today as it was then. I quote from the budget speech of 1981, Dr. Eric Williams. He said:

"And so, Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, this concludes the 1981 Budget proposals, based on prudence, restraint, and an avoidance of adventurism and free spending at a time when most other countries of necessity have to tighten their belts. Some belt-tightening will do us no harm if we stop to think of the cost of increasingly scarce gasoline, of steadily rising prices of imported commodities, of the liquor which, at least in terms of the slaughter on our roads, we cannot afford, of the increasing disparity between our wages and our performance at work. My hope is that this budget will help to encourage a certain austerity in our expenditures, national and individual, in 1981, and will discourage those amongst us who have been flaunting their affluence in the faces of those who have not."

Mr. Speaker, very wise words from 27 years ago.

We all remember our first time, but with her poor maiden performance, I regret to say that the hon. Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara would hardly have fond memories of her first time. She may do it several times again, but regrettably, she will never get a second chance to make a first impression. More regrettably, the nation will not hold pleasant thoughts and kind memories as we struggle through the upcoming fiscal year under the yoke of another oppressive PNM budget and at the hands of an uncaring PNM regime.

Thanks to the PNM, it will be a year of pain in times of plenty; it will be woes in times of wealth, and misery in the face of money. Unless we correct it and we do so quickly, I submit that the only place we are going with Patrick is straight to hell.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much.

The Minister of Tourism (Hon. Joseph Ross): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my distinct privilege to present my very first budget contribution as a Government Minister before this distinguished House of Representatives. [*Desk thumping*]

In my contribution today, I hope to outline the progress of our local tourism industry and the plans for development of a sustainable tourism sector in our twin-island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

I want to take the opportunity as well to express my gratitude to the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Tourism, Mrs. Melba Dedier, and the staff of my Ministry. Also, Councillor Neil Wilson of the Tobago House of Assembly, and

the staff of the Division of Tourism of the Tobago House of Assembly, the Tourism Development Company and all tourism stakeholders for their kind support.

I also would like to thank the hon. Prime Minister for allowing me to serve my country in the capacity as Minister of Tourism. I want to thank as well, my Cabinet colleagues here, with whom I have collaborated on issues particularly with respect to tourism, and last but by no means least, I want to thank the Almighty God for giving me guidance, sustenance and strength.

I wish to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance, for what I considered to be a gem of a budget, which was presented in this House on Monday last. [*Desk thumping*] A national budget must encapsulate so many elements, so many ingredients, so many things you have to think about in formulating a budget. You have to look at measures to control inflation; you have to look at measures for job creation and maintenance of these very jobs; you have to look at social and infrastructural development issues; you have to address savings, business development, personal and corporation taxes, environmental issues and the list can go on and on.

When one therefore, sets out to prepare a national budget for any country, all these factors must be considered including the views of the people. Just under one year ago, the hon. Prime Minister and every single one of us on this side, faced the entire population with a plan and a programme for this country, which we call Vision 2020. This was the product offered to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and this was the product the people chose. Whether those on the other side like it or not, the people voted strongly in favour of Vision 2020 and what it contained. The budget for 2009 was crafted around Vision 2020.

From my heart—and I believe I have a good heart based on the advice that was given to me quite recently by my doctor, both spiritual and physical—I must give the hon. Minister of Finance the highest possible rating for presenting to this House a well-balanced budget, [*Desk thumping*] knowing fully well that a budget cannot give every single person every single thing they want, and that is why it is called a budget.

She also made a very good presentation, articulating quite succinctly for just over three hours. The Members on the other side are asking for this, for that and the other to be included in the budget. If the hon. Minister of Finance were to take into consideration every single thing and include everything into the budget, we may have still been here getting her presentation.

She presented to us a budget that was consistent with what the people had voted for in 2007; a budget that seeks to provide significant long term and short

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term benefits for this country. Allow me to go to PricewaterhouseCoopers—a document that was quoted by most of the Members on the other side conveniently—and look at page 6. Hear what they concluded with:

“In concluding our overview of the 2009 budget presentation...”

This is PricewaterhouseCoopers speaking and I heard the Member for St. Augustine saying that all financial and other institutions condemned the entire budget. It goes on:

“we must compliment the hon. Minister on her comprehensive coverage of the areas that she identified.” [*Desk thumping*]

So, the hon. Member for St. Augustine, when he is talking about everybody, all financial institutions, all accounting bodies and so on, condemning the budget, I think he is very limited; this is a reputable accounting firm.

Mr. Speaker, last Monday was indeed a historic occasion for this country. It marked the very first occasion when a female Minister of Finance presented a budget in this country. What was historical about this budget as well is that the respondent on the other side was also a female. So, it also marked the first time a female Minister of Finance was presenting a budget and a female Member from the other side was the first respondent. I believe she was acting as the standing Leader of the Opposition in the House, or probably the Leader of the Opposition. I would not be as meddlesome as my colleague from Diego Martin North/East, to say whether she was Leader of the Opposition or not, that is UNC business, and I wish to stay clear of that.

The response from the Member for Siparia was full of many inaccuracies that I believe it would take us twice the time to answer those inaccuracies as it took her to deliver them. Furthermore, we would not fall into the trap of responding to pettiness after pettiness and failing to advise this country of what we have been doing.

It appeared to me that the hon. Member and other Members on that side really have difficulties in speaking the complete truth; I am convinced. Anyhow, I will deal with some of the half-truths later on in my contribution. For now, I also wish to thank the hon. Member for Siparia—well her colleague from Chaguanas West would know how much I like history—for giving me a piece of history when she responded, by informing this House that Dr. Daphne Phillips was the first woman to act as Prime Minister in Trinidad and Tobago. Again, women, this is history, I was not aware of it.

I was called over the phone, people spoke to me in my office, and many people took serious umbrage at the manner in which she made that information available to us. When one looks at the composition of the population of Trinidad and Tobago and the composition of our very Parliament, I think that it was distasteful to some extent, for the hon. Member to refer to Dr. Daphne Phillips as the first black woman. I would not belabour the point but it connotes something.

I really wonder if the hon. Member listened—I am not going to belabour the point, but I think it was distasteful—carefully to what she said and truly understood and believed what she said. The hon. Member quoted Alexander Pope, John Fitzgerald Kennedy and even used the scriptures to her convenience. With respect to John F. Kennedy, she said and I want to quote:

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

I would like her to let this thing go through her mind again. This is a very important quotation. We on this side of the House understand what President John F. Kennedy said and we agree with him.

If you follow the People's National Movement's policies over the years in Government, and especially, in this 2009 budget, we are doing everything possible to ensure that the great majority of people reap the benefits of the rising abundance.

3.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, those on the other side tear down every effort of government to create benefits for the majority in this country. They tear down the expansion of the education system to ensure that the poorer ones in the society have access to tertiary and higher level education. They tear it down. They tear down even the very thought of Government trying to create a young entrepreneurial class of people in this country. They tear it down to pieces. As my colleague from Tobago East went on to say, their whole objective behind discussion in this budget is that every single thing the Government is proposing should be thrown out of the window.

For instance people who earned \$750,000 and less—this is what the budget has—per annum pay effectively no tax whatsoever. People who earn as much as \$250,000 pay 9 per cent; \$500,000 they pay 17 per cent. The School Feeding Programme they want to tear it down as well. Medical treatment which is virtually free in this country, tear it down as well; housing which is subsidized to ensure that the people in this country, particularly the less fortunate, tear it down as well.

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[*Interruption*] Under this Government poverty has been cut in half within a very short space of time. [*Desk thumping*]

I would be the first to admit, yes, there are still things that we need to do. There are great challenges that we face. The crime rate is of concern. There is need for improving supply of water and so on, but we must not distort the facts. This Government has achieved over the years, and not solely because of rising oil and gas prices. We have achieved over the years, so much, and it has been because of the sound economic management, honesty, commitment, hard work and of course, with the help of the Almighty God, this country has achieved significantly. [*Desk thumping*]

By all means they have a right and it is their right under the Constitution to criticize and so on. But Members on the other side as my colleague from Tobago West had asked them, come up with suggestions, come up with areas that we need to look at, suggest areas where Government needs to place additional focus, but do come here and try to take this country back to the very dark old ages.

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is not about PNM and UNC, this is not about black and white and this is not about East Indian, African and “Douglas”—

Hon. Member: No, no, no.

Hon. J. Ross: Election is over and done with, and the campaigning must stop. Imagine, not a single Member on the other side—and this is instructive—could mention one good thing in the budget. Not one good thing. I say shame on them. [*Desk thumping*] It is time that we show some sort of patriotism. Shame! You want to tell me that there is nothing in that budget that is worth considering? I am yet to understand as well why Members on the other side cannot see anything good in Trinidad and Tobago. Why they cannot see anything good under the People's National Movement.

I listened to some of the earlier comments on this budget and what I see—and it is very clear—is a set of people on that side looking in every single corner of a very clean house, looking for dirt. When they cannot find dirt they try to create it. That is what I saw on the other side. It reminds me of the calypsonian who talked about, “Trinidad is my land and of it I am proud and glad”. Honestly, I cannot understand why these people are talking this country bad. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Peters: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. J. Ross: Yes, “Brother Gypsy”, it is not you. Madam Deputy Speaker, this brings me—[*Hon. Dr. A. Browne sings verse in calypso*] Yes, go ahead—“they does talk it bad every day and the right thing they would never say.” [*Desk thumping*]

This brings me to the picture that the Member for Siparia wants to portray of tourism. The Member quoted from the Travel and Tourism Competitive Index Report 2007—

Hon. Member: Misquoted.

Hon. J. Ross: She said she quoted, “eh”. Let me see; I think I have the paper in my pocket too.

Hon. Member: “Wha the paper in your pocket too?” [*Laughter*]

Hon. J. Ross: Yes, I took it out, I am very concerned, I want to read it very clearly:

“The world economic forum in 2007 established a Travel and Tourism Competitive Index. On a scale of one to 130 with one being the highest, Trinidad and Tobago was ranked 129th in the world.”

Second to last. Did you all hear that?

Hon. Member: Yes. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. J. Ross: This is a blatant misrepresentation of the truth.

Hon. Member: False lie, false lie. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. Ross: To quote my sister from Arouca/Maloney, not a false lie “nah, a big false lie”. [*Laughter*]

I can provide copies of the report to every single one here this afternoon. According to this report, Trinidad and Tobago was ranked—and this is 2007—85. I will go a step further—so to say that we were ranked 129 out of 130, it shows what they want to tell the people outside there, that this Government is the worst thing for the country—the report in 2008, which was one year later, showed that Trinidad and Tobago moved from 85 to 74 [*Desk thumping*] on the overall index, just beneath Coloumbia and Sri Lanka, but we were above places like Honduras, Oman, Ukraine, Indonesia, The Philippines and Saudi Arabia. Those were the ones that fell behind us.

Mr. Warner: Zimbabwe.

Hon. J. Ross: And Zimbabwe. Well, I cannot remember and I am not going to look at it now. Even in interpreting the data, the Member did not even attempt to put the data in any context whatsoever. No context whatsoever, Madam Deputy Speaker! The whole intention was clearly to mislead this country into believing that Trinidad and Tobago was the worst place to be. *[Interruption]* She did not read carefully, she did not put the information into context.

The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report was published by the World Economic Forum in collaboration with DELOIT, the International Air Transport Association, the World Conservation Union, the World Tourism Organization and the World Travel and Tourism Council. The year 2007 was the first year that that kind of report came out from them, and even that body indicated that they did not take every single thing into consideration, and there were improvements to be made on the report. The report was based on an analysis of data collected which dealt with many things: policy, rules, regulation, environment, sustainability, safety, security, health and hygiene, prioritization of travel and tourism, air transport infrastructure, ground transport infrastructure, tourism infrastructure, ICT infrastructure, price competitiveness in the country, human resources, affinity for travel and tourism, natural resources, cultural resources. These were some of the factors that they considered.

Not only did we rank 74th—*[Interruption]* yes, Barbados was 29th, Jamaica was 57th, Guyana was 109 and Venezuela was 103, but the Member for Siparia did not even present the information properly and correctly. Again, I assume the intention was to mislead the people in this country. The Member never said for instance, and I am now looking at 2008—look where it is in policies and rules—we ranked 46; in ground transport infrastructure we ranked No. 44. Number 44!

Mr. Imbert: Imagine that.

Hon. J. Ross: Thank you, Minister Imbert and the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure. We ranked No. 44. In ICT infrastructure we ranked No. 49; in price competitiveness we ranked No. 24.

Hon. Member: Oh my goodness. *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. J. Ross: Barbados was No. 48, Jamaica was 85 and Venezuela was 47.

Hon. Member: Oh my lord!

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: Where is the source? Where is the source? *[Crosstalk]*

Hon. J. Ross: This is what we got from that side and I can go into that entire contribution and tear it to pieces because it is fraught with inaccuracies. *[Interruption]*

It is intellectual dishonesty. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Deputy Speaker, honestly, when I reflected on this—because I always enjoy listening to the Member for Siparia. Honestly!

Mrs. Goopie-Scoon: Really!

Hon. J. Ross: Yes, but when I heard that comment, particularly, I said that probably her eyesight went bad. I said probably the Member needed to do a little checking of the eyesight because she did not read properly, she missed a line or two, or the numbers were going all. Then I said no, if her eyes are good, probably she needs to check her heart—

Hon. Member: “Ooh.”

Hon. J. Ross:—to see if her heart is in the right place.

Hon. Member: Oh, that is terrible.

Hon. J. Ross: I said no, I believe she has a good heart, but then I said look, she better check her conscience—

Hon. Member: That is right.

Hon. J. Ross:—and if her conscience does not clear her up on this issue, I think the Member owes this House, owes the population of Trinidad and Tobago an apology. [*Desk thumping*]

4.05 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the very person who wants to place Trinidad and Tobago at 129 out of 130, is the same person who comes later in her contribution and tells this House and I quote:

The majority of people are not concerned with Government using the country's money to build Hyatt; where they cannot even go, where they cannot even buy a bottle of water.

Listen to it. On the one hand, you are placing Trinidad at 129 out of 130 and, on the other hand, you are saying do not build Hyatt; do not do this; do not do that.

Madam Deputy Speaker, on the one hand, the Member is saying the Government is not doing anything to build the tourism sector. That is what was stated there and, on the other hand, those on the other side do not want the Government to even see about building hotels. What level of inconsistency? I know, and we on this side know that they can only fool whom they want to fool. The Member went on to describe such an excellent budget as an opera episode. Is that what you see in all of this, an opera episode? More to come, referring to the

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budget documents; more to come, more to come. If the information is late or if we do not submit the information, that very Member would go and accuse the Government of hiding information and make challenges under the Freedom of Information Act.

Mr. Sharma: What is wrong with that?

Mr. Ramnath: You are being exposed today.

Hon. J. Ross: What is wrong with that? What I am saying is that we are providing the information, but yet you are criticizing— in other words, you are just there for the sake of answer to her.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member for Siparia in her contribution, referred to the OJT programme as reaching the point of being a white collar DEWD. If that is the individual who is hoping to be leader of the other side, I humbly suggest that they are in a sad state. The Member has demonstrated total disregard for Government providing young people with relevant on-the-job training. She has shown total disregard for the poor and less privileged, who may not be able to afford an education in the United States of America, England or any one of those metropolitan countries, or even including the University of the West Indies and UTT. She has shown total disregard for URP—she called it DEWD, but I knew she meant URP—and CEPEP workers.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am saddened when I hear statements emanating from someone who is aspiring to be the leader of that party, and to be leader of this country. I am sure that the hon. Member for Chaguanas West would never endorse that kind of position. I see a nod, yes? You see he said, yes. [*Crosstalk*] I am sure and I keep saying he played a major role in my early life. He has always encouraged me to study, to work hard and to share my experiences with others, and to wish the best—no, honestly—and to try and help those who are coming up after me. So I am saying he will never endorse that. I recall as well, that even during the vacation when he was a teacher, the hon. Member worked so hard that he would not even go to the United States during the summer vacation—I will say August vacation, he used to say summer—he would stay and pack boxes. I am proud to see that he is a successful businessman today. [*Desk thumping*]

The OJT—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. J. Ross: No, no, no. I am coming to that, I cannot let nonsense pass— provides young people with knowledge and experience. It teaches young people to plan their finances, so that when they get paid, they know that they can put

aside a certain amount for the future and do not spend it all on their own. We on this side take pride in providing opportunities for our young people to develop and flourish.

Mr. Sharma: Thank you very much, Minister. Are the Government Members aware that there are OJTs working in Members of Parliament offices on both sides? Please, come on, do not waste time.

Hon. J. Ross: Madam Deputy Speaker, it is not everything in life you respond to. I hate to waste time on nonsense and this is one of the things that my former tutor taught me, move on with serious business. What this Government seeks to do in Vision 2020 and especially in this budget among other things, is to ensure that the great majority of the people, young ones in particular, benefit from the rising abundance, both now and beyond 2020. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to go back to the PricewaterhouseCoopers Report because much was said about it.

Hon. Member: What page?

Hon. J. Ross: Page 25, Summary of total projects. Madam Deputy Speaker, people listening to the comments from the other side will feel that this Government finishes nothing in Trinidad and Tobago. Let me give you the summary, projects completed, 12; projects in progress, 79, and so on. But you of all people, if you look at the projects that we are talking about here, we are not talking about simple projects. I do not want to go through the projects, but we are talking about massive development projects that cannot be completed in one year. [*Desk thumping*] All the plans—listen to me, it takes so much to get a project completed from—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Those are the problems that they created.

Hon. J. Ross: Yes, it takes so much to put a project on stream and to complete it. It is the same way you would have liked to see the overpass completed in six months and after that it collapse. I also heard my colleague from Diego Martin West talking about that. I consider him to be a very excellent orator and an analyst and he knows the constraints. He knows some of the constraints that the Government, or any government as a matter of fact, would face in carrying out development projects. I do not know what you all want us to do. Is it to do what Carlos John did, when he was Minister in the Ministry of Works and Transport and take all the money—I think it was something like \$200 million you had that year for roads, next thing it went up to \$800 million, [*Crosstalk*] just

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before election— and paved roads, paved roads? And I could tell you afterwards, contractors were coming to me, asking me to help them get their money. No contracts were issued to them. Is this what you all want?

I am asking you, is that what you all want? Do not expect a project to be finished in—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: Stop making excuses.

Hon. J. Ross: It is no excuse. Member for Fyzabad, since you are talking, I will mention something about you. You, in your comments, I think you said something about, “Do not penalize people because they support the UNC.” This government does not do that. You heard for yourself from the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, how equal the funds were distributed. You heard from others, but I would not be sidetracked.

Hon. Member: He got \$11 million to build a centre.

Hon. Member: The most expensive community centre in the country.

Hon. J. Ross: Madam Deputy Speaker, for want of time, let me focus a bit now on my area of tourism. Tourism is one of the largest economic activities. The fascination for seeking new land and new experiences appears to be irresistible; travel is fun; travel is adventurous, educational and inspirational. More and more people are travelling despite the challenges of long lines, increased airport and seaport security, and issues of insecurity and terrorist threats around the world. More and more people are still travelling. Everyday, over US \$2 billion worldwide is generated by international tourism alone, with almost 900 million international tourist arrivals recorded in 2007—this is worldwide—and is predicted to reach something like 1.6 billion by the year 2020.

Between 1995 and 2007, visitor arrivals to Trinidad and Tobago almost doubled, moving from 260,000 to 458,000 according to information obtained from the Central Statistical Office. What we are saying, the Government has been encouraging the growth of tourism over the years for it to have doubled. I want to give you some statistics as well, looking at it by country:

- From the United States of America:
 - in 1996, we had 90,000 visitors; in 2006, we had 170,000, an increase of 80,000 people.
- From Canada:
 - in 1996, we had 36,000 people; in 2006, we had 49,000

- From the United Kingdom:
in 1996, we had 28,000; in 2006, we had 59,000.
- From Central and South America:
in 1996, we had 17,000; in 2006, we had 27,000.
- From the Caribbean:
in 1996, we had 54,000; in 2006, the figure moved to 99,000, an increase of 45,000.

Mr. Sharma: How many stayed back?

Hon. J. Ross: I think you did. The United States accounted for something like 37 per cent of the visitors; other Caribbean islands, 22 per cent; the United Kingdom, 13 per cent; Canada, 11 per cent; Central and South America, somewhere in the vicinity of 10 per cent.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the World Travel and Tourism Council statistics indicated that in the Caribbean, tourism accounts for nearly 15 per cent of the gross domestic product; almost 13 per cent of employment with approximately two million jobs; and 18 per cent of export earnings, or simply put, one in every \$5 earned in the world, is from tourism.

