

Leave of Absence

Friday, October 31, 2008

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, October 31, 2008

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the following Members requesting leave of absence from sittings of the House: hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira, Member of Parliament for D'Abadie/O'Meara for the period October 29, 2008 to November 05, 2008; hon. Donna Cox, Member of Parliament for Laventille East/Morvant from today's sitting of the House; hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj SC, Member of Parliament for Tabaquite from today's sitting of the House; and hon. Kelvin Ramnath, Member of Parliament for Couva South from today's sitting of the House. The leave which these Members seek is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Annual administration report of the Betting Levy Board for the period July 01, 2006 to June 30, 2007. [*The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Venture Capital Incentive Programme for the year ended September 30, 2002. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

Papers 1 to 2 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, the Government is in a position to answer six questions today, which are Nos. 135, 148, 198, 210, 213, and 231. I would ask that the other questions be deferred for a period of two weeks.

The following questions stood on the Order Paper:

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

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

**Financial Support for Needy Students
(Details of Selection)**

- 60.** Could the hon. Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education state:
- (a) how much money was spent in 2007 to support needy students seeking tertiary training abroad;
 - (b) how these students were selected for financial support;
 - (c) whether there was any advertisement with respect to the availability of this fund for assistance to local students studying abroad; and
 - (d) if the answer to (c) is in the affirmative, could the Minister state the dates and the specific media in which these advertisements were placed? [*Dr. H. Rafeeq*]

**Major Landslips
(Repair of)**

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

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

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

Mayaro/Rio Claro Region

(Details of Expenditure and Services to Housing Project)

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

Mayaro/Rio Claro Region

(Details of Sub-contractors)

- 179 (B)** Could the hon. Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment state:
- (a) the names of all contractors and sub-contractors attached to each HDC project in the Rio Claro/Mayaro region;
 - (b) the services provided by each; and
 - (c) the actual sums paid to them to date? [*Mr. W. Peters*]

Performing Arts Centre

(Original Estimated Cost for)

- 185.** With respect to the Performing Arts Centre, could the hon. Minister of Finance state:
- (a) what was the original estimated cost for the construction and furnishing of the centre;
 - (b) is there any anticipated cost overrun given the present state of the construction of the centre; and
 - (c) were there any tendering procedures followed for this project? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

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

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

**St. Vincent and the Grenadines
(Details of Special Terms of Financing and other Benefits)**

- 188.** With respect to this country's provision of \$78 million to the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines for the construction of an airport in that country, could the hon. Minister of Finance state:
- (a) are any special terms attached to this financing such as preference for local contractors and suppliers of goods and services, and if not, why; and
 - (b) what economic and other benefits does the Government envisage will come from this expenditure? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

**Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago
(Moneys Disbursed)**

- 189.** With respect to the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago, could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs state:
- (a) how much money was given by the company to the fourteen (14) national sports organizations for the period October 2007 to July 2008;
 - (b) the disaggregate sums used from the company's Funding Service Level Agreement; and
 - (c) how much money was provided directly to the Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation, during the period October 2007 and July 2008 and the purposes for which these sums were provided? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

**Trinidad and Tobago Youth Cup
(Provision of Funds for)**

- 190.** A. Could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs state how much money the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago and the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs provided for the Trinidad and Tobago Youth Cup in 2007 and in 2008, including the waiving of the fees for the use of the stadium?
- B. Was the sum granted by the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago and the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs the full sum requested for the hosting of the Trinidad and Tobago Youth Cup? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

**Sporting Facilities
(Details of Work Suspension)**

- 191.** A. Could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs state the number of sporting facilities in which the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago has suspended work, the reasons for the suspension and the cost of same, inclusive of moneys spent thus far?
- B. Could the Minister state what will be the cost to complete the work that was suspended in each facility? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

**Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago
(Details of Acting Chief Executive Officer)**

- 192.** A. Could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs state the method of selection for the Acting Chief Executive Officer of the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago?
- B. What is the evaluation process and is this process documented anywhere? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

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

- 195.** With respect to the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago, could the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs state:
- (a) the number and location of the projects where the company is experiencing problems; and
- (b) the nature of the problems being experienced? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