4.20 p.m.

In Trinidad and Tobago, according to the WTO Council Report, the tourism sector accounts for somewhere in the vicinity, of both jobs indirectly and directly, of over \$100,000; that is roughly 20.9 per cent of our total employment. Directly it accounts for some 345,000 jobs or 5 per cent, and it is expected to generate revenues in excess of \$5 billion or 4.4 per cent of GDP from direct activities.

The locals' perspectives with respect to tourism: Tourism continues to play an increasingly important role in this country's national, economic and social development and ranks very high on the national agenda. It ranks very high, unlike what you are saying, on the national agenda.

Mr. Sharma: What do the international advisories say?

Hon. J. Ross: Government has consciously worked to give it an institutional status by bringing the tourism sector into the ambit of Government's thrust areas for development. The Government has now placed tourism as one of the areas for development. It is quite fair to say that enough emphasis may not have been placed on it in the past, but I am telling you that the Government has now placed it high on its agenda.

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Government intends to design all tourism development programmes with a view to being community centric and people centric. Conscious programmes have been chalked out to popularize it among our people, with maximum encouragement to youths to take up this sector as a new profession of the century.

Today, approximately 500,000 foreign tourists contribute to close to TT \$3 billion annually to our local economy. A vibrant tourism industry is one that is well balanced, profitable and sustainable; this is where we want it to reach. A strong and efficient tourism industry will greatly benefit everyone involved and allow all stakeholders to enjoy their fair share of the resulting business, or to quote J. F. Kenny, "the rising abundance".

Visitor arrival grew significantly over the years, and as I told you it has doubled in the last—[*Interruption*]

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. J. Ross: Thank you, Member for Fyzabad. [*Laughter*]

High arrivals have meant high hotel occupancy rates. In 2004, hotels recorded the highest ever occupancy levels in Trinidad and Tobago. Trinidad averaged somewhere in the vicinity of 80 per cent plus; Tobago, 85 per cent. Carnival arrivals over the period 2004—2008 averaged anywhere around 40,000.

Unlike what the Member for Siparia was trying to portray or the impression she was trying to give to the community, Trinidad and Tobago also received its fair share of international awards and accolades. Whether you believe it or not, our United Kingdom (UK) office was voted the top tourism office at the last World Tourism Conference.[*Desk thumping*] Tobago was selected as a leading ecodestination, and the Tobago Main Ridge Forest, over the last three years, has won the award as the leading ecodestination in the world.[*Desk thumping*]

This performance represents an important measurement of our success. It reflects the effective governance or performance of the Government in building the tourism sector to take its rightful place in the economic landscape of our country. [*Interruption*] Rome was not built in a day; we are getting there. [*Crosstalk*]

My stewardship will be grounded by the National Tourism Vision 2020 statement which reads, and I quote:

“By the year 2020, the Trinidad and Tobago tourism will be...contributing significantly to the gross domestic product through job creation and increased revenues, driven by a uniquely differentiated internationally competitive product, complemented by comprehensive, fully functional physical infrastructure, modern competitive institutional framework and supported by the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The sector will be anchored by properly marketed flagship products with brand names that are globally well-known.”

The National Vision for Tourism identified eight goals. I feel it is important to read them out for you:

1. To ensure that the tourism sector is a development priority driven by a strong and effective public/private sector partnership;
2. To develop Trinidad and Tobago's tourism industry to realize its full economic potential;
3. To institute investment incentives supported by efficient, enabling procedures to ensure Trinidad and Tobago becomes an exciting risk reduced investment opportunity;
4. To ensure that Trinidad and Tobago has the supporting infrastructure necessary for sustainable growth;
5. To position Port of Spain as the meetings and conventions capital of the Southern Caribbean;
6. To upgrade Trinidad and Tobago's existing room stock to acceptable international standards and establish a critical mass of new rooms and provide full range of accommodation options;
7. To build a service culture and position Trinidad and Tobago as the country that provides the warmest welcome and highest level of international quality service in the Caribbean; and
8. To ensure that Trinidad and Tobago is marketed as a recognized tourism destination in every principal market.

With our unique location, together with our rich and diverse culture and geography, tourism will definitely be one of the catalysts for diversification. Also, the revisiting of the Tourism Development Act makes our incentives much more exciting, and they would surely give Trinidad and Tobago a competitive edge.

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At this point I advise the House that we are in the process of reviewing our incentives for the tourism sector. We anticipate that should be done within the shortest possible time.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I will now look at what the Ministry of Tourism and its agencies have accomplished in its fiscal year 2007 and 2008. First, partnership—the tourism industry of Trinidad and Tobago is not only about hotel rooms, investors and business meetings; tourism is about everyone. I want to go again to the PricewaterhouseCoopers book.*[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting of this House is suspended for the tea break. We shall resume at 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Hon. J. Ross: Madam Deputy Speaker, I stopped off at looking at fostering partnerships. Before I resume I want to just go again to another notable document, "Focus on Trinidad and Tobago, Budget 2009" by Ernst & Young. Just for the record, Ernst & Young is on record on page 27 showing that Trinidad and Tobago placed 74th out of 130 countries analyzed. Then on page 28—people must know the facts—the document says:

"On a more positive note, Trinidad and Tobago undoubtedly has a favourable fiscal regime in place for tourism development." *[Desk thumping]*

So for those who want to let us believe otherwise, this is an objective organization. They have made suggestions for us. I am telling you, as Minister of Tourism, we will take their substitutions; they have indicated their positives and the negatives. I was expecting those on the other side to show some of the positives as well, but they said nothing.

To quote Ernst & Young:

"On the bright side, the performance by Caribbean Airlines from reports shows a definite improvement over the former BWIA."

So for those who want to criticize the Government for the action taken to scrap BWIA and establish Caribbean Airlines, this is an objective opinion. It goes on and on to show some of the strengths as well as areas that we need to look at.

I go back to partnerships. I was saying that the tourism industry of Trinidad and Tobago is not just about hotels and hotel rooms, investors and business meetings. I indicated to this House that tourism involved everyone. I was about to quote from the 2009 Budget Memorandum; this was put out by PricewaterhouseCoopers,

PWC. On page 23 it says that we have to do more than just rely on the greatest show on earth, Carnival; we have to construct hotels and hold conventions to entice foreigners to our shores to spend and invest. They said that we needed to do some more, which was a reasonable comment.

They also said that consultations and decisions must take place. This is exactly what we are doing at this point in time, as we seek to establish partnerships. At the Ministry of Tourism, we are intent on mapping out a course of action which has the people of Trinidad and Tobago at the centre of our thinking and at the centre of our decision making. This would be shown later on. This Government is a firm believer in developing partnerships with stakeholders and communities, in order to forge a sustainable industry. We are committed to the practice of inclusiveness.

Immediately upon assuming office in November 2007, I held consultations with all the stakeholders, with a view to charting a way forward for the sustainable development of our local tourism industry.

This stakeholders' forum apprised me of the opportunities and challenges facing the local tourism industry, as well as the operations of the various entities operating in the sector, and we continue to hold these dialogue.

5.05 p.m.

Let me bring you up-to-date in terms of the kinds of partnerships with the private sector that we are building in tourism, and I would like to bring you up-to-date on the Turtle Village Trust Project.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there is a growing demand by tourists for new experiences. Today tourists want to experience new culture, they want to explore exotic locations and they want to have an exciting, safe and adventurous vacation filled with wonderful memories.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the North-East Coast of Trinidad is the ideal location for this kind of experience and the Ministry of Tourism has partnered with BHP billiton in making the Turtle Village along that North-East coast the premier turtle destination globally.

During the last fiscal year, the Ministry of Tourism again revised its draft tourism policy which we are going to put out for public consultation very soon. This also was recognized I think in the 2009 budget memorandum by Ernst & Young.

We continue to work on developing signature events that would become part and parcel of our national calendar of events. We have Taste Trinidad and

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Tobago, Pan Yard Sensation and this year's Pan Yard Sensation was done in tribute of the culture icon Terry Joseph whom most of you know passed away. It was done in conjunction with PanTrinbago. Pan Yard Sensation showcases the best of the steel pan in a concert format along other elements of Trinidad and Tobago culture.

In terms of air lift, this is one of the challenges facing the tourism sector locally and regionally, but it is not a matter that we are not working on to correct.

Air lift is a very serious issue facing the tourism industry in Trinidad and Tobago and I should advise this House that hon. Patrick Manning, the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, was instrumental in establishing a steering committee which had turned around tourism in Tobago, and it has continued operating and has made significant inroads in securing additional air lift to Tobago. I cannot go into too many details.

The TDC in the earlier part of this year launched a new website, gotrinidadandtobago.com. We have used the available technology to understand our markets, and this cutting-edge destination site is highly functional and takes into consideration the fact that persons are using the Internet more and more to research tourism destinations and book their dream vacation.

In terms of safety and security personal, safety and security in a destination is an important purchase criterion for travellers. Fear of crime can be a possible deterrent for potential visitors, we are all aware of that. Crime is therefore an issue which we in the industry have to deal with and I am confident that we are dealing with it. The record will show in terms of crime against tourists that we have very good records. To my knowledge, for this year I cannot recall any serious crime inflicted against a tourist. As a Government, we are working tirelessly in addressing and intensifying our war against crime.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as we celebrated world tourism recently, the theme had to deal with responding to climate change. The effects of more intense hurricane season over the last three years, sea level changes, the reef and beach erosion are all physically threatening the viability of the Caribbean tourism industry. Bearing in mind that people are always at the centre of all tourism projects and in our development emphasis, this is what we have in mind; first the people of Trinidad and Tobago and then visitors to our shores.

Let me just give you an update on the Maracas redesigned project. Early in 2006, in an effort to develop the Maracas Beach Facility to meet international standards and improve its operations, the Ministry of Tourism and its implementing agency, the Tourism Development Company, engaged the services of Lee Young

& Partners in association with the Institute of Marine Affairs, Atkins of the United Kingdom and Vicca Enterprises Limited of Trinidad and Tobago to prepare a master plan for the design of this new facility.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the existing situation at Maracas Beach Facility has been critical in driving the development planning. The issues that we have to face at the facility are traffic congestion; pedestrian hazards due to pedestrian/vehicular conflicts; inadequate and malfunctioning facilities; low-lying land resulting in flooding; deterioration of car park services, and what I am saying is that Maracas was not in a very good state hence the need for Government to take action.

Some of the objectives for the design of the new facility could be increasing the area of beach space for users; diversion of the North Coast Road south of the existing car park; improving the drainage to deal with the flooding issue; installing of a new higher capacity wastewater treatment and so forth. At the end of the day, this upgraded facility will provide us with a high quality beach in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the ministry has plans not to limit the upgrade of our beaches to Maracas only, but to tackle all the other beaches. Let me just mention as well before I close some of the activities of the lifeguards. Lifeguards as you are aware play a very major role on our nation's beaches and in so doing make a vital contribution to the tourism sector. The statistics are very good for the number of lives that were saved and the number of rescue operations undertaken by the lifeguards over the period of last year.

The lifeguards have gone through extensive training and we have taken steps to improve the facilities for them at the various beaches. During the year 2008/2009 we will continue to improve the quality of our lifeguards.

A major project undertaken by the Ministry of Tourism is the development of the Emperor Valley Zoo. When it is completed we would have a zoo that meets international standards and one with much more facilities where the animals would be treated in the best way possible.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I move from the zoo and I look at our domestic awareness programme. We have been involved in Trinidad and Tobago Road Trip; we have also had our domestic culinary festival which proved to be a big success.

I will wind up by suggesting to this House what 2008/2009 brings to us. The Ministry will be focusing on the following initiatives:

- Finalize the National Tourism Policy for Trinidad and Tobago;

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- more aggressive promotion of ecotourism and adventure tourism;
- exploiting our huge potential for cultural tourism;
- continue the development process for signature events;
- ensuring the readiness of our human resources to meet the demanding requirements of the tourism industry;
- we intend to develop marketing and promotional plans to leverage opportunities arising from our sporting infrastructure and wealth of sporting talent therein developing our sport tourism niche;
- we intend to develop a strategic alliance programme;
- we intend to develop an advertising campaign tracking and monitoring system to rejuvenate our destination branding strategies to accelerate our domestic awareness programme so as to open the eyes of the our citizen to the value of tourism.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we recognize that there is work ahead in building the tourism product to an acceptable standard but huge potential is there, it just needs to be harnessed. We also know the value for money will be a key issue in determining our destination attractiveness. Government has outlined what it will bring to the table in terms of finances. This Government has delivered and will continue to deliver.

Before I close I want to take the opportunity—because I missed it earlier on—to wish my Muslim colleagues in this Parliament and in the country Eid Mubarak. When I look at what has transpired in the period 1995—2001, I am saying because of the rampant corruption, arrogance and discriminatory practice that were unleashed on this country during that period, I recall that the people prayed very hard and I recall the words of Ezekiel in Chapter 34 verse 10 because I was also a victim of that kind of pressure. I quote:

“I take my sheep away from you and never again will I let you be their shepherd, never again will I let you take care of yourselves, I rescued my sheep from you and I will not let you eat them again.”

I thank you.

5.20 p.m.

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a pleasure to enter this debate to speak to the

matter before us, the Appropriation Bill 2009, and to raise matters pertaining to the Bill, to the performance of the Government, a review of the Government's achievements and to discuss some policy issues pertinent to the level of governance that we witnessed today.

It is also a pleasure for me to join the demolition squad on the Opposition that will now have the final speaker; and it is not the very first time. On previous occasions I did conclude the debate for the Opposition on appropriation bills. I want to indicate that I am the final speaker on the Opposition and, for all intents and purposes, when I am finished, the debate is finished. [*Desk thumping*]

A debate means a contest of ideas. A debate can only take place between two or more parties. One party cannot have a debate; that is a monologue. If you look at McCain and Obama and so on, one person will say something; another one will come up. I listened attentively to these people on the other side; I am within one minute of my contribution and there are rumblings and mumbling and so on. I mean, please, you all, I am talking about a very serious matter. You all could go in the corridor if you do not want to hear me; drink coffee, tea, cocoa or something.

A debate is a contest of ideas between two or more parties, that you come together in the Parliament and you go at it, toe to toe. The Government will speak; the Opposition will reply; the Opposition will speak; Government Members will reply. On one occasion we actually had a third entity in this House, so we had another debate with three political entities and we had a very lively, stimulating debate. But today, and not surprisingly, given that the leader of this House on the Government side is the Member for Diego Martin North/East; they have so arranged their business that the Opposition will finish speaking today, sometime in the next hour, by 6.30 or so, and then each Government Minister or spokesman will address the nation for half-an-hour. They will not be debating because there is no debate taking place. So they will engage in the vagina monologue—I think that is a theatre production—among themselves while the debate has ended. The debate ends now and it is my privilege to proceed.

I was then struck by the Member for Barataria/San Juan who contributed before me. He made, I think, a profound statement. I do not know if persons heard. But he said in this budget statement, it appeared that the Opposition saw nothing good. And I thought about it. But he is right and it is only then it struck

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me. I looked again in the budget to see something that I can stand here and support and say: "Look, I support this." And I discovered that in the 60 minutes or so, of speaking, the Member for Barataria/San Juan uttered a correct, accurate statement. There is nothing that we can look at in that budget and support.

While the Member for Barataria/San Juan spoke and complimented the Minister about the good work; pretty budget; the budget dealt with all the issues, the Member for Barataria/San Juan knows that this budget did not address the issue of crime; that the Minister of National Security came here and repeated the same policy pronouncements he has been making since January 30 when the crime debate began and ended. The Member for Barataria/San Juan knows that the Government will not deal with crime. That is why he constructed a 10-foot wall by his house in San Juan. The "man put up a wall, 10 feet!" If his constituents go there now they are in front the Berlin Wall.

Mr. Maharaj SC: And he has a contractor to go up five more feet.

Dr. R. Moonilal: I will not get into who is building and constructing, and so on. I am not into that; that is the man's private business. I am sure he will pay his contractors and workers. But the thing is, a Minister of Government, nine months into a Government term, construct a 10-foot wall by his house and then come to the Parliament and say: "We trust you; you can deal with crime." That is the hypocrisy! I really did not find anything else, regrettably, to rebut in the Member for Barataria/San Juan, so we will leave him there for the moment.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you ask yourself on September 22, 2008, the Minister of Finance rose in this House and presented a budget for three hours, 10 minutes and 30 seconds. On September 22, 388 persons were murdered by that day; killed; for 2008. Today, as I address you on this day, September 30, 403 people have been killed. The murder rate today is 403. It means that since the Minister spoke, 15 persons who had the opportunity to listen to the Minister are dead. Now, they did not die because of the speech—

Dr. Gopeesingh: How you know that? "Yuh sure?"

Dr. R. Moonilal: I think that is pushing it a bit. Fifteen people who were alive when the Minister spoke are dead when the Minister winds up. That really is the problem facing this country! That is the issue! What has this budget done to bring hope to the population of Trinidad and Tobago that their loved ones would not be murdered? Hayden Ross was alive when the budget was delivered, but he was dead by the time the winding up came. Roshni Ramdial was alive when the budget was delivered, stone dead by the time the budget reply came; murdered.

What has this budget done to tell a family out there that, look, this is your plight; help is on the way; hope is on the way; the budget has delivered hope? Absolutely nothing! That is really the issue we are raising. We are not raising issues like the drug programme and so on; we will get to that, but there are central issues facing this country and crime is one. Food prices, what have we done? When the Minister came to this Chamber to deliver that budget, the Government themselves—not the Opposition—hyped up the debate: “The first time ever a female Minister of Finance.” They hyped it up! The biggest issue was the gender of the presenter. Three hours, 10 minutes later, the next day headline: “Same ole, Same ole”.

I remember the Member for Diego Martin North/East—and I do not want to say much about him because I thought he was a punching bag for this entire debate; I am not sure I want to contribute to that—maybe I will, later. The Member for Diego Martin North/East said the Minister of Finance will not only break the glass ceiling, she will shatter the glass ceiling. At the end of the day, she polished the glass ceiling. Because as the Member for Siparia, in her eloquent, charismatic reply to the budget, indicated that the budget was very weak in dealing with gender issues.

Hazel Brown, a prominent activist in the community, gave her an F for the budget, and for the record, F means fail. I do not want to read everything, but Wednesday, September 24, Disabled People’s Association: “\$200 increase, a slap in the face”; Wednesday, September 24: “Motorist pay \$9,500 for conversion kits changing engines to CNG”—compressed natural gas; not compressed national gas. I think she said that. “Changing engines to CNG too costly,” taxi drivers. Wednesday, September 24, *Newsday*: “Karen’s budget knocked”. Next: “Fire Association head laughs at budget”.

“Head of the association, Michael Spencer, laughed at the \$20.2 million allocated to the Fire Services.”

He gave his reasons why he was laughing at the budget. Tuesday, September 23: “Car gas prices go up”. TTUTA, the Teachers’ Union: “Budget a rehash”. September 23: “New voice but same high spending story”, *Express* editorial. Next: “Nothing for farmers”. Next: TTMA: “Budget misses on crime”. Next, Wednesday, September 24, *Express*: “Taxi drivers talk price hike”.

I could go on and on. Faced with a widespread condemnation of the budget from sources that they believe and sources that, over the years have given support to this Government, they rounded up the Minister of Information who started to

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speed dial the media houses and sent a Minister a minute—every morning, every evening, every night you go, a Minister “pop” up, sent by the Minister of Information on speed dial, with the editors and news producers, because they realized what had happened, that the traditional sectors that were sympathetic to their administration over the years, had condemned this budget and the only people who could talk is the Minister. [*Desk thumping*] The only person who could really defend the indefensible is a Cabinet Minister and so they were corralled into the stations and so on, and sought with public relations to fool the population.

Mr. Warner: Spin!

Dr. R. Moonilal: Spin! But you see, this population is not as stupid, I believe as Members on the other side may think. They read through this budget quickly and realized that nothing will change.

The Member for Siparia, in her contribution, raised some startling revelations. I want to deal with one of them now. I have several matters to rebut before I get to some issues of employment, productivity, industrial relations, and so on. The Member for Siparia raised the issue of a Government Minister and, indeed, named the Minister of Finance as a holder of public office who did not file and her name did not appear on the register of interest at the Integrity Commission; did not declare to the Integrity Commission on her personal, financial, assets, liabilities and so on, for 2003 to 2006 when, I believe, that Minister served on State boards—at Tidco.

The Member for Siparia raised the issue and we now are putting a fact pattern together; we have placed a fact pattern together. This is a dangerous, dangerous situation that I am going to speak about in the next five minutes. There are serious implications if what we are suggesting is remotely possible.

At the end of August 2008, officers at the office of the Leader of the Opposition paid a call on the Integrity Commission to inspect the Register of Interests. The law permits that. According to the Integrity in Public Life Act, Chap. 22:01, section 14: “Register of Interests” says:

“A person in public life shall file his declaration under section 11, an additional statement of registrable interests in the prescribed form, which shall contain the information required by subsection (3).”

And that subsection deals with interest filed under subsection (1) containing information relating to the person:

“(a) particulars of any directorships...

- (b) particulars of any contract made with the State;
- (c) the name or description of any company, partnership or association...”

And the list goes on and on.

Let us follow it. At the end of August officers of the Opposition Leader’s office paid a call on the Integrity Commission, inspected the Register of Interests and the name of the Minister of Finance was not found on the Register of Interests.

5.35 p.m.

Officers of the Office of the Leader of the Opposition again, on September 23, visited the Integrity Commission. The name of the Minister of Finance was not on the register, nor in the supplementary register. The Opposition's response was on Friday, September 26 and the Member for Siparia raised that issue after twice checking at the Integrity Commission where officers, including an attorney at law at the Office of the Leader of the Opposition, visited the Integrity Commission.

Lo and behold, today one attorney at law and another officer from the Office of the Leader of the Opposition visited the Integrity Commission where they now have a new register, a new index has been done—it has been redone. They claim that there was an IT issue and that they are now using technology to update records. They now have the register with the name of the Minister of Finance, but no supplementary register. The Minister's name appears today in the register dated September 30, 2008. The register is dated today.

What is even more frightening is that when the officer paid a call on the Integrity Commission today, they were met by one Wellington Virgil, Senior Superintendent and the officer who arrested the Member for Couva North, the former Prime Minister, the hon. Basdeo Panday, in a matter involving the Integrity Commission. He was a policeman when he charged Mr. Panday. Today he is an investigator with the Integrity Commission. He got a big “wuk”. He is investigating with the Integrity Commission in a matter where the court of this land quashed a conviction and said that the trial was unfair.

Let us put a few more facts here. When confronted by an attorney at law, an officer of the Office of the Leader of the Opposition, Wellington Virgil, policeman now Integrity Commission investigator, enquired of the officers where they were from and who sent them. That is not a receptionist, a clerical officer or the tea lady who just happened to be at the desk. A senior superintendent approaches officers to ask who sent them but the law is clear. Section 14 deals with this matter.

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“The Registrar of the Commission shall compile and cause to be entered in a Register of Interests, all information furnished pursuant to subsection (1) and shall at the request of any member of the public, permit the inspection of such a Register.”

A Member of the public has every right to present himself or herself to the Commission and say, I am here; I would like to inspect the register. Now, a senior superintendent approaches citizens and questions them. That is a serious issue. It speaks about the collusion of an important institution in our democratic framework there to promote accountability and integrity by public officers that may perhaps be in collusion with members of the Executive. [*Desk thumping*]

If this had been a single occasion, we may have allowed it to pass, but when you add another issue where the Member for Diego Martin West spent three years trying to stay out of jail—he was at the courthouse every Monday morning trying to stay out of jail because the Integrity Commission allegedly conducted an investigation without his knowledge and without giving him the benefit of being heard, a fundamental principle of natural justice. They were trying to lock him up before the election; that same Integrity Commission. Gordon Deane in an interview said he had fun.

I raise this very critical matter because when a society starts to collapse, you begin to see manifestations of the fusion of the Executive with every independent arm of the State. [*Desk thumping*]

Last evening, when the Member for Oropouche West, in her own eloquent and brilliant contribution in this Chamber, spoke about Nazi Germany, Members on the other side were sliding on their seats. They were just uncontrollable at times, but we were making the issue that there was danger when institutions that should be independent are in collusion with the State and the government.

I will make one example of this and then I am moving on. It was during the debate on the Motion of no confidence in the Prime Minister on September 12, 2008 that the Government got up and, at tea time, adjourned the House for one hour to go to Woodford Square and break the law. In Zimbabwe, the commissioner of police walks with an umbrella near His Excellency Robert Mugabe. People ask why. He is photographed next to him with an umbrella so that if it rains while Mr. Mugabe is breaking the law, he can shelter him.

The Acting Commissioner of Police here went to Woodford Square in the company of the Prime Minister and the mayor and presided over the breaking of the law. [*Desk thumping*] As bad as it is, Madam Deputy Speaker, can you

imagine Tony Blair in London somewhere on the streets by Harod's breaking the law and the British police just looks at him and says that is the Prime Minister? Can you imagine George W. Bush, President of the United States, walking in Washington somewhere, breaking the law and the police saying that this is the President; he can do it?

It does not happen in a developed country. This is a banana republic where the Prime Minister can break the law because he is the boss and if you do anything you may lose your work. Look at the Integrity Commission and the issue of collusion. Look at Woodford Square. They cook the books at the Integrity Commission. At Woodford Square, the police assisted the Prime Minister to break the law by addressing an illegal assembly. The mayor, who said that the organizers he did not know; they were invisible, went out with the visible audience. That only happens in banana republics. That does not happen in developed countries.

The Minister of Finance, with whom we entrust our finances and budgets, appears to be in collusion with the Integrity Commission to cook the books and to ensure she is not exposed. That is a very serious matter that I want to address first and foremost.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order: Standing Order 36(1).The Member has alleged that the hon. Minister of Finance is in collusion with the Integrity Commission to cook the books and to forge the record and that should be withdrawn.*[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, I know you are giving details of what I imagine is your personal attendance or information that you received, but I think that the allegation of collusion is one that we must be careful about. You are sitting next to two very senior attorneys and it is not easy to make an allegation of collusion or conspiracy. I think you should be very careful there.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Deputy Speaker, I withdraw that. I suggest, and leave it at that, that the books appear to have been cooked in favour of the Minister of Finance.*[Desk thumping]* I say no more.

I move on with some of the matters arising from the budget. I have had the benefit of listening attentively to speakers opposite and there are certain patterns and themes that emerge. Members of the Government, to me, display a lack of understanding of a simple matter of the difference between output and outcome; allocation and management. It is not only in this budget debate, but generally. The Government recites its allocation as an achievement.

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While it is important that we know allocations and that they do increase, it is not the same as achievement. In the same way, output is not outcome. You may produce 7,000 graduates from YTEPP; that is output. When they go into the productive sector and work in manufacturing services and technology, that is outcome. In their budgeting, they boast about allocation and they do not understand that you give so much money. You could not give if you did not have. I think it important to make that point.

The next point I want to make after Members opposite is that a budget is not about an Opposition; it is about a government. Their strategy, whether in the budget debate or the motion of no confidence is: you are attacking us, what did you do in 1995 or 2000? They deflect attention away from their performance by focusing on the Opposition and they make personal attacks. It is regrettable, but some people are incurable. You learn to live with that.

The budget is not about the Opposition; it is not about the Member for Tabaquite or Siparia or Chaguanas West. It is about the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and how they benefit. [*Desk thumping*] The more you talk about the UNC and Members on this side, their personal life and who did or did not come to the budget on Friday, you are trying to deflect attention from the Government that is responsible for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

We got that. They were speaking about Mr. Basdeo Panday, Member for Couva North. You will swear he was in the House delivering a speech. They have a fixation with the Member for Couva North. They conspired and colluded so that he would not enter the House and be reinstated and then have the gall to stand and talk about him and to quote him.

The next issue about their responses so far is that they have the tendency to accuse Members of the Opposition. It is so incredible that when you attack the Government and debate policy and speak on behalf of the oppressed, underprivileged and victims of crime, you do not love the country and are not patriotic.

That came from a former Minister of Government. He was summarily dismissed before the last election. When we told him they were wasting \$34 million pursuing the headquarters of the FTAA, he said we were bad mouthing the country; we did not want Port of Spain to grow and that we hated Trinidad and Tobago. We were not patriotic. That is what he said.

5.50 p.m.

Thirty-four million dollars later the FTAA collapsed, “collapse”. There was nothing and \$34 million of taxpayers’ money, went, gone disappear. Members opposite

must understand the Opposition has a sacred responsibility to speak out against what we believe to be wrongdoing and bad policy.

If you scan this country today and see what has happened to this beautiful land of Trinidad and Tobago, I do not want to tell you, we all know the details.

On the radio recently, I do not know if Members heard, Carib Brewery has advertisements telling you that they do not keep money on trucks anymore. Imagine this is a county where, if you do not keep money, you have to advertise it because bandits are all over robbing the delivery personnel. Carib has put out an ad. stating: Please, we are not handling cash anymore. They have to put out an advertisement. That is the nature of this country.

The Member for Laventille West, who is not here now, had an incredible statement over the year. He said far from dealing with crime in some of his areas, he believes that Laventille and other areas could be a tourist attraction. A tourist attraction for whom, Billy the Kid, Rambo, Terminator or Kid Colt? While you should be putting strategies in place to save our young people, to reduce crime and mentoring programmes, they are focusing on incredible policy measures. That is what they have been up to in a country where, as the Member for Siparia indicated, life expectancy is down and going further down. This is a country where murders are escalating.

Recently, a gas station was opened in Sea Lots, when we saw the security there; one would have thought it was a nuclear plant. I have heard about state of the art gas stations, but that is state of the arms. They then come to the Parliament as if nothing is wrong. Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill said that we never had it so good. Hayden Ross' family, I do not know if they ever had it any good. They lost their father, a husband and the provider of the home. We never had it so good. This is the contempt they share, while they purse projects and squander.

Quite recently, I was walking through Port of Spain and went into a sports shop to buy something and a gentleman at the cashier came up to me and said: "The budget debate starting?" I said: "Yes." He said: "Ask dem where, how and why dey waste all that money." That is how the average man on the street is thinking; they are wasting money everywhere, squandering and corrupting.

The Member for Caroni East outlined for us another frightening tale of the escalation of insurance contracts, a "fella" by the name of Ramnarine Narace—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. S. Panday: Jerry, Jerry.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Who is that?

Mr. S. Panday: Ramnarine Jerry.

Dr. R. Moonilal: I always had difficulty with that, because I found it hard to believe about 10 years ago that one man, “ah fella name Ojaram”, would have a brother named Jerry. I always find that a bit suspicious. Then I discovered that it is really “His Excellency Ramnarine Narace”. Now we are hearing that the PTSC buses that they were proud of and are boasting about, which they brought to Woodford Square to break the law, may have been insured by the very Trinre. This is madness. The Minister of Health should have been in this Parliament this morning to answer those stinging allegations made by the Member for Caroni East. In a decent democracy, he should have presented himself at 6 o’clock in the morning, waiting to clear his name. The Minister of Health is nowhere to be found. The headline today states \$100 million in contracts—a Government Minister. This is a man who has an elevator in his house. He has a two-storey house with an elevator.

Hon. Member: “How yuh know dat?”

Dr. R. Moonilal: I will give way in a minute. Let me finish. I have a point to make about that.

The health sector has collapsed. The Member for Caroni East outlined that. We know that, but it will not bring confidence to the sector when the Minister of Health can be identified in this way as participating, one way or another, in wrongdoings and involved in a conflict of interest as the Member for Caroni East has suggested and has written the Integrity Commission on this matter. *[Interruption]* I do not know why I do that.

Mr. Imbert: Because, underneath all of that, you have some decency in you. I thank the Member for giving way. I want to indicate that the Minister of Health is currently in Washington attending the International Health Conference, but is on his way back to deal with the allegations made by the Member for Caroni East, which are easily dealt with.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you. Nothing could be as important in Washington as this matter of mass corruption in Trinidad and Tobago.

In a few other points of rebuttal, the Member for Siparia, in her contribution, raised the issue of the record of Trinidad and Tobago, where on all the important indicators: business, competitiveness, life expectancy, infant mortality, et cetera, Trinidad and Tobago was going down and down.

I think the Member for St. Augustine, in his eloquent, brilliant presentation earlier this afternoon, also raised that. He reminded us of the great parliamentary debaters of yesteryear. I believe this distinguished father was in that group in the 1960s.

The issue before us here—the Member for Siparia gave those indicators in response to the Member for Diego Martin North/East. He stood to rebut the Member for Siparia and he came with another outlandish argument. First, he stood up with eight pieces of paper that looked like the paper “dey wrap bara with; doubles paper”. That was his speech. Notwithstanding that, he said: “People from Barbados are coming here—look how good it is in Trinidad—and we are talking about the country collapsing. People do not want to live here. It is so bad.” The people from Barbados may come here to shop in Bhagwansingh’s Hardware and the malls. Do they come to Trinidad for the education system? No, they stay in Barbados. Do they come for the health care system? No, they stay in Barbados. Would they come here for our security? No, the security in Barbados is better. One hallmark of these countries that are open is that you would sometimes get some cheap goods around.

There was a time when a lot of Trinidadians would go to Caracas and Margarita to shop. They would come back with their suitcases, open them in the square and start selling. Would you say Venezuela is more developed? They are coming here because they can get some bargains in a few shops, malls and hardware. They do not come here because we have a better social security system, health care or proper education. Nobody comes here for that. This is the state of our country.

A few days ago, somebody jumped off the fourth floor of the hospital. The person jumped twice. This is a country where you could have a dress rehearsal for a suicide. The security at the hospital appeared to have been absent. Someone would attempt to kill himself and would be allowed to get up, dust his pants and go back to the fourth floor and jump again. That is Trinidad and Tobago.

They responded to the Member for Siparia by saying: “This is development.” People are coming to shop here. It is like going to Margarita or Caracas to shop. Does that mean that the country is developed? I would leave that there as well.

The issue of crime—I want to talk a few minutes about crime and link it to our employment issue. This Government has been boasting, for some time now, that they have unemployment down, unemployment is the best ever and it is coming down. The Prime Minister said, on several occasions when he was also Minister of Finance: “Look here, make a choice, you either want growth or inflation.” He

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said once you have growth, you must have inflation and sometimes you have to deal with the inflation because it is growth. It is very clear, between 1996—2001, we had economic growth. Every single year, GDP increased a percentage. The economy grew. In 1994, it was the first turnaround year of the economy and it has grown every single year.*[Interruption]*

Mr. Manning: What caused that?

Dr. R. Moonilal: You would explain that later, when you speak for the 3,000 minutes you want. Every single year, there was economic growth: 1996, 1997, 1999, 2000 and 2001. We knew that. Our friend from St. Augustine reminded us of the inflation rates, in 1996, 3.3 per cent; and 1999, between 3 to 5 per cent, generally. How it is the UNC was able to manage inflation in the context of economic growth with less?

Mr. Manning: What was the unemployment figure?

Dr. R. Moonilal: I am coming to the unemployment figure, specifically here because we have a bit of disagreement on that. We disagree with the approach. I am leading an argument to suggest that the administration of the Member for San Fernando East has possibly destroyed the work ethic in this country for a very long time to come. I am leading that argument.

I have had the opportunity to visit the Middle East and some of the small oil-producing countries that several Members spoke about.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

They also have a similarity, in that they also reshape the labour market for foreign migrant labour market to come in and work and a domestic market to consume. Domestic labour force consumes and foreign labour force works. What has happened here is that there is a political dimension to this unemployment issue and I would run the facts straight.

In 2001, when the Member for San Fernando East was sworn in as Prime Minister, he had to face an election in one or two years for the least. He could not stay 18/18; he knew that. Whether he got a Speaker of this House or not, he knew he had to go back to the polls in a very short time. He knew that he needed help because the UNC administration had gotten more votes in 2001 than the PNM that formed the Government. He knew he had to go back to the polls and he knew that the UNC had more votes. What did he do? He quickly mobilized community leaders. He quickly mobilized a lumpenproletariat of community leaders who were also involved in crime, and determined that they would help in the marginal seats. Win the seats, I would form the Government.

I said it before and they wanted to cause some damage to me when I said on radio: “When yuh keep corbeaux as friends, dey will jook out yuh eye. Yuh doh keep corbeaux as friends, yuh keep any other birds, not corbeaux, dey will come fuh yuh eyes.” What happened? The former Member for Diego Martin Central, Mr. Valley, when he was here, said it. Criminals went to them and said: “Boss, we helping yuh win. We taking care of dis and dat.” They fell into that trap. Criminals went to them and said: “Listen, we prefer if you give us work, otherwise we would have to come by your house, steal and commit crimes.” Over the period 2002/2003, they fell into a trap by criminal elements. Persons have come to my office as well. I hear it. Members on the other side will hear it more, because they are in office and they have resources. People will come to you.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and colleagues on both sides of the House. I am making the point what happened here is a simple matter with long-term grave consequences. When persons come to your office and they tell you something to the effect of: If you do not give me a job, if you do not help me, I would have to go and rob. Do you know what you should tell them? You should tell them: “If you go and commit a crime, the police will deal with you. Do not come in my office with that nonsense.”

6.05 p.m.

What they did was they took a decision—the former Minister of Housing Danny Montano said it before; he is now President in the other place—that it is better to give them jobs otherwise they would go and commit crime. When people are predisposed to commit crime, they are going to commit crime anyhow, whether you give jobs or not.

So, at first, they shared up the NHA contracts—they had to paint all the buildings—in chunks and gave gangs—the Jennifer Lopez and Serena Williams matter and so on. They gave chunks to NHA and they gave chunks to URP and, today, the genie is out of the bottle and you cannot control it even if you want to. That has gone too far. Taxpayers’ money, through those make-work programmes has financed crime.

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I want to tell Members opposite that very soon politicians have to run and hide. Do you think it is businessmen alone? Politicians in this country will hide eventually from that element, because once they get to know you and they hold on to you—like in Colombia, Mexico and elsewhere—and you are feeding them with money, the day you try to stop that you are in bad trouble. I do not wish ill or bad to any colleague opposite, but I am telling you that once you keep these people as friends and believe that if you do not give them work or a piece of the action they would go and rob, you are making a mistake.

The Government policy was premised on it is better to give them jobs otherwise they would go and rob and commit crime. People are predisposed, so deal with their predisposition to crime. They need some other type of help, not jobs. They take the jobs and taxpayers' money to go and buy drugs and guns and they are killing.

I want to make the point very clear. The Member for Tobago East was hovering around an issue. The Opposition or the UNC has never been against employment for needy underprivileged people. [*Desk thumping*] We understand that persons at the lower rung of the social ladder will need temporary employment and income support to help them. When the distinguished Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla was the Minister of Labour and served with distinction in that capacity—he was in charge of the URP—the budget then was \$125 million. Do you know what is the budget today? It is \$381 million.

I want the population to hear this. This Government spends millions of dollars a day. This is like ISCOTT. I do not know if some of them remember ISCOTT. In the 1980s, ISCOTT was losing a million dollars a day. The URP consumes a million dollars per day. Do you really think it is the poor, the needy, the low wage and the low skilled workers getting a million dollars a day? That is going into the accounts of gang leaders and criminal elements. How many URP contractors and foreman have moved from travelling on a maxi-taxi to driving a Prado? Where do you think they get the money from? Is it from inheritance? Those make-work projects must be sanitized, but they must remain to assist those who really need them. This is really the story of crime in this country. They cannot stop crime. I want to suggest that even if they wanted to they really cannot, because they are part and parcel of that. If they turn against those people now then they are going to be in trouble. The Prime Minister met community leaders and they are all dead. There are only two community leaders remaining and both of their names start with “M” and none is Moonilal. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, on the employment matter, I wanted to speak to that issue. What happened in the period 2001—2006? I have to use the 2006 report, because the last labour force report of the CSO was in 2006. We do not have an annual labour force for 2007 or 2008, so we have to use 2006. Mr. Speaker, at the time the UNC was in office—the record is very clear. In fact, there is no dispute over that issue. Between the period 1995—2001, the UNC was able to create jobs without the host of programmes that they have—without \$381 million into URP, certainly without CEPEP which is a PNM creation, without MuST, YAPA, and the “DAPA” and so forth.

When one looks at the job creation record of the UNC it also tells a story. During the period 1995—2001, we were able to create 82,600 jobs. Now, that is many jobs to create without the proliferation of make-work projects. Between 2001—2006, the PNM created 72,200 jobs. That is the CSO data. So, we created 82,600 jobs and they created 72,200 which is less. When one takes out the 7,000 in URP, the 4,800 in CEPEP, the MuST and so forth and one factors it into their employment figure, the real unemployment figure in this country is 13.25 per cent. That is their unemployment figure when one takes the make-work out. You have to take that out because that is not in the productive sector.