**Director of Sport
(Details of)**

- 196.** A. Could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs advise whether the Director of Sport at the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, who also works for the University of Trinidad and Tobago, has been appointed a paid advisor to the Trinidad and Tobago Amateur Boxing Board?
- B. If so, could the Minister advise how was this made possible and state the terms and conditions of the Director's appointment as a paid advisor to the Trinidad and Tobago Amateur Boxing Board? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

**Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago
(Relocation of)**

- 197.** A. Could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs advise whether there are plans to move the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago from its present location in Couva, to Port of Spain?
- B. If so, could the Minister state the proposed cost of the relocation, the proposed new location and the rental costs involved?
- C. Could the Minister also state whether any tendering procedures were instituted in deciding on the new location? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

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

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

**Chaguanas Borough Corporation
(Details of)**

- 204.** Could the hon. Minister of Local Government state:
- (a) how much money has been received to date by the Borough Corporation of Chaguanas for this fiscal year; and
- (b) how much money has been spent to date by the corporation for this fiscal year? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

**Sport Projects
(Status of)**

- 205.** Could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs state:
- (a) the Sport Projects that were started during the period October 01, 2007 to date; and
 - (b) what is the present status of the projects? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

**National Basketball Federation of Trinidad and Tobago
(Release of Funds)**

- 206.** A. Could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs state whether funds applied for by the National Basketball Federation of Trinidad and Tobago, during the period October 01, 2007 to date have been released?
- B. If not, could the Minister state the reasons why? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

**Community Youth Programme
(Cost of Launching)**

- 207.** A. Could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs state whether the Community Youth Programme was launched at the Scarlet Ibis Room of the Trinidad Hilton?
- B. If so, what was the cost of launching this programme at the Hilton? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

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

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

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

214. Is the hon. Minister of National Security:

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

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

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

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

**Victims of Crime
(Compensation for)**

- 216.** A. Could the hon. Minister of Social Development state whether the Government intends to compensate victims of crimes who, because of the non-implementation of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Act of 1999, were not able to access and receive the benefits to which they were entitled under the Act?
- B. If the answer is negative, could the Minister state the reasons why not?
- C. If the answer is in the affirmative, could the Minister give the particulars of such compensation? [*Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC*]

**Existing Noise Law
(Contravention of)**

- 217.** A. Could the hon. Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment state whether she is aware that persons who play very loud music, above the prescribed decibel levels, in their homes as well as in their motor vehicles are contravening the existing law?
- B. If she is aware, could she state what machinery is in place to prevent this from taking place? [*Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC*]

**Land Acts
(Implementation of)**

- 218.** A. Could the hon. Attorney General state whether the Government intends to implement the Land Adjudication Act (No. 14 of 2000), the Land Tribunal Act (No. 15 of 2000) and the Registration of Titles to Land Act (No. 16 of 2000)?
- B. If so, could the Attorney General inform the House of its planned date of implementation?
- C. If it does not intend to implement the Acts, could the Attorney General give reasons for its non-implementation? [*Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC*]

Protection and Benefits for Individuals under Acts

- 219.** With respect of the following Acts, could the hon. Minister of Social Development state when the respective individuals can get the protection and benefits due to them:
- (a) Homes for Older Persons Act (No. 38 of 2000)
- (b) Socially Displaced Persons Act (No. 59 of 2000)
- (c) Children's Authority Act (No. 60 of 2000)
- (d) Children's Community Residences and Foster Homes and Nurseries Act (No. 64 of 2000)? [*Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC*]

**Acquisition of Buses
(Tendering Procedures for)**

- 220.** A. Could the hon. Minister of Works and Transport state the tendering procedures, if any, that were followed in the acquisition of 151 buses between 2002 to 2007?

- B. Could the Minister state whether the Government did the acquisition through any agent, giving the name(s) where relevant? [*Mr. S. Panday*]

**Immigrants in Trinidad
(Number of)**

- 222.** Could the hon. Minister of National Security state:
- (a) how many Chinese, Korean, Ghanaian, Nigerian and Cameroonian immigrants are in Trinidad;
 - (b) how many have entered and remained in the country illegally? [*Mr. S. Panday*]

**Illegal Immigrants
(Details of)**

- 223.** A. Is the hon. Minister of National Security aware that a large number of illegal immigrants are employed and are exploited by private security firms and construction firms in Trinidad?
- B. Could the Minister state what steps have been taken to deal with the rampant illegal immigrants in Trinidad and Tobago? [*Mr. S. Panday*]