I want to tell you about manufacturing. Now, if you want to measure the productive capacity and employment absorption, one looks generally at services, manufacturing and what is called retail, wholesale distributive hotel and so on. In manufacturing, between 1995—2001—CSO data—the UNC created 8,500 jobs in the manufacturing sector. What did the PNM do in 2001—2006? They created 2,800 jobs. So, 8,500 jobs were created by the UNC and 2,800 by the PNM. Their rate of job creation in manufacturing for the period is 5.3 per cent.

Mr. Ross: Mr. Speaker, I would like the hon. Member to tell us this evening if he is saying that CEPEP work is not meaningful employment. [*Interruption*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: I think you should continue reading the report that you described as Ernst & Young. Mr. Speaker, the rate of growth in manufacturing was higher under the UNC. If one looks at other areas—there is a particular area that I would like to make reference to and that is elementary occupations. That is low wage and low skilled employment. In elementary occupations in 1995—2001, the UNC created 11,000 jobs. The PNM, during the period 2001—2006 created much more elementary jobs; 37,000 in elementary jobs. The rate of growth of the UNC was 11 per cent in elementary jobs, but with the PNM that rate of growth went to 33 per cent in elementary jobs. If one looks at occupational classification, the elementary jobs are always low skilled, low wage with high

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vulnerability and exploitation and so on. If you look at community services, again this is where those make-work programmes will be, you would see another picture where the jobs are there.

I want to get to the Member for Barataria/San Juan issue. We have said it before that CEPEP has potential to do much good in this country, but standing at Woodford Square with a picture of the Prime Minister saying: “Patrick is Boss”, that is not employment. [*Desk thumping*] They are getting money. I raised the matter here with the registration form and gang number and I counted it. So, going to Woodford Square and holding up the placard: “If I fall all fall down”, that is Trinidad and Tobago’s work. Is that contributing to any productive sector? If you take the CEPEP gang and put them to work with the agricultural sector to clean drains and to undertake irrigation to support farmers, you are going to get them into productive activity. If you take URP to assist communities with drainage projects, you are going to get them into some productive activity. There is a difference between output and outcome. They were paid for a day, but we cannot do anything about that. How much thousands it was? I think it was either 2,000 or 3,000, but whatever it was, they got their day's pay. That is full employment, the lowest ever. If you go back next week and you call them they are going to get pay again. That is the nature of that. It is not in the productive sector.

With respect to tourism, the Member for Barataria/San Juan spoke earlier about the zoo and so on, but in that sector you can use groups like that for some productive activity—link them to the private sector and support private sector development. Today, we have a crisis and the crisis is thousands of persons in Woodford Square holding up a placard: “All fall down” and by the grocery, supermarket, the drug store and the gas station there is a sign “workers wanted”, but the workers were in Woodford Square. Now, the challenge of a Minister of Labour—I have the accident figures to deal with. I may have to amend the Standing Orders to get more time as the Prime Minister intends to do.

Mr. Speaker, a Minister of Labour should be shifting workers from make-work programmes into the productive private sector and then bringing legislation and setting up institutions to protect workers from exploitation and unfair conditions of work. [*Desk thumping*] Nothing is wrong with private sector work. That is what would drive a diversified economy. In the post boom period, it is the private sector that is going to drive the economy, and not the Government in that sense.

So, over the years, URP and CEPEP—the Prime Minister said in 2002 that URP and these things are temporary, and they were meant to help with an adjustment between workers who are desperate and the private sector. What has happened is

that they have increased the subvention and the number of persons and it has not been transferring to the private sector. You have to explain to me what those people were doing in Woodford Square and being paid. That is really the problem. If a gas station wants an attendant they would not get him, but people will go to work in the morning and do some work that will not be productive—more likely than not they would work for an hour or two, and then they are home. Now, tell me when in that person's life they can ever re-adjust to an 8.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. job?

People come to my office and when I tell them that if they are looking for a job there is a bakery, do you have a driver's permit, the baker wants you to drive and deliver bread, they would say that they cannot make with that because that is work in the evening. They would then ask if I have anything for daily-paid workers and to give them a note to go to the URP. They prefer that. Now, you are destroying the work ethic. People in Trinidad and Tobago will not work hard.

This country is becoming a post-employment society. You now have a job because it shows that you are not at home doing anything. People do not work, because there is a general culture here, not only of lawlessness, but of low productivity fostered by the Government and promoted by the Government in the labour market. That is a critical problem that a future government has to deal with, because the solution is not simple. It is not a simple matter of bringing St. Vincentian, Grenadian, and Chinese workers here. The Member for Diego Martin West, I think he came out of his own hypnotic trance a few weeks ago, and he is now speaking about everything not good in the world. To me, the world did not change, but his world has changed, and he has now discovered that there is a problem with foreigners coming in and taking jobs. We were talking about that in this Parliament since 2002. [*Desk thumping*] You had the Phillipino nurses, Cuban doctors and Chinese, Jamaican, Nigerian and Guyanese labourers. People are coming from all over in the labour market.

6.20 p.m.

The main problem facing the labour market today is low productivity; it is fuelled, supported and calculated by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. That has a political implication of course, because it is called "ghetto bank voting". They have it in several underdeveloped countries, in several states in Asia, Africa, India, outside of the city they do the same thing. It is called "ghetto bank voting".

You create employment programmes and you keep people into this dependency syndrome. So when election comes you just go and you say, "ah ha", this is the

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party we support. You cannot tell those people anything else; you cannot tell them anything about the next party. When you come you full the buses with them, you bring them to the national square to support the great leader as he breaks the law. You see it in other countries as well, but it undermines the work ethic, it destroys your labour market terribly, because your productive sector will collapse on you.

The Member for Siparia made another point, the brain drain, people are leaving, I think seven out of 10. Seven out of ten of our graduates will leave and I want to make a point about this budgetary initiative here of scholarships for PhDs. I have absolutely no difficulty with that; I myself am a recipient of a scholarship to read for a PhD degree. [*Desk thumping*] I have no difficulty with that.

All I have to say on that is that one should—[*Interruption*] the Member for Diego Martin North/East, he did not have enough puncheon over the couple of days, so we have to “hit him a few more lash”—be clear on what you are attracting your PhDs in, the specific areas, whether it is technical, engineering because, you see, you have a next problem.

How much PhD in History do we need really? Suppose somebody is going to do a PhD in Greek dialect, we take that. We take taxpayers money and give them that, because Greek dialect, I could see that helping the people somewhere in Marabella to San Fernando.[*Interruption*] I will talk about San Fernando and the neglect. I went on the wharf to see the water taxi, there were two stray dogs and a stray cat. [*Laughter*]

The issue of the PhD is this. First you are dealing with a small group of people, so when you get a first-class honours or a magna cum laude—as I received as well—you know what happens? The international community cues up to give you a scholarship. You have Commonwealth, OAS, Forde Foundation, Cornell University and Toronto. When I was reading for my PhD, I was offered a scholarship from Cornell University, the government of the Netherlands and Warrick University. You do not need government that way.

Your first problem is that people who have those distinctions will not need the Government, they have access to it. Your second issue with that is that if you put it for certain areas—this is a small number—you can develop specific areas. That is what I really want to come to. Chart your development strategy according to your needs of industry. It could be in certain specific areas, link to tourism, marine development, environment, agriculture and support your PhDs, support your intellectual community to get the right persons, the skills that you need.

When you are transforming the public sector there are certain skills you need. Attract persons and give the scholarships for specific areas related to your development agenda, because you really cannot give people a scholarship to do PhD in any old thing they want and say well look, we have the money, we will do it. The point, of course, is to attract those resources back to your country.

While I am on that, the budget also has this increase in gas and I do not want to fight over the premium, super, regular and so on, but the Minister in the cut and paste budget made a cardinal error when she premised that measure on traffic management. She said she was raising the gas to get cars off the road. Now, if you want to drop a tax on people because you feel they have money—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: To punish them.

Dr. R. Moonilal: You want to punish them—you are drinking big, you are eating big, pay more, say that, say you want a tax; say you want to lessen your direct subsidy on fuels. When you come now and say well, we are raising the price of premium gas, because we want to get cars off the road, "Oh gosh, man" tell the Minister to come better than that.

The next day after the budget I was at the Mon Repos gas station in San Fernando and while filling up diesel I interviewed a few of the attendants. I said, what is happening; they said, boss, look at what is happening here, everybody now just shift and they gone to the super, very few people staying with the premium, and then somebody came with a technical argument to say it has no difference. So how the cars coming off the road? Are they putting water in the engine? Is it water they are putting in the carburetor? They are still running, they are still on the road.

It is like the madcap plan of the Member for Diego Martin North/East. You know at a time he proposed that there should be car-pooling. Anybody remember that? He said to reduce the number of cars on the road have car-pooling. So when you are coming from San Fernando pick up two bandits on the road and bring them into town. [*Laughter*] That was his brilliant idea.

Mr. Speaker, a couple of other budgetary measures I want to comment on. I want to ask the Government and the relevant Minister, all these programmes that they are running: OJT, YTEPP, MuST, HYPE and so on, that is fine; I am understanding your argument with output, but I want you to consider outcome, meaning when people graduate from OJT. Are you undertaking the tracking of persons. You know how they track people? Somebody was on OJT; he stopped

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working at the place that he was assigned to; you meet him by the taxi stand; he says, "I get a job"; you say, "Ah ha, we doing well, the OJT got a job."

You ask the OJT, YTEPP, MuST, tell us how many persons have been trained and how many are now in employment. We need to invest as well into that area of research, understanding where people are going, then you can assess the success of the programme. It is not the absolute figures of how many people graduate, it is really the outcome, where are they going, what are they contributing.

We have scholarship winners, Mr. Speaker. I must tell you there was a grave injustice and violation of the law a few days ago. On the front page they had two females' pictures, two young ladies won national scholarships. What was it again? The "Golden Girls", but that was a grave injustice. How could you expose these people like that? I thought the policy of the Government was not to release the names of people who got scholarships. Why did the Ministry of Education announce everybody's name who got the scholarship? How could you do that?

The Ministry of Education announced a list of all the scholarship winners, and I think the son of the distinguished Member for Fyzabad received an additional scholarship.[*Desk thumping*] Clearly you could understand the intelligence and where it will come from.[*Laughter*] The daughter of the Member of Parliament for Caroni Central received a scholarship.[*Desk thumping*] When they give scholarships at the Ministry of Culture and Gender Affairs they said that is different, there are different terms and conditions. It is taxpayers' money! It is taxpayers' money! Whose money is it? Who else, is it the Government of St. Kitts? Whose money? It is taxpayers' money. The person who got the additional scholarship. Once it is taxpayers' money, taxpayers are entitled and that matter could be challenged in court. How could you announce the scholarship winners on one day and tell us we cannot have the names of the others, it is private and confidential. Absolutely nothing, in fact I have seen the application form for those scholarships of the Ministry of Culture and Gender Affairs, and nowhere it says confidential and so on.

They know why they do not want to release that, because former Minister Joan Yuille-Williams was in charge of that, and the good Member for Port of Spain South knows in her heart—very gracious lady—she would like to release the names, but she is prevented by the Prime Minister and the Cabinet from doing that, because they would expose a very dirty picture, and it will expose a very unpleasant picture, and the picture is also exposed in the HDC as well. We asked for the names of persons who got houses courtesy the taxpayer.

Mr. Imbert: When did you ask that?

Dr. R. Moonilal: We have asked the question several times in the Parliament. We have asked the question through the Freedom of Information; to the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment. [*Crosstalk*] We have asked for the names of persons who got homes. They said it is private and confidential. You know and I know why you cannot give us those names. You know that, everybody knows that. The Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla told you why.

The Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla in a brilliant speech at 12.00 midnight— [*Desk thumping*]—he had this House attentive at 12.00 midnight while we slept away at prime time during the budget presentation. The Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla said that there is bias and discrimination against East Indian persons receiving homes and if you supply the names it will show. So, just admit it and let us move on.

Prime Minister, there are more East Indians citizens on Black Entertainment Television (BET) than in the HDC houses. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*] I am glued to my television screen, I look at it all the time. There are more East Indian citizens on BET than in the HDC houses. That is the fact, deal with it. I think in 2008 we should not be pretending; just admit it, maybe you have a good reason for it.

On the matter of the waste of taxpayers' money, I want to indicate to the Government that the Opposition has had enough. Enough is enough in terms of the corruption, the waste and the mismanagement of public funds. There is a point at which in a condition of boom you tend to gloss over and forget how much money goes. There are several projects of this Government that they cannot account for. Moneys have just been spent and you hear millions and millions.

One such area is the Brian Lara Stadium, and since the Member for Chaguanas West has spoken already, I just want to make one statement on that. To this day, the Government cannot account for cost overruns at the Brian Lara Stadium. [*Desk thumping*] They cannot account to the Parliament; they cannot account to any institution of governance. I have taken it upon myself to write the Auditor General a letter calling for a special audit into the financial management of the Brian Lara Stadium and Academy at Tarouba. [*Desk thumping*]

The Auditor General is empowered under section 25(4) of the Exchequer and Audit Act to undertake a special audit into the account of any state-funded entity or company. I have called by letter dated September 29, I have indicated that the Government cannot account to the Parliament for moneys spent on the Brian Lara

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Stadium. The estimate at the beginning of this project was \$275 million; that has escalated to over \$560 million to date.

Now that is not just the cost of cement, brick and mortar, it cannot be. I have called upon her to undertake an audit; to look into the assessment of the mechanisms established for the administration of this project; the systems of procurement; the nature and cost of massive cost overruns and the general financial management of this mega-project. We cannot wait for UDeCott and the commission of enquiry, we may have to deal with it piece by piece to expose the wrongdoing of this Government as it relates to the squander, the waste and the mismanagement of billions of taxpayers' dollars.

I remind you, in closing, that while in 1991 the PNM administration indicated that they had spent the boom money well, they had invested, they had built big buildings, by 1987, when ANR Robinson read the budget, he said the Treasury was empty and they were borrowing money to manage the affairs of this country. Let not history repeat itself.

I thank you.

6.35 p.m.

Mr. Roger Joseph (*La Horquetta/Talparo*): Mr. Speaker, I rise to contribute to this budget debate. The theme of this budget as indicated by the hon. Minister of Finance in her brilliant presentation, is Shaping our Future Together. I would like to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance for her brilliant presentation. [*Desk thumping*]

Shaping our Future Together—together, not one man or one woman, but together as one nation, one future, one destiny and one vision. This budget is a continuum of the plan to achieve Vision 2020. There is a well-known saying and it has been said over and over again, that without a vision, people perish. The political leader of the PNM and the hon. Prime Minister of this country has articulated a very strong and very positive vision for this country. [*Desk thumping*]

This was packaged in a document titled Vision 2020. In essence, it speaks to Trinidad and Tobago achieving developed country status by the year 2020, on or before. We all know that the electorate accepted this vision as a fact. They on the other side do not want to accept that. They have ridiculed it. They have tried to poke holes into it. We just heard the Member for Oropouche East attacking the Government plans and vision simply because they do not accept it.

They are trying to convince the population that it is pie in the sky. But you know what I believe? I believe that the Opposition thinks that the people of this

country—Trinidad and Tobago—are fools and idiots and that they will buy wholesale into any propaganda that is merchandized by the house of the rising sun. We on this side believe that we have an educated and developed society. Thanks to PNM education policy. [*Desk thumping*] We are a nation of discerning citizens and for that we thank Almighty God.

The Opposition does not wish for this country to be a developed nation and that is why there are so many criticisms. They would prefer that the Government abandon its vision for our country, they would prefer that the Government—halt its Public Sector Investment Programme, they would prefer that the Government reverse its thrust in education—especially tertiary education, they would prefer that the Government reverse its thrust in housing. They are an Opposition of reverse thrust. This Government is moving forward. [*Desk thumping*]

The hon. Minister of Finance in presenting this budget had indicated that infrastructural development has been identified as a special priority over the next several years and special mention has been made on the expansion of transportation infrastructure. The hon. Minister of Finance indicated that our objective is and I quote:

“...to develop and maintain a multimodal public transport system utilizing a variety of mass transit solutions and a comprehensive integrated road network to provide safe, convenient, affordable and efficient transportation to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.”

This PNM Government, our Government, is tackling the nation’s transportation challenges in a holistic manner. I wish to bring to this honourable House what is considered to be the most significant project of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago’s infrastructural development plans as it relates to transportation, that is the Trinidad Rapid Rail Project. In February 2006, the National Infrastructural Development Company Limited (NIDCO) was mandated by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago through the Ministry of Works and Transport to implement a rapid rail project. NIDCO and the Government signed the contract for the rapid rail project on April 11, 2008 with the Trinetrain Consortium which is a joint venture comprised of three French principals Bouygues Travaux Publiques—the Member for Siparia is not here to hear the correct pronunciation of the word—Alstom Transport and RATP Development.

The consortium comprised of world leaders in their respective field. This contract is a design/build/operate/maintain contract commonly referred to as a DBOM contract with an additional conceptual planning stage in phase I, which

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makes it quite unique in rail construction and in the transportation industry. Phase I of the Rapid Rail Project is already underway, and I sorry that the Member for Oropouche East is not here, because he talked about allocations and outcome. [Interruption] Phase I is already underway and it is expected to be completed in March 2010 or at the end of 2009. It is on schedule and I am pleased to report that it is on schedule. [Desk thumping]

The framework of the contract seeks to involve the contractor at an early stage so that NIDCO and the Government work closely together with the contractor to achieve Government's goal on a best value for money basis. [Interruption] The contract is structured in three phases: phase I, which is the data gathering and planning; phase II, the design and construct; phase III, operations and maintenance with the latter being for a 15-year period.

The rapid rail transit system will provide a fast and frequent service linking Port of Spain to Sangre Grande and San Fernando. The objective of the rapid rail project is to provide an alternative means of transportation to the citizens of the country. The rapid rail project will be highly reliable, modern, safe and secure. Therefore, for the last three or four days we have been hearing the Opposition talking about the Government does not care about transportation and the traffic gridlock; they are spending the money and they do not care about the people who are suffering in traffic. The fact of the matter is, the Government is using the resources of this country to ease the traffic woes of the population. Building a First World transportation system does not happen overnight and they of all people should know that. [Desk thumping]

The project is divided into three phases as I said, and I will go into a bit of detail. Phase I consists of planning and preliminary engineering of the project including early works that can even start before final engineering is completed and phase I is expected to be completed in 20 months. Phase II consists of the final engineering construction of civil works, manufacturing, installing of the rolling stock and other systems—that is the trains—and commissioning of the total system including training of operation and maintaining staff. Mr. Speaker, I want to repeat that, including training of operation and maintaining staff—I wish the Member for Oropouche East was here to understand a train operator or a train engineer is a part of a highly specialized and skilled labour force. We in this Government are desirous of developing our people to that standard, not the standard to which he ascribes. [Desk thumping] Phase III consists of the operation and maintenance of the Trinidad Rapid Rail Project over a period of 15 years.

The rapid rail transit system has been divided into five geographical segments and they are as follows: Segment one, Port of Spain station to Curepe and South to the Chaguanas station, a distance of approximately 22 kilometres; segment two, Curepe to Arima, approximately 19 kilometres; segment three, the Chaguanas station to the San Fernando station, approximately 21 kilometres; segment four, Westmoorings station to Port of Spain, approximately seven kilometres and segment five, Arima station to Sangre Grande station. I cannot remember any part of the country being left out here.

The schedule for completion of the project as proposed by the Trinirain Consortium anticipates that phase I will be completed in approximately 20 months as I said, which is at the end of 2009—next year—and phase II is expected to be completed four years after. As I said, the schedule will be fast and frequent. The train shall be capable of speeds of above 110 kilometres per hour, minimum, and will provide travel times notably shorter than comparative automobile travel times. Train frequencies will be less than 15 minutes during peak periods and less than 30 minutes during off-peak periods. The trains will be modern, air conditioned, attractive, comfortable, safe and secure with ample seating. I want to let the Member for Tabaquite know that he can sell his donkey cart and use these trains in five years' time. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Travel on the train.

Mr. R. Joseph: Travel on the train. [*Desk thumping*] The location of the stations will be selected to minimize train travel time while providing convenient access to attract passengers and meet demands throughout the corridor. Secured facilities will be provided to accommodate suitable access to stations for pedestrians, cyclists, buses, maxi-taxi and automobiles, including off-street drop-off and pick-up waiting areas and park-and-ride lots. Security provisions will be incorporated in the design throughout the stations and adjacent parking and pick-up/drop-off areas.

The project will ensure that the stations and the trains will be fully accessible and safe for use by handicapped passengers, including those confined to wheelchairs and shall comply with all accessibility requirements. I am happy that we can announce in this Parliament today that there is, in fact, an outcome of that expenditure that incurred in the last fiscal year. [*Desk thumping*] All projects are on track. The allocations for the next fiscal year for this project is going to ensure that this project is delivered on time and that we will get an outcome as opposed to an allocation in terms of what the Member for Oropouche East is suggesting.

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I want to discuss and talk about another part of the Government's holistic transportation solution, and that is the introduction of the water taxi service, the service that is much maligned by Members on the other side. They are saying, again, that it is pie in the sky, it will never happen. The Member for Oropouche East said he went down there and he saw two stray dogs and himself. [*Desk thumping and laughter*] I want to suggest to the Member for Oropouche East that the water taxi is alive and it is coming. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: That is right. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Joseph: Mr. Speaker, the coastal water taxi service is being undertaken with the key objective of providing an alternative mode of transport among the coastal cities of Port of Spain and San Fernando and the Borough of Point Fortin. The service will offer commuters a viable and efficient alternative means of transportation. The current project objectives are to execute 30 trips or 15 round trips. Travel time between San Fernando and Port of Spain would be significantly reduced from two to three hours to just approximately 40 minutes. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, I encourage you to use the water taxi service.

Phase I of the service between Port of Spain and San Fernando is at an advanced stage. Critical to the implementation of the water taxi service, is the acquisition of suitable, highly efficient and economical fast ferries. In this regard, four second-hand vessels have already been acquired for the water taxi service and a request for a proposal was issued by NIDCO in June 2008 to selected manufacturers for the supply of four new fast ferry vessels—brand new—in addition to the four that we have right now for the water taxi service. [*Interruption*]

Phase II of this project involves the construction of terminals at the Chaguanas area, Waterloo or Orange Valley and of course Clifton Hill area in Point Fortin and then Point Cumana. Imagine if you may, having the option to board a high speed catamaran in San Fernando, travel in air-conditioned comfort—

Hon. Member: Yes man. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Joseph:—have breakfast or coffee on board, [*Desk thumping*] read a newspaper [*Desk thumping*]—not the *Newsday*, or even use your laptop, doing work, surfing the Internet via wireless connection. [*Desk thumping*] The best part is that you will reach into Port of Spain in 40 minutes. [*Desk thumping*]

6.50 p.m.

Additionally, inter-city buses will be available when you disembark at the terminal, to take you to whatever part of the city you may wish to go. The same bus service will be available in San Fernando in a hub and spoke arrangement.

Mr. Speaker, PTSC has ordered 20 new buses to exclusively transport the water-taxi passengers to their destinations upon disembarking. [*Desk thumping*] This is a seamless transportation solution, and of course, the other side keeps on asking when it is coming. For that, I will tell them standby, but do not buy a standby ticket. This service is expected to be introduced well before the end of this year. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Warner: In time for Christmas.

Mr. R. Joseph: Finally, on the issue of transportation—I noted on the *Sunday Guardian* dated September 28, 2008, the hon. Minister of Works and Transport is shown riding in the front seat of a spanking brand new bus, [*Desk thumping*] one of 70 which was being commissioned. Mr. Speaker, actually he looked like he was driving the bus.

Mr. Imbert: I was.

Mr. R. Joseph: In the event, Mr. Speaker, was the commissioning of these 70 new buses to service some 30 new rural routes. These 70 new buses did not include the 20 that have been acquired for use of the water-taxi service. I heard other speakers—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Members: From the other side.

Mr. R. Joseph:—from the other side maligning again, the PTSC rural bus service. Again, I want to repeat and the hon. Minister of Works and Transport said it, that this Government, under the leadership of our hon. Prime Minister, has demonstrated that it cares about the people in this country. Mr. Speaker, permit me to take you back in time, the year, 2001; the place, PTSC; the number of buses in operation, 83; and now we come back to the present time, 2008. There are 313 new buses operational in PTSC and that is an increase of over 250 per cent. The budget documents revealed that the next phase will increase this number of available buses to 400. I want to add again, I heard speakers on the other side saying that there are no rural buses in some of their constituencies. I heard the Member for Tabaquite saying that; I heard the Member for Mayaro saying that; and I heard a Member from one of the other areas saying that, but Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I would like to read out a couple of the routes. I have obtained a list of the new rural routes already in operation as a matter of information, and I want them to tell me exactly where these places are. Maybe they are not in Trinidad:

- Port of Spain to Curepe, Chin-Chin, Las Lomas.

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Now whose constituency is that? Caroni East.

- Port of Spain, Curepe, Kelly, Las Lomas via St. Helena.

Caroni East.

- Port of Spain, Arima, Carapo;
- Port of Spain, Arima, Talparo, Mundo Nuevo;
- Port of Spain, Five Rivers, Lopinot;
- Port of Spain, Tunapuna, Caura;
- Port of Spain, Blanchisseuse;
- Port of Spain, Arima, Blanchisseuse;
- Sangre Grande, Guaico/Tamana.

Whose constituency is that? The Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla no doubt.

- Sangre Grande, Four Roads, Tamana;
- Sangre Grande, Fishing Pond;
- San Fernando, Fyzabad;
- San Fernando, La Romaine, Woodland;
- San Fernando, Hermitage Village via Philippine;
- San Fernando, Borde Narve via Ciperio Road, Golconda and Friendship.

Mr. Regrello: Oropouche.

Mr. R. Joseph: Oropouche. Thank you, Member for San Fernando West.

- San Fernando via GP Road to Lengua;
- San Fernando via Guaracara/Tabaquite Road, Piparo.

Whose constituency is that? Hon. Member for Tabaquite, you could dispose of your donkey cart that you say you want to buy. You can use the bus.

- San Fernando via Guaracara/Tabaquite Road to Tabaquite;
- San Fernando via Gasparillo to Mayo, Maryland;
- San Fernando via Gasparillo to Caratal.

All these are new routes in operation, Mr. Speaker. Brand new buses, air-conditioned too, better than the BMW you have.

- San Fernando to Macaulay via St. Margaret's Junction;
- San Fernando to Tortuga via Spring Vale;

- San Fernando, Couva to Basta Hall, Carolina.

Is that Couva North or Couva South?

Mr. Warner: Couva South.

Mr. R. Joseph: It goes on:

- Chaguanas to Couva via Waterloo;
- San Fernando, Guayaguayare.

Whose constituency is that?

Mr. Warner: Mayaro

Mr. R. Joseph: And he said that we do not have buses.

- San Fernando, Mayaro;

Hon. Member: They do not know their constituency?

Mr. R. Joseph: They obviously do not know or they probably do not even know their constituents.

- San Fernando, Erin—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Maharaj SC: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. R. Joseph: They have started already. Mr. Member for Parliament, you need to visit your constituents.

- San Fernando, Erin via Siparia;
- San Fernando, Barrackpore;
- San Fernando, Princes Town;
- Couva, Gran Couva;
- Chaguanas, Rio Claro;
- Curepe via Southern Main Road;
- San Fernando via Southern Main Road;
- Sangre Grande to Cumuto;
- Sangre Grande to Guayaguayare.

Imagine that!

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- Sangre Grande to Manzanilla;
- Sangre Grande to Biche;
- Sangre Grande to Rio Claro; and
- Sangre Grande to Toco.

Hon. Member: Comprehensive service.

Mr. R. Joseph: Services to Port of Spain:

- San Fernando to Barrackpore to Port of Spain—by the number 6 scale;
- San Fernando to Penal Junction to Rochard Road to Port of Spain;
- San Fernando to Princes Town to Port of Spain;
- San Fernando to Siparia to Port of Spain;
- San Fernando, Fyzabad to Port of Spain.

Mr. Manning: That is a testimony to service.

Mr. R. Joseph: Mr. Speaker, this is a testimony to service according to my colleague, the Member for San Fernando East, [*Desk thumping*] and if I may borrow a phrase from my colleague, the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, facts are stubborn things, they just do not go away. [*Desk thumping*] You cannot dispute that, but this Government is not going to be distracted from doing the people's work. Our vision commits us to the development of First World infrastructure, which includes modern transportation infrastructure. We are prepared and ready to continue the hard work in fiscal 2009 and beyond.

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

The Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stanford Callender): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, like my colleagues on this side, would like to congratulate the Minister of Finance for her maiden budget presentation for fiscal 2009. [*Desk thumping*] I also want to congratulate all my colleagues on this side who have spoken thus far in the budget debate and in particular, my colleague, the Member for Tobago East. [*Desk thumping*] I want to make a point that my colleague from Tobago East made, slightly differently. I also want to take this opportunity to congratulate the Prime Minister and the Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly, for conducting themselves over the past seven years in such a way, as to create a new era of harmonious relationship between the two islands of the Republic. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Browne: That is the point.

Hon. S. Callender: Prior to this era, it was not always like that and my most recent reference is the period between 1995 and 2001. The results after the 1995 general election was 17-17-2 and the UNC with some arrangements, crafted I think by the Member for Tabaquite in enabling the two Tobago seats, to allow the UNC to form the Government for the first and maybe the only time in the history of this country. [*Desk thumping*] That period was contrasted with the rancour and acrimony between the then Chief Secretary, Hochoy Charles and the then Prime Minister, Basdeo Panday, and their friends on the other side.

Mr. Speaker, when I listened to the response of the budget speech by the Member for Siparia, I asked myself—not for the first time, not for the second time—how on earth a party that is seeking to be the alternative Government of Trinidad and Tobago, that the Opposition could not even spend half a minute in any reference to Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] This country is made up of two islands, Trinidad, and Tobago, so statistically Tobago is half of the country. Then it dawned on me when I listened to the Member for Couva South as he made reference to an interview between the former President and Clevon Raphael in the *Sunday Guardian* dated September 28, 2008, he did not start at the beginning of the interview because the question that was asked to the former President was, “What is the number one problem facing Trinidad and Tobago?” His response was, “The number one problem facing Trinidad and Tobago is a lack of patriotism.” I asked myself, is the anger of the Member for Couva South against the former President of this country, the reason the UNC took that opportunity to use and abuse the people of Tobago? You see, Tobago got absolutely nothing during their tenure, and when I listened to the Member for Chaguanas West, ill-advised—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: As usual.

Hon. S. Callender:—asking the question or trying to compare the allocation of \$2.6 billion for Tobago, with the Borough of Chaguanas, like him I say, “Heaven help us.” Because for the Member for Chaguanas West, who like—the question was asked by my colleague from Tobago East, “You sure your father from Tobago?” Because I was told once upon a time by an old Tobagonian gentleman, who said, “You could take a Tobagonian out of Tobago by heritage, but you cannot take the Tobago out of the man.” [*Desk thumping*] We are friends, but you disappointed me. To compare Tobago with a borough, is disappointing and it is insulting also; and to compare Tobago’s allocation with Chaguanas, is

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even more insulting. In a budget of \$49 billion, you are questioning Tobago's \$2.6, where is the other \$47 billion to be spent?

Dr. Browne: What did Tobago do to deserve this?

Hon. S. Callender: Where? But you see, I attach that to your lack of understanding as to what the Tobago House of Assembly is, and what it represents for the people of Tobago. I felt if you were away at the time of the debate that led to the creation of the Tobago House of Assembly by Act No. 37 of 1980, you should have been reminded by your friend, the Member for Tabaquite, in the arrangement to co-host the two Tobago seats, he made an arrangement that they would review the Tobago House of Assembly Act, so today, we are operating under Act No. 40 of 1996, and in that, you have to understand the role and responsibility of the Tobago House of Assembly. Therefore, while in Chaguanas you might have responsibilities of some little secondary roads and drain; in Tobago, the Tobago House of Assembly is responsible for all roads. [*Desk thumping*]

Wages and salaries of public servants in Trinidad are paid by different Ministries. In Tobago they are all paid by the Tobago House of Assembly.

Hon. Member: And he said that is where he is from.

Hon. Member: Give him a lecture.

Hon. S. Callender: You know. The health authority and all health services in Tobago are funded by the Tobago House of Assembly. All the social services in Tobago, is the Tobago House of Assembly. The strides we have made in tourism, is because the Tobago House of Assembly is responsible for tourism development in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] The salaries of teachers and infrastructure of schools are the direct responsibility of the Tobago House of Assembly.

7.05 p.m.

I am a bit disappointed. I believe that you took bad advice from the Mayor of Chaguanas who made a similar comment a few days ago, in trying to compare Tobago's allocation with Chaguanas; out of place.

I want to congratulate the Minister of Finance for recognizing the PNM's contribution over the past years and, in particular, over the past seven years, to the impact of Tobago's current progress and prosperity. [*Desk thumping*] This was made possible because in 2001 in Tobago we were able to remove from office the friends of the UNC. [*Desk thumping*] Later that same year, we had a PNM Central Government in Trinidad and a PNM administration in Tobago. Tobago can now boast of seven years of peace, progress and prosperity. [*Desk thumping*]

To achieve our objective of becoming a developed nation by 2020, it is in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago not to change the status quo. [*Desk thumping*] Some of the benefits we derive from this association of respect from a PNM in Trinidad and Tobago, some of the strides we have made, like in early childhood centres all across the island, and education from nursery to tertiary, are because the PNM values education and investment in human capital.

I listened to the Member for Siparia; she was making analogies, although her statistics were wrong, but she had a chorus line which said that things were happening in certain countries because they did not have the PNM. Let me tell you what is happening in this country because we have the PNM. Full placement of all children in primary and secondary schools. In Tobago we have witnessed, over the past seven years, the establishment of three new secondary schools in Goodwood, Speyside and Mason Hall; [*Desk thumping*] new primary schools in Buccoo and Castara; new and refurbished health centres in Bethel, Charlotteville and Canaan—the Canaan Health Centre is the poster child of the Health Sector Reform Programme financed by the IADB—a repatriation to Tobagonians of lands of their forefathers, such as Pigeon Point, Courland, Pembroke Estate and Adelphi became possible because of the PNM.

We now have one of the best interisland ferry services in the world, [*Desk thumping*] cementing the ties that bind us as a people and encouraging commerce and social interaction between the citizens of this country living on either island. This initiative came about because the Assembly felt that it was time to change the mode of transportation between both islands. In dialogue with a caring government, the Government acceded to the request. Our fast ferry service is now the envy of the Caribbean.

I am happy to see most of our UNC friends and supporters using the ferry up and down, because it is a service that we provide for the people. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] As my friend just made reference to the senior citizens now being able to use the fast ferry, I heard some sniding comments, from both the Member for Mayaro and, I think, the Member for Tabaquite. They were questioning the rationale to allow senior citizens to use the ferry.

Mr. Maharaj SC: That is not enough!

Hon. S. Callender: Let me give you an analogy that was told to me from a lady in my constituency. She said, "You know, I have relatives in Arima, so now I could take my bus pass and board the bus going to Scarborough, and from the bus go on the fast ferry to Port of Spain, from Port of Spain I could go to Arima, and I

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could overnight by Penny, if I wish; the next morning I board the bus back to Port of Spain, free of charge. I board the ferry back to Tobago, free of charge."

Hon. Members: Free of charge!

Hon. S. Callender: "When I land in Scarborough, I take the bus back to my home; free of charge." [*Desk thumping*] That is only possible, do you know why? Because we have the PNM in this country.

Mr. Maharaj SC: They are entitled to free airline tickets.

Hon. S. Callender: Do not trivialize the airline ticket situation. I asked the Secretary for Tourism about two days ago, "What is the airfare from Tobago to Grenada?" He said, "About \$1,800." I asked, "What is the airfare from Tobago to Barbados?" He said, "About \$2,000." We pay \$300, highly subsidized, millions of dollars in subsidies, to allow the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to travel between both islands. [*Desk thumping*] So we pay millions on both the sea bridge and the air bridge to subsidize travel for our country.

We have witnessed in Tobago, over the past seven years, an increase in the level of subsidy in this country. We have witnessed increase in the improvement of our infrastructure network, like the Charlotteville/L'Anse Fourmi Link Road and the Mason Hall/Les Coteaux Road, among others. Like my colleague, the Member for La Horquetta, in addition to the 70 new buses that have been put on route in Trinidad, we have 20 such buses in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

From time to time I constantly hear, particularly the Member for Caroni East, speak about this Government being a minority government. I have always had a problem with that. I make reference to a deal that was struck after 1995. Like my friend from Chaguanas who has left, while the Member for Couva South was reading the *Guardian*, I too read the *Guardian*, but I also read the *Newsday*. They were celebrating their 15th anniversary, so there were some very interesting stories.

One of them was on page 49:

"Panday Robbie together again"

That was some arrangement organized for the two Tobago seats to put the UNC in government. If I could have spoken like the Member for Oropouche West, a true copy of the father— When asked by the reporter:

"...what role Mr. Robinson would play in the new Government, Panday said it would be a 'partnership'. Pressed further Panday would only say, 'We are partners.'" [*Laughter*]

It is the same partner that the Member for Couva South attempted to destroy. He further went on to say:

"...he wanted Robinson to be with him at all times..." [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, I want to deal with the question of minority government, because further in the article the reporter went on to say:

"There will also be the irony of the Opposition party,..."—meaning the UNC—"the PNM, having polled 255,885 votes, more than the UNC 239,816."—will form the government.

Hon. Members: What? What?

Hon. S. Callender: They have the brass face to come and talk to us about being a minority government. [*Desk thumping*] As I said before, those two Tobago seats gave you the first and last opportunity in your life, [*Desk thumping*] to become the government of this country, and never again would you be so privileged.

We have witnessed the absence of housing development in Tobago for over 20 years, but today, due to this Government— You know, Mr. Speaker, when the Member for Mayaro was speaking, I chose not to interrupt him, because I am known to be a man in the culture. I have had a little experience in culture myself, therefore, I was truly entertained by 75 minutes of pure entertainment. What I also learnt last night was that they have a lot of entertainers on that side, because the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, close to midnight, kept me awake. In entertainment, content is not important, it is the laughter you generate. [*Desk thumping*]

He had the audacity to say to the Member for Tobago East, "You come to the Parliament and never say anything about Tobago." The Prime Minister had to say that he did not have to. The reason we do not have to stand and talk like you do is because we are in the Government of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Therefore, there are several forums that present themselves to us to discuss the business and the interest of the people of Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

A senior parliamentarian said to me once that Parliament is a place where the Government brings and passes legislation, and Opposition talks or make their contributions. Therefore, we allow you to entertain us for 75 minutes, so let me talk "nuh". [*Laughter*]

I was saying that we have witnessed the absence of housing development in Tobago. The last time we had low cost housing development in Tobago was under a PNM regime. He does not understand that the politics of Tobago started

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changing after that; so for 20 years, those who were charged with responsibility, given this function, for Tobago in the Tobago House of Assembly (THA), never thought about even an enquiry into housing development, because it was not a policy of the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) or the UNC.

Today, we are happy, because we have PNM in the country of Trinidad and Tobago now, and housing development has started. [*Desk thumping*] So we have housing estates again in Roxborough, Blenheim, Castara, Adventure, with others to come on soon, like in Courland. Therefore, Tobago, not only has benefited from these infrastructural developments, but also from allocations received from the budget over the years, in almost \$7 billion, in addition to the THA's allocation.

These were services directly offered by the Central Government for the people of Tobago. [*Crosstalk*] Thus when the Minister of Finance talks of the progress and prosperity in Tobago, and in Trinidad and Tobago, she was on sound footing. Despite the wailing by the Member for Siparia and the chorus group, this country is moving forward.

Budgetary resources do not flow from a piece of paper. I am making this point against the backdrop of those who place significant reference to the Dispute Resolution Commission award of 4.03 per cent award, but this PNM administration has always adopted the policy that Tobago's development, in developing Trinidad and Tobago, is not necessarily statistics in terms of budgeted DRC allocation.

7.20 p.m.

A friend of mine gave me a very interesting interpretation as to what the DRC could mean in local parlance. It is like a young man “fren'nin’” with a lady who has two children and refuses to take care of them so the lady decides to put him in court for maintenance.

It is interesting that the time when the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) took the Government to court for increased allocation, it was during the time of a UNC/NAR administration and, therefore, the DRC came like you take the man to court for maintenance. But in time, the lady would find a more handsome man and he says: Look, you do not have to take that on, I will give you what the man was supposed to give you for maintenance of the children, and I will give you more, I will take care of you, I will provide your needs. Do you expect the people of Tobago to leave that and go back to the man who left them? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: No way, never. Bid that lady goodbye.