**Trinidad and Tobago Sport Camps
(Details of)**

- 226.** With regard to the Trinidad and Tobago Sport Camps held between August 4—22, 2008, could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs:
- (a) provide details of the procurement procedure for the equipment purchased with particular regard to sport equipment and water; and
 - (b) state how many service providers submitted quotations in these areas? [*Mr. J. Warner*]

**Mr. Israel Khan SC
(List of briefs)**

- 232.** Could the hon. Attorney General give a list of briefs given by the State and/or State Agencies to Mr. Israel Khan, SC and the fees incurred therefor? [*Mr. S. Panday*]

**Princes Town Regional Corporation
(Spraying of Region)**

- 233.** A. Could the hon. Minister of Local Government advise whether on or about the 2nd September, 2008, the Princes Town Regional Corporation sought permission to make virements in order to carry out spraying in the region, in order to deal with dengue?
- B. If the answer to (a) is in the affirmative, was permission given and when?
- C. If the answer to (a) is in the negative, when is such permission expected to be granted? [*Mr. S. Panday*]

Questions, by leave, deferred.

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

- 135. Mr. Winston Peters** (*Mayaro*) asked the hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs:

With respect to the Community Centres Programme, could the Minister state:

- (a) whether new community centres will be built within the Mayaro/Rio Claro region during the period 2008—2010;
- (b) if the answer to (a) is in the affirmative, at what locations and what is the proposed cost of each;
- (c) whether refurbishment/repairs will be undertaken to the existing community centres within the Mayaro/Rio Claro region; and
- (d) if the answer to (c) is in the affirmative, which centres are earmarked for development, what is the budget for these works and what are the proposed dates for commencement?

The Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs (Hon. Marlene Mc Donald): Mr. Speaker, the Ministry's community centres programme for the Mayaro/Rio Claro region consist of:

1. the construction of two new community centres over the period 2008—2010; and
2. the refurbishment, modernization and enhancement of three community centres.

Oral Answers to Questions
[HON. M. MC DONALD]

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With respect to parts (a) and (b) of the question, the location and proposed cost of each new community centre to be constructed over the period 2008—2010 are:

- i. Charuma: in Charuma Village, Biche, at an estimated cost of \$4.7 million.
- ii. San Pedro/Tabaquite/Rio Claro—at an estimated cost of \$3.8 million.

With respect to parts (c) and (d) of the question, three existing community centres in the Mayaro/Rio Claro region have been earmarked for development. These existing community centres are the Ortoire Village Community Centre, the Radix Village Community Centre and the Booze Village Community Centre. Details relating to work on these centres are:

1. Modernization and enhancement works commenced at the Ortoire Village Community Centre in August of 2008. The contract price to the work is \$3,361,812, plus VAT of \$504,271.
2. Refurbishment works commenced at the Radix Village Community Centre in July of 2008. The contract price to the work is \$431,550, plus VAT of \$64,732.
3. Development work at the Booze Village Community Centre is estimated at \$2,970,000 and is it proposed to commence in March of 2009.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Housing Construction in Edinburgh 500 (Details of)

48. Dr. Hamza Rafeeq (*Caroni Central*) asked hon. Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment:

With respect to the high-rise housing complexes being constructed in the Edinburgh 500 area in Chaguanas could the Minister state:

- (a) whether the necessary approvals were obtained from the Chaguanas Borough Corporation;
- (b) if the answer to (a) is in the affirmative, what were the dates of such approvals;
- (c) what is the cost of construction of the housing units; and
- (d) at what price will these units be sold or rented?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, in the absence of the Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment, I will answer the question.

With respect to the high-rise housing complexes being constructed in the Edinburgh 500 area in Chaguanas:

- (a) the Town and Country Planning Division has granted full planning permission for the construction of the Edinburgh high-rise housing complexes. Detailed plans have been submitted to the Chaguanas Borough Corporation;
- (b) not applicable;
- (c) the cost of construction of the housing unit is \$88.2 million VAT exclusive.
- (d) the selling and/or rental prices have not yet been determined and will be approved by Cabinet in due course.

Dr. Rafeeq: Mr. Speaker, the question asked is whether the necessary approvals were obtained from the Chaguanas Borough Corporation. The answer said that documents have been submitted to the Chaguanas Borough Corporation. I wanted to find out whether approval has been given by the Chaguanas Borough Corporation as the question asked?