Hon. S. Callender: Mr. Speaker, Tobago is pleased with the budget because it speaks to a matter of great concern to us which is the acquisition of Friendship

Estate. There is a perception that the Tobago House of Assembly is into land grabbing, but that is the furthest thing from the truth. If you understand the history of Tobago's land, you will recognize that most are owned by plantation estate owners and, therefore, for Tobago's development to meaningfully take place, we have to acquire a significant amount of land.

Given the price for land in the market, lands are going for about \$100 per square foot. When the HDC did its consultancy survey, it determined that to meet Tobago's housing needs at the time will require about 4,000 houses and that required in excess of 400 acres of land. Therefore, one has to understand the need for us to go in that direction because it gives us an opportunity to plan Tobago's development in a meaningful way.

We have the ability to treat with the environmental impact that will occur in the country, and to meet some serious institutional challenges because right now there are institutions like the Fire Services Headquarters, the Police Headquarters in Tobago and they are looking for some lands. We have to review the site for the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) Tobago's campus from Buccoo: because of the concerns about the erosions that are taking place, COSTAATT is also looking for space in Tobago to build institutions and so forth. They gave us an opportunity to maintain and manage the environment in such a way to maintain Tobago's mantra of being clean, green, safe and serene.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to make this point that this budget also provides about \$67 million for the tourism rolling plan because I remember when we came into office in 2001, occupancy rate in the hotels in Tobago was 17 per cent. Workers were sent home, they were on shifts, some of the industries were facing closure and one of the things I have to congratulate the Prime Minister for is, that early in 2002, he established his Cabinet subcommittee on the tourism sector. He assumed the chairmanship of that committee and it started meeting in Tobago.

At the first meeting he said to all the stakeholders that tourism is to Tobago what oil and gas is to Trinidad and Tobago and, therefore, the focus was being placed on that major area of revenue for Tobago which is tourism. So he took responsibility for that and, therefore, the strides that Tobago has made over the years in tourism are a direct result of that intervention. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, time would not permit because I have given myself a limited time to treat with some of these issues. The Minister of Tourism spoke to some of the issues; all I want to say is that unlike when we came in 2001, there was only one international flight coming to Tobago that was British Airways and the regional airline LIAT: together they provided something like 1,126 seats per week.

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In winter of 2008, there will be 15 international flights per week coming to Tobago [*Desk thumping*] providing 2,856 seats, more than 150 per cent increase. We now see the hotel occupancy at an average of 70 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] In addition to that, we have reports that the Guest Houses and the Bread and Breakfast Sectors are averaging about 60 per cent.

The indigenous aspect of the tourism industry in Tobago is the Bread and Breakfast Sector. They have added over the past few years over 400 new rooms to the sector, and construction is expected in the next few months of 630 luxury rooms. [*Desk thumping*]

The cruise ship industry has had its share; it is expected to bring almost 100,000 passengers to Tobago in the 2008 season. This represents 700 per cent in the figure a few years ago, and this was made possible because of the extension of the jetty. In the next two weeks we will see continued improvement in the sector. Tobago has now become a platinum member of the Florida/Caribbean Cruise Ship Association that has bought a level of expertise, training and other things to the sector. Tobago continues to lead the way in ecotourism as the Minister of Tourism said. After winning this prestigious award for four consecutive years, Tobago is again nominated in this category in 2008. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I just want to summarize and wind up my brief contribution by saying that this administration is striving to make the Tobago House of Assembly the genuine partner with the Central Government in a relationship that not only benefits the islands of Tobago and Trinidad individually, but strengthens our country, the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago such that the country becomes greater than the sum of its individual parts.

I have always been happy to say that I am a proud citizen of Trinidad and Tobago because I am convinced that Trinidad and Tobago is a much greater place than Tobago can ever hope to be. [*Desk thumping*] Trinidad and Tobago is a much more beautiful place than Trinidad can ever dream to be.

Mr. Speaker, as we move as a people, we must take up the challenge of making the country a developed country and respond by carving out our special and exciting niche for ourselves in a dynamic and changing world, losing neither our self-respect nor our cultural personality nor our dignity in the process. Why the people of Trinidad and Tobago put someone in office; I submit it is not to achieve perfection as someone said. I believe it is important to improve the standard of living and the way of life for our people and I believe that is why you

put a government in office. I am convinced that the PNM has done that over the past and will continue to do that in the future of this country. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I am sure you will appreciate my joy and pleasure in supporting the fiscal package for 2009 and I take this opportunity once again to congratulate the Minister of Finance for a job well done.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Patrick Manning): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have come to the point in this debate when we have to take very careful cognizance of what has been said on the other side and to set the record straight.

Mr. Speaker, what became clear to me as I listened to the debate was the unfolding of a strategy by hon. Members opposite to target the Prime Minister and seek to tag onto him corruption, mismanagement and a quality that can best be put as megalomania. That is what they sought to do.

Speaker after speaker on the other side spent some considerable time seeking to denigrate the Member for San Fernando East; that is fine with me. I came through the Opposition years of 1987—1991 when there were just three of us and 33 persons on the other side and every Friday we had to face the slings and arrows of those opposed to us. Morris Marshall, God bless his soul, the very distinguished representative for Laventille West told me that he used to get a headache on Thursday night knowing what he had to face on Friday and if we have come through that, it is unlikely that hon. Members opposite could so conduct their business in a way to cause me any undue pain.

It is important however, Mr. Speaker, that I spend some time rebutting what hon. Members opposite had to say, much of it bears absolutely no relationship to the facts, but which to the uninitiated or the casual observer can sound cogent and can give the impression that those opposite who are articulating these positions are seized with the facts and know that of which they speak. Nothing can be further from the truth and, therefore, I crave the indulgence of this House at the appropriate time to give me whatever time is required to be able to set the record straight.

7.35 p.m.

So permit me to begin by extending very sincere congratulations to the very distinguished Minister of Finance, the Member of Parliament for D'Abadie/O'Meara [*Desk thumping*] who in her very first budget presentation, set herself apart and above and demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt, that she had the capability and the intellectual capacity to do the job entrusted to her care for the time

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being. [*Desk thumping*] And if you detect a sense of pride in the way I speak—it is something that I do not expect you to understand—it is the pride of a Prime Minister who is pleased with the appointment he has made as Minister of Finance—very pleased. [*Desk thumping*]

She is not a finance person nor is she an economist; she is a lawyer by profession.

Dr. Moonilal: You proud of that?

Hon. P. Manning: Yes, I am. If your leader is not proud of you, I am sorry; I am proud of my Minister. [*Desk thumping*]

She is a lawyer, but demonstrated that law or no law, she had the capacity to understand the issues that face her in her portfolio and to adumbrate policy prescriptions of which Trinidad and Tobago could be justifiably proud. I would like to add my quota of congratulations to the chorus of voices that have gone before me, congratulating the very distinguished Minister of Finance.

When I listened to the very distinguished Member for Siparia and I looked at the budget contribution of the Minister of Finance in relation to the contribution of the Member for Siparia, I come to the inescapable conclusion that the comparison marks the difference between those who aspire and those who achieve. [*Desk thumping*]

The Member for Siparia has done much, much better in this House and I will have to put it down to something that is bugging the Member. I do not know what it is, but the Member's contribution just did not measure up. I am not trying to be discourteous or anything; I am just trying to analyze the thing. It did not measure up. In fact, I recall my own days as Leader of the Opposition. I spent 11 years in the Opposition, you know, Mr. Speaker. I recall my own days as Leader of the Opposition and the fact that I, too, had to reply to budgets. I knew what went into that.

If I had replied to budgets between 1987 and 1991 in the way that the Member for Siparia replied to this budget, the PNM would have been in Opposition to this day. An Opposition, whether hon. Members opposite would like to accept it or not, is to be considered an alternative government, because if something happens on this side and if the Government falls, it is likely that hon. Members opposite would occupy the seat of power and authority.

At any rate, what are they doing on the other side? Are they not seeking to get into government? They market themselves—and quite properly so—as an alternative

to the Government, and so it is. But you do not become an alternative to the Government merely by saying it; as the Bible says: "It is by their deeds ye shall know them." "By your fruits we shall know you."

So that it was entirely out of order for the Member for Siparia and, in fact, everyone on that side, to come to this Parliament and to seek to wade into the contribution of the Minister of Finance without giving us any semblance of an alternative. What could we look forward to? Let us assume the Government fell, what will the people of Trinidad and Tobago say they can look forward to as hon. Members opposite take the positions of authority in this country? What can they expect?

We have outlined our vision—a very clear vision—of developed country status by the year 2020. Hon. Members opposite have made it clear that they do not subscribe to that view. That is their right. But to what view do they subscribe? I listened to the Member for Siparia for three hours and eight minutes and if I said to you that I can tell you the vision that hon. Members opposite hold for the development of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, then I will be less than an honest man. It just was not there.

What were the philosophical underpinnings of their policy prescriptions? What were they? I did not glean it from the contribution of the Member for Siparia, nor did I glean it from the contribution of the Member for Tabaquite, or the Member for Chaguanas West, or the Member for Oropouche. Well, Caroni East was among the worst contributions I have heard in this debate. [*Desk thumping*] I am sorry, but I am not trying to be discourteous; I am just trying to say it as I see it. The Member for St. Augustine, no policy; the Member for Princes Town North, naught; well he was the worst. My heart goes out to the Member for Oropouche West, so let me make no comment on my young friend. One of the best contributions on that side came from the Member for Mayaro. [*Desk thumping*]

So they do not agree with what the PNM is doing. That is their right. But to what views do they subscribe? What are their policies? To what policies do they subscribe? You could not find it in the contribution of any one of the hon. Members opposite; you could not find it in the contribution of any one of them! And where does that leave us? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. P. Manning: And you hear what the Member for Caroni East is saying? The Member for Caroni East is saying, "Put us in government and then you would

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see”. In other words, the people of Trinidad and Tobago must buy “cat in bag”. That is what it is! [*Interruption*] We passed that way before, you know.

Let me tell you about the NAR. You see, when you asked the NAR, “What will you do about inflation?”, do you know what they used to say: “We will roll back the inflation”, as though the recession was a carpet [*Laughter*] and you just roll it up and roll it back and that was the end of it. That is what they used to say and people fell for that!

When we talked in budget responses in this Parliament, we used to make positions very clear. In fact, we used to enjoy doing it. You take, for example, the budget for 1988. We disagreed with what the government had to say and listen to how we put it: “It was not the tip of the iceberg that sank the Titanic, but the nine-tenths mass that lay lurking beneath the dark and icy waters.” The people of Trinidad and Tobago understood what we were saying. It was not what you saw; it was what you did not see!

Mr. Speaker, where are the lyrics that compared with that? Where are they? I notice it is just not there. It is not good enough, and I want to say to hon. Members opposite, this is my 38th budget. I have heard some of the best and some of the worst in this country. It is just unacceptable to come to a Parliament and talk about a budget without indicating to us what you would have done had you been in government. It is easy to say: “I am not doing this; I am not doing that, but what would you do?”

The Member for Siparia said the Government has not done this and has not done that; 22 per cent here and 22 per cent there and so on; they said they were doing this; they did not do that. In one breath she says that, but in the next breath the Member says that the economy is at capacity and, therefore, if you put any more into the economy, you are going to fuel the inflation. On the one hand, we did not do this and we did not do that, but on the other hand, if you go and do that and do this, you are going to fuel the inflation. What does the Member for Siparia expect us to do? And what would the very distinguished Member for Siparia have done had she been in our position on this side? They have the luxury of talking all kinds of things because nobody has held them to any account; they could say what they want!

In Opposition in 1987, 1988 and 1989, when I came to this Parliament I would thank my team—the three of us in the lower House and the six of us in the Upper House. We worked together as a team. I noticed that the Member for Siparia was thanking the employees of the office of the Leader of the Opposition and the employees of her office in Siparia—is it? Nigel and who else?

Hon. Member: And Lisa.

Hon. P. Manning: Lisa. That is a very important thing, you know, because what it tells us is that none of her colleagues was involved in assisting her in the preparation of her response and that is the next point I am coming to because the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla just said it.

You see, what they do, they wash their dirty linen in public; they make matters that should be kept private, public business and when you comment on it, they say, "It is not your business". But let me tell you, we are students of politics and they do it in the full glare of public scrutiny. I sat here when the Member for Siparia was making her contribution.

Let me just tell you what George Chambers once told me. He said that if ever a felony is committed, the first man you question is the man who was not there—politics. That is what he said. And as the Member for Siparia made her contribution, do you know who was not there? The Member for Couva South was not there; the Member for Chaguanas West was not there; the Member for Tabaquite was not there. They do it in full glare of public scrutiny. I sat here! But what was worse, as soon as that contribution was finished we went for lunch; when we came back, up comes the Member for Couva South and then the Member for Chaguanas West.

I sat here and I watched what happened, you know. As the Member for Couva South came in, the Member for Siparia was sitting in the seat of the Member for Couva North; pretended that she did not know that the Member for Couva South was there and was looking in the other direction. Sitting in the seat of the Member for Tabaquite was the Member for Caroni Central, the itinerant Chief Whip. He had to tell the Member for Couva South, "Look, I think you better pass around." He saw it.

Do not make private business, public. When you do those things for us to see, we see them. But you know, there is one man who came much, much later; that is the Member for Tabaquite. That is the man who really was not there. Therefore, do you know who the real culprit is?

Hon. Member: The man who was not there, and still not there. [*Interruption*]

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I am sure that the Member for Tabaquite has a good reason why he was not there. Let me tell you how Dole Chadee used to do it; a good friend of his. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, I sat here; I took all my licks, you know; I took all my licks and they share licks without mercy. But it is all right. My day is here. [*Desk thumping*]

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Let me tell you how Dole Chadee used to do it. If they want to kill somebody in Trinidad, this is what they did: Dole Chadee, Joey Ramiah, who was the head of the execution gang, and others, would go to Piarco Airport and buy a ticket to Caracas; they would board an aircraft for everybody to see and they would go to Caracas. But the minute they hit Caracas, they start to travel; they travel down to Eastern Venezuela, and within 24 hours they are back in Trinidad through Cedros—through the back door—carry out their act; go back by the same way and four days later they come back through the airport, come off a plane with a perfect alibi: “I was not here.” [*Crosstalk*]

7.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Tabaquite obviously is well aware of those methods and is beginning to demonstrate them more and more in the conduct of his public business. The Member for Siparia committed a great travesty. Whatever the merits or demerits of her contribution, I did not expect that someone as experienced as the Member for Siparia would have made the error of not checking her facts. On too many of the principal facts she put forward in this Parliament, we were able to challenge those facts successfully.

For a start, she said that the public service debt had tripled since 2001 and had gone up by 380 per cent. In fact, the public debt was \$31 billion in 2001. It is now \$43 billion, an increase of 35 per cent, barely one-third increase and not the three times increase of which the Member spoke. That was easy; a no-brainer. Even if Nigel or somebody else had put that in his speech—as the Member for Siparia read it, it must have struck her.

The Member claimed that the infant mortality rate under the PNM Government had increased to 38 deaths per 1,000 births in 2008. In fact, the UN Population Division has confirmed that our infant mortality rate is actually 12 deaths per thousand, considerably less than the figure when the UNC was in office.

She claimed that interest rates are rising and will rise under the PNM thus making it difficult for people to own homes. In fact, the interest rates have declined from 16 per cent in 2001 under the UNC to 11 per cent in 2008 under the PNM and to as low as 2 per cent because that is the mortgage interest rate under those concessional mortgage arrangements given by the Government of the PNM; the exact opposite of the contention of distinguished Member for Siparia. Mr. Speaker, when you put that in a speech, what does it do to the speech? It decides the entire credibility of the contribution which otherwise would have been of some merit.

That was not all. She claimed that if the UNC were still in power, the balance in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund would have been US \$40 billion. It was easy for us to demonstrate and demonstrate quite clearly and correctly that over the period 2002—2008 we never earned US \$40 billion. If what the Member was saying was that we could have saved all that we earned and borrow some more money to save, then it does not make sense. Why would the Member put that in her speech? We do not understand.

All that contribution sought to do was to make the Member for Diego Martin North/East look like a genius. He waded into that and properly so. Parliament is not the place for "ol' talk" you know. When you come to Parliament, get your facts right. From time to time, people err and mistakes are made, but what the Member for Siparia did was play fast and loose with the facts and with the minds of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, then the Member for Siparia, in an impassioned plea began to resort to gimmickry. Have mercy, Mr. Manning, and I could see the contrived pain as she was saying it for the benefit of the cameras, putting up cut-outs from the newspapers.

Where was the call for mercy when the Member for Couva North, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, was conducting acts that led to his facing two sets of charges before the courts? Where was the call for mercy? Where was the call for mercy from the Member for Siparia when five of her colleagues were doing all kinds of things in the government that five more of them are now before the courts of Trinidad and Tobago? Where was the call for mercy when the Member for Siparia would get Common Entrance results and sit in her office in the Ministry of Education and manipulate them for three days? *[Interruption]* That is what happened. *[Desk thumping]*

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, imputing improper motives.

Mr. Speaker: If you are alleging that the Prime Minister is deliberately misleading the House in what he says, you can bring a substantive motion.

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, what did they do for the last two days? I sat and took it. Let me tell you: before you throw stones make sure you do not live in glass houses. And when that is finished, she came out and talked about the superiority of her constituents, after she got results that had been manipulated by the Member for Siparia for three days. Thank God for the People's National Movement in the conduct of our public affairs. *[Desk thumping]*

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It is the Member for Oropouche who started talking about the Integrity Commission. The Member for Oropouche does not know the Integrity Commission. The Member for Siparia was saying that on Tuesday last she called the Registrar of Statements of Registrable Interests at the Integrity Commission to find out certain things. That is not a route she had to use. She has an alternative route available to her. If she wants to find out something at the Integrity Commission, she has an alternative route available to her.

Let me put it this way. King Solomon, in his musings in the book of Ecclesiastes had this to say: To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven. There is a time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to take up; a time to rest and a time to work. May I add a time to stay silent and a time to talk? For me, the time to talk has come. [*Desk thumping*]

Four years ago, as we were seeking to get people to sit on boards of directors a significant number of them began to say to me that they were not prepared to do that because they had reason to believe that the Member for Siparia had special access to the Integrity Commission. This is what they said. I initially ignored it, but when I heard it often enough and realized the effect, I called one of the security agencies to check it and, Mr. Speaker, you will not believe it, they confirmed that there was someone in the Integrity Commission who is loco parentis, as the lawyers would say, with the Member for Siparia. As a consequence of which, the Member was in a position to know far more than she, under normal circumstances, was authorized to know.

We reported it to the Chairman of the Integrity Commission at the time. I have monitored the relationship between the Member for Siparia and the individual concerned for years. They can say what they wish. That incidentally has a jail term associated with it. When they talk about the Prime Minister protecting people, if I protected anybody, it was the Member for Siparia. By one fell swoop—and they played fast and loose with it. They played so fast and loose that it came into the public domain to the point where people knew about it and took the position that they were not serving on boards of directors. That is the reality. [*Interruption*]

Of course I know what I am saying. I want the Member to get up and say it is not true.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: It is not true. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Manning: Let me repeat what I have just said. I have monitored it for years. We leave it at that.

When we came, therefore, to the Parliament and said to Members that we wanted to change the integrity legislation, we did not say all that we knew. We did not say all that was on our minds. Their strategy is clear and the strategy of the hon. Member, once that was done, the effect was that no one would want to serve on boards of directors and the PNM would not be able to conduct the people's business.

Hon. Members opposite, listen carefully to what I am saying. All who want to grumble are free to grumble, but what you are getting are facts about which I am certain you would not have been aware.

Mr. Speaker, then the Member for Siparia decided she wanted to nail me up somewhere. You want to nail me? I will tell you a joke, Mr. Speaker. There was this lady who had a son who used to go to government school; he was not doing well in school. She moved him from that school and sent him to a Catholic school and suddenly as school was over he would run home, studying hard. She could not understand it. When exam results came out, he came first in test and in Mathematics which he did not like. She said: What is this? What accounts for this sudden change? He said, well, Mummy, you see in that school I am going to now, it is a Catholic school. In every classroom in that school they nailed a man on a plus sign. They "aint" nailing me. When you are looking to nail people, pass me straight. You are not nailing me. Okay?

8.05 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I would come to inflation a little later on, but from where I stand, I stand on the north, facing south, and wherever I look, whether I look through big glasses, small glasses or no glasses at all, I have a clear view of the very distinguished Member for Diego Martin West.

Mr. Speaker, I went to Woodford Square and I said to the people in Woodford Square: If I fall everything falls. The Member for Diego Martin West has taken great issue with that, suggesting, among other things that could not be true, and, indeed, it is not the PNM's way. What was I talking to the people in Woodford Square about? It was a Motion of no confidence. We made the point then and I make it again that in our jurisdiction, a Motion of no confidence in the Prime Minister is indeed a Motion of no confidence in the Government, so if the Prime Minister falls, the Government falls; all fall down. That is the point I was making. How could my friend from Diego Martin West take issue with that? I cannot understand it.

Clearly, my friend forgets that in 1987, when we faced the juggernaut of the NAR, 33 of them in the lower House and three of us on the other side, we were

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outnumbered, outgunned and inexperienced. Outnumbered and outgunned. It was reported in that general election they spent \$40 million; first time any party had spent that kind of money. We spent nothing close to that. In fact, in the local government election that followed in 1987, we were able to raise only \$33,000. They were all over us. We sat down, three in the Lower House and six from the Upper House, and asked ourselves: How do we neutralize this thing? We were outnumbered and outgunned. Everything stacked against us. Do you know what decision we took? My very good friend from Diego Martin West was a part of it. We took the decision that if we are able to assail the leader of the party, then all fall down. We neutralized all the advantages that they had. That was the decision we took. That was the strategy that we pursued. In circumstances where everybody felt that the PNM would be in opposition for 10, 15 or 20 years, we said we will take them in five and in five years we returned to the corridors of power in Trinidad and Tobago; a successful strategy. The leader fell and everybody fell with it.

Mr. Speaker, I draw the attention of hon. Members to Club 88. Remember Club 88? They pulled out. I understand the strategy that the Member for Diego Martin West is pursuing. I understand it well. Solomon also said in the book of Ecclesiastes that there is nothing new under the sun. The Member for Diego Martin West, when I see the posture that he has now adopted—I remember Karl Hudson-Phillips. I was here. I saw it all. But, I would like to tell my friend that those who pursue that strategy—I do not want to outline what the strategy is, you know, I know it—have no assurance that the strategy will work; no assurance of that at all. Club 88; do you remember Club 88? In happier times we used to discuss these matters. That was the strategy they pursued and the effect of it was that the Government fell.

The very distinguished Member for Tabaquite, he too, could talk to my friend from Diego Martin West because he tried it in 2001. Was that the year? He succeeded in bringing down the leader. What was the effect? All fall down. That is the reality. Why would my friend take umbrage to that and give the impression that by saying that I am setting myself up, apart and above from what the norms are? I am in a position to say that is the fact. We successfully pursued that policy and the policy worked then.

Sunway—the Member for Diego Martin West has given the impression that there was some kind of collusion between Sunway and the Prime Minister. “How Sunway got into the Prime Minister’s Office? Who invited them there? They come in and leave with a piece of paper; they have an MOU and deals are being

made.” He made heavy weather out of that, deals are being made; an attempt to attach the Prime Minister’s good name with deal-making, of which, of course, you know he is completely innocent. It is an attempt to do it.

Mr. Speaker, I wondered, because of the way he put it, what did we say when Sunway visited us. What were the press releases that were issued? Let me see what was the basis for the Member coming to a conclusion like the one to which he came. Let me get the documents here.

Mr. Speaker, I crave your indulgence as I read into the parliamentary record, every press release that we issued following a visit by Sunway to my office. They came four times. The first was May 10, 2007. This is what the press release said:

“The Prime Minister is making moves to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago derives long term benefits from the presence of experienced foreign construction firms in the country.

At a meeting with a delegation from the Sunway Group at Whitehall, President of the group Chew Chee Kin responded to a call from the Prime Minister to partner with the government in an effort to expose local contractors to the technologies and models used by his firm, in its successful construction projects. Mr. Chew told the Prime Minister that the Sunway Group would embrace the opportunity to share its expertise with the people of Trinidad and Tobago, as a continuance of the company’s good relations with this country.

The Prime Minister indicated to the Sunway group that it was critical that the skill level of local small contractors was raised during the period of intense infrastructural development, the country was currently undergoing. The Prime Minister outlined to Mr. Chew the government’s priorities in relation to the areas of development of the sector, construction management and manufacturing of construction materials.

The delegation was headed by President Chew and included Country Manager Mr. Poon Koon Hoo and Senior Managing Director of the Sunway Group, K.I. Tan and Executive Director Agri-Business Q.C.The.”

That is the first one. Any deals?

The second one, July 18, 2007:

“Prime Minister Patrick Manning today met with The Managing Director of the Malaysian construction firm Sunway, responsible for constructing the recently completed Attorney General and Legal Affairs Tower in downtown Port-of-Spain.

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The Prime Minister and Mr. Foh-Kai Kwan discussed a variety of issues including possible collaboration between the Government and Sunway in the areas of training for workers in the construction sector, quarrying and the supply of construction materials.”

—a joint venture arrangement we suggested, to upgrade the quality of our local skills to ensure that there is a transfer of technology, and the companies that come here with expertise do not leave without our local people benefiting from it.

“The Prime Minister expressed concern that a Cartel exists in the local construction industry that had influence over the costs and supply of construction materials, the existence of this Cartel, he indicated, was not in the best interest of the continued growth of the construction sector.

Sunway was invited to partner with the government to bring equity back into the sector and to assist in the enhancement of the entire range of construction related services and products on offer in Trinidad and Tobago.”

The release goes on to say:

“Mr. Kwan also indicated to Prime Minister Manning that in addition to its expertise in construction, Sunway’s core competence was in quarrying, making it the largest quarrying firm in the world. He indicated Sunway’s willingness to collaborate with the government to meet the national demand for an improved highway network and to increase the nation’s hotel stock. The Prime Minister noted that he was aware of Sunway’s expertise in all three areas.

In addition Sunway is currently in talks with the government to establish a construction school in Trinidad and Tobago to ensure that in the future, local construction practitioners are equipped with skills that are in demand internationally.

The Topping Up ceremony to mark the end of the construction of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs Tower takes place tomorrow morning at 10.00 a.m.”

Any deals?

Mr. Maharaj SC: “Yuh would not see it on dat.”

Hon. P. Manning: But from the comments made, I got certain impressions and I am just trying to see.

We go on to the third one. That is what we were led to believe. The third one goes this way, Mr. Speaker:

“The Chairman of the Sunway Group met yesterday with Prime Minister Patrick Manning...”

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

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 90, I beg to move that Standing Order 41(2) be suspended during the contribution of the hon. Prime Minister.

Hon. Members: Why?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Leader of the House seeks my leave, pursuant to Standing Order 90, to move a Motion for the suspension of Standing Order 41(2), dealing with time limits of speeches in respect of the Member now addressing the House, the hon. Prime Minister. This is quite an extraordinary request. *[Interruption]*

Mr. S. Panday: Crazy!

Mr. Speaker: As Members are all aware, the suspension of a Standing Order is looked upon as a procedure to be adopted only in exceptional circumstances. Indeed, the Standing Orders say that either notice or leave of the Speaker is required. The present request, coming without notice, requires the leave of the Speaker before it can be put to the House. Every such request is to be taken on its merits, for there are no set rules to guide the Speaker in matters like these.

A Speaker must, therefore, exercise his discretion with utmost care and caution, after taking into consideration all the accompanying circumstances of an individual case.

When, therefore, this matter was raised with me, I was not moved to give leave. The Minister has subsequently assured me that this unusual request is motivated by matters of significant national importance, of which he has supporting documentary evidence. *[Interruption]*

Mr. S. Panday: Personal explanations.

Mr. Speaker: In those circumstances, I allow the Motion—*[Interruption]* Do you want to say something?

Mr. Maharaj SC: Mr. Speaker, I want to put it on record that the Opposition objects to any extension further than the normal period, which is 30 minutes, because the Prime Minister is an intervener in this debate. It was moved by the Minister. There is no precedence for this in Trinidad and none in the Commonwealth, in the short space of time I got notice of it. The only time there was an extension was when the Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams, moved a Motion and that was the Wooding Report.

Secondly—*[Interruption]*

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: And he was the mover of the Motion.

Mr. Maharaj SC: He was the mover of the Motion. The Standing Orders provide for the Prime Minister, under “Personal Explanations” or “Statements by Ministers”, to utilize time to make statements, but in a debate like this I think it would be a sad precedent and a bad precedent.

If the Government supports this Motion, the Opposition is only going to remain in this House for the 30 minutes, the 45 minutes that he already had, which is the normal period. That is with the greatest respect to the Speaker and with no discourtesy to the Speaker. But, on principle, we cannot allow this to happen.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the request to suspend Standing Order 41(2) was brought to the attention of the hon. Member for Tabaquite and he did indicate to me his disagreement with it. I listened to him and I took careful note of his concerns. However, in light of the assurance subsequently given to me by the Minister, I believe that this is a matter which warrants a decision of the House.

8.20 p.m.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 25

Noes 11

AYES

Imbert, Hon. C.

Manning, Hon. P.

Nunez-Tesheira, Hon. K.

Gopee-Scoon, Hon. P.

Kangaloo, Hon. C.

Abdul-Hamid, Hon. M.

Dumas, Hon. R.

Ross, Hon. J.

Taylor, Hon. P.

Swaratsingh, Hon. K.

Parsanlal, Hon. N.

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Beckles, Miss P.

Mc Donald, Hon. M.

Hunt, Hon. G.

Le Gendre, Hon. E.

Browne, Hon. Dr. A.

Callender, Hon. S.

Cox, Hon. D.

Jeffrey, Hon. F.

Hospedales, Hon. A

Joseph, R.

Hypolite, N.

Regrello, J.

Roberts, A.

Sinanan Ojah-Maharaj, Mrs. I.

NOES

Maharaj QC, R. L.

Warner, J.

Persad-Bissessar, Mrs. K.

Moonilal, Dr. R.

Gopeesingh, Dr. T.

Bharath, V.

Panday, S.

Panday, Miss M.

Sharma, C.

Peters, W.

Partap, H.

Dr. K. Rowley abstained.

Mr. Speaker: One abstention? Let us just clarify. The Member for Siparia has voted against.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: No.

Mr. Speaker: I think earlier on you said—okay, the Member for Diego Martin West has abstained.

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, are you mixing me up with the Member for Siparia?

Mr. Speaker: I am not sure.

Dr. Rowley: We are two different—

Mr. Speaker: So, you have abstained?

Dr. Rowley: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the matter having been clarified, 25 Members voted for, 11 against and there was one abstention.

Question agreed to.

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. In the two press releases that I have already read, I think the position is very clearly established. There were no deals involved. The Prime Minister, in the exercise of his function—at this time when we are seeking to attract expertise in foreign investment into the country—meets with all big investors who seek to come into Trinidad and Tobago as part of a plan to attract investment and to make Trinidad and Tobago the world-class society to which we all aspire.

The memorandum of understanding that was signed—I should just point out one aspect of it, “Services to be provided by Sunway”—said subject to the relevant procurement procedure laws, regulations and rules of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago that whatever is in here, is subject to the relevant procurement procedures laws, regulations and rules of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Where are the sweetheart arrangements that were suggested in the contribution of the hon. Member for Diego Martin West? Where are they? It is not here. Just for the record, I take the opportunity to lay this document on the Table of Parliament. [*Document laid on the table*]

Sunway is the largest quarrying firm in the world and a large firm that does construction work in Malaysia.

Mr. Maharaj SC: Mr. Speaker, I must thank the Prime Minister for giving way. [*Interruption*] We are following the normal rules. Can the hon. Prime

Minister tell this honourable House how did Sunway meet with him? How was that appointment arranged? How that meeting came about? Was it because three Ministers went and met them in Malaysia and that resulted in the meeting or did they come just out of the blue?

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, whenever companies come to Trinidad and Tobago, they normally come under the auspices of a ministry. It is normal in those circumstances that the Minister or an official in the ministry would be in contact with the Office of the Prime Minister to ensure that I meet with them and Sunway was no different.

Mr. Maharaj SC: Sorry to do you that. I am not going to trouble you again. I wonder if the hon. Prime Minister can tell us specifically whether Minister Saith, Mr. Calder Hart and Mr. Ken Julien met with Sunway prior to the meeting you had in Trinidad.

Hon. P. Manning: They did because you see they went to Malaysia sometime ago and yes they would have met with Sunway.

Mr. Partap: It is going to come out.

Hon. P. Manning: By all means, there is nothing to hide. Mr. Speaker, when we put up Scotts Quarry for bid, it was an open tender and four companies bid. When they did the assessment of those bids that met the requirement, three of the bids met the requirement. It was an open tender and Sunway won that bid on the basis of the superior proposal that it put to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Essentially, it involves a price for aggregate of about \$85 per metric ton. The second bidder put in a price of 10 per cent below the market price which was \$130 at the time and the third bidder put in a price of about \$146 per metric ton. Sunway was way below and, therefore, they won the bid.

In addition to that, the Government told Sunway that we wanted to be sure that it could produce at a certain level. This was after they won the bid. We then extracted that further from them, because we talked about a cartel existing in the construction before and what the Government was seeking to do was to break the cartel.

One of our mechanisms for controlling inflation in this country is by increasing supply; dealing with inflation from the supply side, and aggregate is a very important commodity in the construction sector. So, we sought to increase the amount of aggregate in the market. That is what we are trying to do. If we can do that then we can keep the price of aggregate down.

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In addition, Sunway agreed to keep the price for five years and nobody else agreed to do that. Their bid included a proposal to keep the price at their bid level of \$85 per metric ton for five years. The bid was clearly superior. The evaluating committee evaluated the bid and they came to the conclusion that Sunway was way and above the other two bidders and, therefore, they got the contract. What is the sweetheart arrangement? Consistent with Government's policy, you deal with it from the supply side. We are doing that with agriculture and so many other areas.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to tell you something else. *[Interruption]* What sweetheart agreement? They bid! Mr. Speaker, do you know what is the real problem? I am going to say why they are after UDeCott and Calder Hart. The real problem is that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is seeking to bring about new arrangements in the construction sector; arrangements that are opposed by the industry at this time. Do you know why? At this time, the construction sector is in the control of the architects, and the Government is trying to move to an arrangement that is more international in nature where the construction is controlled more by the contractors than by the architects, and where the Government is guaranteed—as we have had our experiences with all the international contractors that we have dealt with—of fixed price agreements and getting away from some of the arrangements in the sector now that have led to cost overruns and inordinately high prices for some of the facilities that we have to construct. We have made the point before.

Members opposite must have an open mind on these matters. The Government is fighting a battle. Fixed price contracts are not the norm in this country. What they do is that you get incomplete designs with professional sums involved in it, which means that you have lost control of your contract the minute you have that. Once you have professional sums in it, what they do is to sub-contract to whoever they want. In writing the specs sometimes they put specs that tie you in to this market or that market. We have made the point before.

The Carnival Centre at the Queen's Park Savannah, when we saw the original price for the roof it came in at \$788 million. Do you remember we said that? We said no, no. There are three suppliers for that roof in the world. The supplier that indicated the \$788 million price was an American supplier, but there is also a Malaysian supplier. We went to the American supplier and asked if he could reduce it and he said he does not bid. If they put it up for bid he is not bidding for any roof.

So, we went to the Malaysian supplier just to ask for the cost and the price fell immediately by \$45 million. That is what we are up against, ladies and gentlemen.

Is it asking too much to ask for the support of the Opposition as the Government seeks to put new arrangements in place to reduce the expenditure on public facilities? Is that asking too much? That is what we are asking.

Mr. Warner: What about your house?

Hon. P. Manning: My house? My house is in Vistabella. Mr. Speaker, the pedestrian nature of the Member for Chaguanas West. *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, that is what we are trying to do and, therefore, the stakes are high. This is what I am saying. We are trying to change the situation where we have lost control of the cost in a situation where the Government has control of these things and where we can keep these things within manageable levels and the trade is resisting it. I think they all know that. You do not have any idea how far they would go to achieve it.

Mr. Speaker, what I am going to say now—I am not ascribing to anybody, and I do not know who is responsible, but you listen to this—I do not think that you are going to believe what I am going to tell you now. I do not think you are going to believe it at all. Do you want to hear it?

Mr. Speaker, on Thursday, June 05, 2008 an article appeared in the *Trinidad Guardian* on page 14. Let me read the article for you all. *[Interruption]* Do you know the story? *[Interruption]* That is how you establish your credibility. You are going to learn these sophistications. As you spend more time in this Chamber you are going to understand these things. Mr. Speaker, on page 14 Malaysia report:

Meanwhile, the contentions involving Hart featured prominently in a full page article in the *Edge Financial Daily* of May 12th a publication in Malaysia.

This is what the article was saying in the *Guardian*. This paper gives local insights on global perspectives on business. The article containing allegations against Hart and his Wife did not carry a by line although most of the items in the newspaper carried by lines of the writers.

This is the *Guardian* article. Written in poor English in many places, the article largely focused on Hart's wife and alluded to the Sunway Corporation which is involved in local projects and is at the centre of the more recent allegations against Hart. The article carried an alleged copy of a Malaysian police report. The article urged Manning to cut ties with the Harts. The article also stated that Manning's legacy would not be remembered for the good things he had done.

Mr. Speaker, this article appears in the *Guardian* dated Thursday, June 05, 2008. The lawyers for Mr. Hart contacted the *Guardian* and asked them on what

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basis they wrote such an article. The lawyers for the *Guardian* sent a document to the lawyers for Mr. Hart which was the publication of a newspaper called the *Edge Financial Daily*—it is a Malaysian publication—dated Tuesday, May 13, 2008.

On page 13 of that publication—they said that is the source—look at it on page 13. [*Newspaper in hand*] You see—

Hon. Members: We cannot see.

Hon. P. Manning: You cannot see! Look at it. [*Newspaper in hand*] You have in this column, a season forecast drop in earnings; Kenwood Victor to form holding company on October 01; and Singapore Telecom to offer IP home in four Asian markets. There are three articles here and then there is an article: “What’s in a name” where they waded into Hart and Manning and everybody else.

8.35 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know what caused it. The lawyers for Mr. Hart decided to contact the editors of the *Edge* newspaper and ask them if they could send them a copy of the publication of that newspaper for that particular day, and this is what they sent. [*Member holds newspaper in the air*] See it? *The Edge Financial Daily*. On page 13, this is page 13, Mr. Speaker, you see it. [*Member holds newspaper in the air*] It does have for the season forecast drop in earning in the outer column; it has Kenwood Victor in the outer column; it has Singapore Telecom in the outer column; this is correct, but what it has in here [*Member holds up another newspaper*] is very different from what this one says.

This one talks about HSBC sets aside IMB \$10.2 billion in first quarter for US loans. This is the document that was sent by the editors of the *Edge Financial* newspaper, and this is the document that the *Guardian* used as a basis for their article on June 05. When this document was drawn to the attention of the editors of the *Edge Financial Daily* newspaper, the editors said they know nothing of this. This is what they published. [*Member holds up newspaper*]

In other words, somebody took this newspaper, removed from it what was on this part of the page and inserted an article in it that was contemptuous, disrespectful and libellous of Mr. Hart and the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. I do not know how the *Guardian* came into possession of it, but having come into the possession of the *Guardian*, the *Guardian* now uses that as a basis for an article which I read out to this honourable House a few minutes ago on page 14 of Thursday, June 05.

That is the extent to which they are prepared to go. Now you begin to understand what is involved in this matter. I ask the question: who has such a diabolical mind in this country to do something like that?

Hon. Member: Call names and I will whistle.

Hon. P. Manning: I have no names to call. You are surprised? Some of my friends opposite cannot believe this. The Member for Oropouche East, you would have believed that had I told you it? You would not have believed that, you know. That is what we are up against. Therefore, those of us who want to operate with integrity and try to ensure that this country operates properly, on an even keel and with the best interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago at heart, have to face those slings and arrows on a continuing basis. Then we have an Opposition across there that comes and says all kinds of things, and supported by my good friend, the Member for Diego Martin West—supported by my good friend, it pains me, Mr. Speaker.

That is not the end of it. That is not the end of it at all. That is going to have a sequel in the courts and we are going to know who is responsible for what and in fact, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, I am going to draw this to the attention of the police authorities, let them investigate it overseas. Interpol should be brought into a matter like that and it should be properly investigated. I only recently knew about it.

PETRONAS, in the Sunway issue, they raised questions about a three week old company.

Mr. Maharaj SC: “What happen for that”?

Hon. P. Manning: Member, remember that question? The three-week old company issue? The allegations that were made by the Member for Tabaquite in respect of a company that he said was three weeks old—the Member for Diego Martin West alluded to it also—which bid for a contract for \$360 million, got the contract and within days they were taken over by Sunway, that is how Sunway came into the country, and that nobody has made any statements on the matter. Quite correct, Mr. Speaker. I will tell you why. When that revelation was made by the Member for Tabaquite, that is when we appointed the commission of enquiry. We said on the basis of that, we are going to the enquiry, and UDeCott had prepared a release to be made and their lawyers advised them that since a commission of enquiry has been established, let us make that explanation before the commission. And that is the reason you have no answer to it so far. I have the press release.

Mr. Maharaj SC: Well give it to us.

Hon. P. Manning: For what? [*Interruption*] I am merely saying, let me not say it because you all are so easy to misinterpret those things. I am saying it was a private document, it was never published. Lay what on the table? I have it here; I have the facts, but you all have to wait until the commission of enquiry. You want to know what they are going to say? Wait for the commission of enquiry. You asked for it.

Mr. Speaker, they got the commission of enquiry; they try to raise the bar every time, you know. Now that they have the commission of enquiry, he now wants a forensic audit with it. Do you think you could ever satisfy them? When you get a forensic audit, what are you going to want? What else would you want when you get a forensic audit? Could they ever be satisfied? They cannot be; they have no intentions of being satisfied; they have no desire to be.

All they are about is destruction and the denigration of innocent citizens under the cloak of parliamentary privilege. That is what they do.[*Desk thumping*] The Member for Caroni East, the last one I expected to do that is the one who did it. Jerry Narace, he is going to deal with you; he is going to answer you, let me not say “deal”, but he is going to answer you. All I will tell you is this; I regret that you are the one who did that. I did not expect it from you.

Dr. Gopeesingh: If it is glaring, why not?

Hon. P. Manning: It is not glaring, and you know that. I did not expect it from you. If it had come from others on that side, I would have said it was all right, not you. You may not know it, you know, but I had to intervene on this side to prevent certain documents relating to you from coming to the public domain. I had to intervene to stop it.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Let it come, Prime Minister.

Hon. P. Manning: No, please, I am just telling you.[*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*] You see, Mr. Speaker, we are trying to maintain certain standards in this Parliament.[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Maharaj SC: Like not answering questions.

Hon. P. Manning: Not answering questions?

Mr. Maharaj SC: Not answering questions.

Hon. P. Manning: What questions we did not answer? Let me put the question to the Member for Diego Martin West: Is that true? Because he said that

too. The Member for Diego Martin West said that we are not answering questions. Mr. Speaker, when the Member for Diego Martin West was the Minister of Housing and they asked him who get and who—What was the answer on two occasions? What was the answer he gave to the House?

Dr. Rowley: The answer was—and I seem to recall you approving it—that the HDC was engaged in mortgage arrangements with its clients, and mortgage being a banking business, the HDC was not prepared to discuss its banking arrangements with the public as was being requested. That was the answer.

Hon. P. Manning: The effect is the same.

Mr. Maharaj SC: Loyalty.

Hon. P. Manning: The effect is the same. Then he said—I agree entirely with the Member for Diego Martin West on that answer. That is proper operations. All of a sudden we are hearing all kinds of things from them on that side, and trying to give an impression to the national community that we are hiding. Hiding from who? Hiding what? [*Crosstalk*] Listen “nah”, we are afraid of none of them on that side. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, we will take on any one of them; we will take on any one, any day, any time, any place! [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Members: If you want fight—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Please, please. Please hon. Members, we are not going to fight, certainly not in here. [*Crosstalk*] Please continue.

Hon. Members: “What yuh gallerying so for?” [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Dr. Gopeesingh: We must recoil in fear.

Hon. P. Manning: Nobody “ain’t” fear nobody. Nobody ask you to fear me. Nobody ask you to fear nobody.

Dr. Gopeesingh: We fear no one!

Hon. P. Manning: That is fear enough.

Mr. Speaker: Listen, while the both of you all are inside here, “fraid” me, “eh”. So, please.[*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Manning: And you know, Mr. Speaker, you will get no opposition from me.

Mr. Maharaj SC.: You will get no opposition from me.

Hon. P. Manning: PETRONAS, he mentioned PETRONAS once or twice, and my friend started off by saying: well, I do not know, I am not so sure, I could be wrong and so on, and then ends up by saying, that is not the model to advocate. Who is advocating any model of PETRONAS? What I was saying was how different countries did it in different circumstances.

In Malaysia, what they do is they use the oil companies to do it. Everybody is trying to get away from the strictures of the public service, while they do the public service report that is necessary. Everybody is trying to do that because we are trying to accelerate our rate of development; everybody is trying to do that. In Malaysia what they did is they gave an urban development mandate to that oil company that has a revenue stream and put the oil company to report to the Prime Minister. That is what they did in Malaysia. I am not saying we are advocating that; I am saying that is what the Malaysians did. In Dubai they did it differently. They do not bid on anything in Dubai; you go to the ruler, he says what the bill is, how much are you paying, how much are you charging me; they say \$300 million; he say you could do it; they say yes; he say okay, take a drink with me.

As you take the drink, he shakes your hand. How much time? Two years. He says, okay, the second drink I am having with you will be two years from today. That is how they do it: You either perform or you do not perform. If you perform that second drink is to congratulate you; if you do not perform, it is the last drink. That is how they do it in Dubai. I never said we are trying to advocate that here. How has the Government of Trinidad and Tobago done it? How are we seeking to do it? Because there must be a way, and the mechanism that we have sought to use is the special purpose state enterprise. That is what we are doing.

It is not rocket science. That is what we are seeking to do and I am just trying to tell my friend from Diego Martin West, I am not advocating the PETRONAS model in Trinidad and Tobago. You have no right to make that assumption. You started off by saying you do not know then started to chastise me. For what?

Mr. Maharaj SC: You all better have a private discussion. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. P. Manning: What private discussion; it was said in here, Mr. Speaker. I am responding to the allegations that have been levelled at I, at me, sorry.[*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*] I sat in this Parliament when the former Member for Caroni East, Ganga Singh, got up and talked about Landate; that was the first time I heard about Landate, I knew nothing about it. My good friend and my colleague from Diego Martin West did not consider it important enough a matter to take his political leader into his confidence; he did not do that, and so like

everybody else I heard about it here for the first time. There was a commission of enquiry—

Dr. Moonilal: He did not tell you about that before?

Hon. P. Manning: No, he did not—there was an investigation by the Integrity Commission, and the matter rests. I have to say that there is one lingering doubt that I have on that whole issue. The contract was awarded to a Tobagonian company, the principal of which is Mr. Warner.

Mr. Warner: Not me, not me.

Hon. P. Manning: That money too small for you.*[Laughter]* The next thing that happened is Mr. Warner subcontracts that contract to a company many times the size of his own firm. As we understand it, if you are subcontracting, it is a big firm that subcontracts to a small firm; a small firm does not subcontract to a big firm. I found that very curious. What is worse is he subcontracted to a firm that was operating in Tobago on a Government contract at the time, at a similar stage of development to the Landate project, and in respect of which the materials could easily be interchangeable. That is what happened.*[Interruption]* I do not know what the answer is.

All I am saying is that I found it very strange. How could a small firm subcontract to a larger firm?

8.50 p.m.

Dr. Rowley: Is the Prime Minister prepared to acknowledge that contrary to what he just said the report to the commission of enquiry will show, not that Warner Construction Company contracted the project to a larger firm, but contracted a portion of the work to another firm? Would you acknowledge that?

Hon. P. Manning: Yes, of course. I take what the Member says without more. But I have to say this. The Member for Diego Martin West talked about being accused of being a defender of the local construction sector—local contractors. I have to tell him I never heard that allegation; that was not the allegation I heard. I heard that he was the mouthpiece for a local contractor. That is what I heard! The local contractor was NH. That is what I heard!

Mr. Maharaj SC: That is a hell of an allegation!

Hon. P. Manning: That is what I heard. You cannot tell me what I heard! I am saying that I did not hear what the Member heard; I heard something else. What is strange about that is the firm that was subcontracted was NH, so I do not

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know. I do not know! I do not know what the facts are; I can only tell you what I heard. I find the whole thing very strange, Mr. Speaker. I find the whole thing very strange.

Mr. Maharaj SC: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. P. Manning: I thought you all were going?

Mr. Warner: But this is better than prayers. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert: “W-a-a-y, all that gran’ charge; 30 minutes gone long time. It gone long time, all that gran; charge. That 30 minutes gone long time.” [*Laughter*]

Mr. Warner: This is better than prime time television. [*Inaudible*]

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, in my capacity as Prime Minister, all kinds of things come to my attention. [*Interruption*] You want to go? I will sit down for you to go. [*Interruption*] You want to hear about this one now.

Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. P. Manning: Cleaver Heights Housing Development—

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: Take your time Prime Minister.

Hon. P. Manning: Yes, drink some cold water. [*Interruption*] See, Mr. Speaker, you see; the Minister of Finance. [*Interruption*] Cleaver Heights Housing Development—I am told that I should look into this project. So, I just asked for a report from the Minister concerned and the Minister sent me this document. I saw a letter in this document dated May 03, 2005— Just give them a chance to take leave of the House, Mr. Speaker.

[*Opposition Members leave Chamber*]

Mr. Speaker: If the Member for Caroni East wants to stay, please, but if you are leaving—[*Laughter*]

Hon. P. Manning: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The document that I received from the Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment, is a letter dated May 03, 2005. It is a letter to Mr. John Connon, Managing Director, NH International (Caribbean) Limited. There is a housing project in Arima and it is a joint venture between a private organization and the State, through the HDC. The private organization incidentally is NH International (Caribbean) Limited and this is what the letter says: that there were two parts to the project, one part is the construction of the houses at a cost of \$92,649,000 and the other part to the project is the infrastructure, utility works and so on, at a cost of \$40,800,000.

When you add the two figures together you get \$133,449,000; but curiously enough the letter is for \$143,449,000. It appeared to us that it was a typographical error; some error must have been made, because this only came to my attention today. We have been trying to find out what was the basis of this and even if something was done in error, when this went to the contractor, the contractor must have seen it. What did the contractor do? The contractor was NH International (Caribbean) Limited. Try as we may and try as I may, as of now, I have been given no proper explanation for this; \$10 million just missing.

Since the Cabinet took a decision on this project on the basis of a submission from the Minister of Housing, Planning and Development, who at the time was the Member for Diego Martin West, I have a question to ask the Member for Diego Martin West since I could get the answer nowhere else: "Where the money gone? Where it gone?" I do not know.

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I am thankful to the Prime Minister. Could you just repeat what you just said, because I really lost you? Could you repeat what you just said prior to the question you posed to me about what was in the letter? It appears as though you are imputing something to me. For my own benefit could you repeat what you said about the figures? What was the story with the figures? I did not get.

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, let me make it clear. I am not imputing any improper motive to anybody.

Dr. Rowley: So what are you asking me?

Hon. P. Manning: I am saying that he was the Minister concerned. The Cabinet took a decision at a cost of \$143,449,000 on the basis of a submission from the Minister of Housing. That is all I am saying. I am saying if I cannot find an answer any place, perhaps the Minister of Housing at the time is in a position to assist me, so I am asking him! Where it gone?

Dr. Rowley: I am asking you to repeat the computation which resulted in the \$10 million missing, I did not get that.

Hon. P. Manning: Okay. The cost of the housing for 408 residential units was \$92,649,000 and the infrastructure cost \$40,800,000. When you add those two figures together you get \$133,449,000 but the contract is for \$143,449,000.

Dr. Rowley: Thank you for giving way, I promise I would not disturb you again. Is the Prime Minister implying by his submission that I as Minister of Housing had something to do with the award of that contract and therefore I am

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responsible for the sums involved in the contract? Is that what the Prime Minister is putting in *Hansard*?

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, let me say what I said just now, and I wish to repeat it again. I ascribe no motive to the Member for Diego Martin West. All I am saying is, the Member for Diego Martin West was the Minister of Housing on whose recommendation the Cabinet took a decision for \$143 million, and therefore since I cannot get an answer anywhere else, perhaps he is in a position to assist me and I am asking him, “where the money gone?” That is all.

Dr. Rowley: I thank you, hon. Prime Minister and I promise I will not interrupt you again unless it is absolutely essential. Mr. Speaker, I want to put on *Hansard* that that which the Prime Minister has produced here this evening, as Minister of Housing, I had absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with any discussion, evaluation or award of that contract or any other contract at the HDC or the NHA. As Minister of Housing I did not get involved in any details to do with any contract, evaluation, recommendation or award and I put that without fear of contradiction.

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, there is a letter in the documentation here that is also signed by the Minister of Housing—I am going to have to find it—I just thought that the Member for Diego Martin West ought to know that. I am not pursuing it you know. I am not pursuing it. That is going to be a subject of an enquiry, because I will now officially ask about it. I just discovered it. I will now officially ask about that because I would like to know what has happened here. I do not know!

Mr. Speaker, now to the budget. Look how much time I had to spend on this. Look how much time! All kinds of innuendoes, all kinds of half truths, all kinds of misleading statements forcing the Prime Minister to spend proper parliamentary time to answer allegations that I have no right answering. All kinds of imputations, they have impugned my integrity in so many ways, I take all of that, Mr. Speaker. I take all of that!

Dr. Rowley: They impugned yours, so you impugn mine. So, since they impugned you, you intend to impugn mine, and you are the Prime Minister of the country.

Hon. P. Manning: I am not impugning anybody. I am just asking questions. I am not impugning anybody's motive.

Dr. Rowley: In baseball you have three strikes, you have two strikes and on the third strike you are out. [*Inaudible*]

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, “do so eh like so”.

The budget. What is the difference between Members opposite and ourselves? The difference is that we have a vision and whatever policy prescriptions that we outline are outlined in the context of that vision. Do you know what the vision does among other things? The vision sets the standards by which we will conduct our business. When we build houses for example, prior to us coming back in the year 2000, the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago—a PNM Cabinet—had to build a housing development, and we took the position that we wanted to put all the utilities underground. Somebody would have said that would cost too much money and instead of doing it that way we could easily build more houses and that would have been a plausible argument and we would have gone with that. But since our vision is clear, developed country status by the year 2020 and all that goes with that. We know, Mr. Speaker, that we are trying to set for the people of Trinidad and Tobago a standard of living similar to the standard of living that we get in developed countries. Therefore, if you are going to be building houses you put everything underground.

Look at Ramgoolie Lands in Curepe, or for that matter Corinth Hills in Pleasantville. Look at both of them. People who have been to Ramgoolie Lands will tell you when it rains the water just disappears. All the drainage is underground. It just disappears. All the drainage is underground, the electricals are underground and the cables are underground. It is a just a model community. All of it designed on the basis of a vision that we hold for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, Members opposite have no such vision and therefore they have no policy, no plan, no programme and we have no idea of that for which they stand. We just do not know. In achieving our vision, it was Dr. Eric Williams, who, some years ago said—now we have targeted the modern industrial state—that, “The modern industrial state of Trinidad and Tobago must comprise of petrochemicals, iron and steel, aluminium and plastics.” In the world of the 21st Century an essential element of that is a proper ICT capability.

We have announced that. All that we have to do now is to indicate to the population when it would be done. Do not expect that in next year's budget we are going to announce that again. We announced it already. You will hear about it again, because we will seek to tell the people where we are and where it is. So, when people say, “Same ol’, same ol’”, it cannot be that people are expecting that in every budget we have that we are going to have some new set of fancy prescriptions. You could only give free tertiary education once you know, you

cannot do it twice. You could only reduce your tax rate to 25 per cent once, you cannot do it twice. Once you have done it you have reached to the point you want to reach and therefore the tax structure does not have to be taxed again except for other things that may have to be done to it.

What I am saying is this. That we have reached to a place where we are implementing rapidly and getting to where we wish to be in terms of developed country status in the shortest possible time, and in many respects we are already ahead of where we had anticipated we would have been at this time.

In the energy sector we already have petrochemicals: 10 ammonia plants, seven methanol plants, we already have that.

In terms of iron and steel, we are making billets and what we call, rounds. To complete the slate, we need to have flats, and therefore, when Essar Steel comes in here—the construction of their plant should begin in the first quarter of 2009—they will be producing flats, and we now have to see what downstream industries we can develop in Trinidad and Tobago, to ensure that we have an industry based domestically, on the basis of iron and steel, rounds and flats.

9.05 p.m.

The next one is aluminium, again, plant construction to begin in the first quarter of 2009. When we have aluminium, it is another pillar and then after that it is plastic—two sets of plastic. Members opposite spoke about the polypropylene already and we have signed the agreement on that. The plant is to be constructed at a cost of \$2.5 billion.

Mr. Speaker, in respect of ethylene and polyethylene, we do not have the critical mass of ethane that is required to make it, so we have been able to negotiate an arrangement whereby we will start the downstream industries in Trinidad and Tobago on the base of imported polyethylene and when we get the critical mass of ethane, we will manufacture that domestically into polyethylene and we will continue with the development of our industry. In other words, we are going to develop a polyethylene industry, heavy plastic industry long before we begin to manufacture ethylene or polyethylene in our own country, innovative way of doing things and that is how it is. That is how it works.

Mr. Speaker, we are proud of that, as indeed, we are very proud of our education system. I listened to the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre and the Member for Tunapuna, two Ministers in Education; one Science, Technology and Tertiary Education and the other, pre-school, primary and secondary education, both of them bringing this Parliament up to date with where we are. We now have a

national system of education at the primary and secondary levels, where we have a new curriculum; we have proper management in schools, departments of school deans and heads of department; we have school boards in place; and we have certain subjects that are compulsory and so on in place now. All that has to be done now is the CVQs, that is to say, the technical vocational education, and we are moving to get that done over the next two years to ensure that we complete the system in the way that it has been designed.

The Member for Pointe-a-Pierre talked about the University of Trinidad and Tobago, which incidentally, is one of our big success stories in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I can tell you, when in 2003 that went into the budget, I was not so sure where we would have reached by now. I was sure it would have taken us a few years to get off the ground. Mr. Speaker, it is a credit to the Government that we got it off the ground in one year, to the point where this September, the UTT will have over 5,000 students—is that correct?

Ms. Kangaloo: Yes.

Hon. P. Manning:—and a proper post-graduate programme for approximately 230 people at the University of Trinidad and Tobago. We are moving faster and faster in the direction of achieving the targets that we set for ourselves in tertiary education, that is to say, a 60 per cent participation rate of the secondary school population by the year 2015. When we came it was 11 per cent, right now we are still counting it, but we feel it is closer to 40 per cent by now—

Ms. Kangaloo: Between 40 to 50 per cent.

Hon. P. Manning: See, already we are somewhere between 40 and 50 per cent. We are checking it, Mr. Speaker, and we will be more definite in due course. So that the 60 per cent that we target for 2015, we are likely to achieve before the year 2015. I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that when we took that decision, that appeared to very far in the future for us. It appeared to be a very difficult target to achieve, but it looks as though not only will we achieve it, but we will achieve it well ahead of the time that we anticipated we would have done it; a big success story. We are proud of the fact that in the secondary school system, we no longer have any shifted schools. There are no junior secondary schools, everybody who passes SEA now goes to a five-year school and there is less quarrelling about transfers from this school to that, to that, to that. Five-and seven-year schools and you could go up to advanced level in the school system if you want. [*Desk thumping*]

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I know that the Members of the House have been very kind indeed and I have really extended this Parliament much longer than I had intended to, but I would have liked to talk a bit about inflation and our highway programmes and water programmes. Permit me, Mr. Speaker, with your leave to deal with one more matter and it is ICT. We have a very innovative proposal from TSTT. Do you know what it is, Mr. Speaker? It is to make Trinidad and Tobago a connected society. Fiber optics cable to the curb, all over the country; 30 per cent of that buried by the year 2013 and the next 60 per cent buried by the year 2019, but the entire system will be in place shortly after 2013.

Mr. Speaker, what that means is, that from the curb to the house, you now have an option as to what to use. If you have fiber optics from the curb to your terminal, then you get the highest speed, and it is gigabits speed you are talking about. High, high, high speeds! TSTT has come to us with this proposal; we have not taken a decision on it as yet, it is before a Cabinet sub-committee right now, but it is one of the exciting new ideas that has come up in this budget, as we contemplate our programme of activities for the year 2009.

Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago is moving on. I want to tell you, that to develop this country at the rate you want to develop it, is an uphill fight. There are so many impediments that are put in your way, but those of us on this side have a sincerity of purpose, and we will continue to fight on because we fight not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers and spite, wickedness in high places. [*Desk thumping*]

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

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Thursday, October 02, 2008 at 10.00 a.m. to continue and complete the budget debate.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 9.12 p.m.