Hon. C. Imbert: Regrettably, Mr. Speaker, in the absence of the substantive Minister, I am unable to provide the clarification requested.

Mr. Sharma: Would the hon. Minister tell us the number of units involved in this project?

Hon. C. Imbert: Regrettably again, Mr. Speaker, although we have the cost in the answer, I do not have the number of units.

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the next question, unless a Minister has good reason not to be present, the Minister ought to be here, because it is not fair to the Leader of Government Business, and it is certainly not fair to the Opposition and more so the Opposition. So let me appeal to Ministers, unless you have good reason not to attend to the House, you must attend to the House and answer questions. [*Desk thumping*]

Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago

(Details of)

198. Mr. Jack Warner (*Chaguanas West*) asked the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs:

With respect to the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago could the Minister state:

- (a) whether the Corporate Communications Manager and Interim Chief Executive Officer receive a travelling allowance;

- (b) if so, how much?
- (c) whether these officers have access to the use of the company's vehicles in their private capacities and if yes, why?

The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs (Hon. Gary Hunt): Mr. Speaker, with respect to:

- (a) The Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited has advised that the Corporate Communications Manager and the interim Chief Executive Officer each receive a travelling allowance.
- (b) The Sport of Trinidad and Tobago Limited has advised that managers are paid a transport allowance of \$2,500 per month, and the interim Chief Executive Officer is paid a transport allowance of \$3,500 per month.
- (c) The officers do not have access to the use of the company's vehicles in their private capacities.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Local Government Report (Status of)

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

Could the Minister state:

- (a) whether the Government has received the consultant's report on Local Government Reform;
- (b) if the answer to (a) is yes, why has the report not been laid in the Parliament; and
- (c) if the answer to (a) is yes, when will the report be laid in the Parliament?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, I will respond on behalf of the Minister of Local Government.

- (a) The Government has received the consultant's report on Local Government Reform.
- (b) The report has not yet been laid in Parliament as it was agreed that the determination of the roles and responsibilities of local government

bodies should be a critical first step in advancing Local Government Reform before determining the local government structure and organization and the legal framework. Consequently, on July 07, 2008, a Green Paper on Local Government Reform, "the Roles and Responsibilities" was laid in the Parliament and the Ministry of Local Government is at present conducting public consultations on this Green Paper.

- (c) Upon the conclusion of the aforementioned consultations, the consensual positions on the roles and responsibilities of local government would inform the structure and organization of the local government system. Thereafter, the necessary legislation would be drafted and submitted for the approval of Parliament.

Mr. Sharma: Thank you, hon. Speaker. Could the Minister in respect to this question, tell us the total cost paid to the consultants? And secondly, what other resources were made available to the consultants?

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I cannot answer that, but however, I might say that when one looks at the question, nothing was asked about cost or anything of that nature. It is difficult.

Mr. Speaker: I was really going to say that it really did not arise out of the answer.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Would the hon. Minister be kind enough to indicate whether further consultations will take place nationally when these four reports are available to Parliament or subsequent to laying it in Parliament, that the Prime Minister spoke about in his address at one time?

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, it is difficult for me as not being the substantive Minister to answer that question, however, I am aware that there has been a round of consultations. The last one as far as I know took place recently and I expect that based on the information obtained at these consultations, that a position will be taken in due course as to whether there will be further consultations. But it is difficult to say at this point in time.

Mr. S. Panday: Hon. Member, do you remember the Prime Minister indicated in that said debate you spoke about, that the papers would have been laid in Parliament very soon?

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I do not know if the Members think I have an encyclopedia in my head. I am afraid that I am unable to answer that question. I am not the substantive Minister.

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

213. Dr. Hamza Rafeeq (*Caroni Central*) on behalf of **Mr. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj SC** (*Tabaquite*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Could the Minister state:

- (a) whether there now exists in the police service a special unit to detect and prosecute praedial larceny;
- (b) if so, what is the name of this unit, the date it was established and its detection and conviction statistics; and
- (c) if there is no special unit, what machinery exists for the detection and prosecution of praedial larceny and what are the statistics for detection and conviction of praedial larceny from 2006 to present time?

The Minister of National Security (Sen. The Hon. Martin Joseph): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In response to question 213:

- (a) The Praedial Larceny Prevention Act, also referred to as an Act to make better provision for the prevention of praedial larceny, was enacted in 1963 to bring relief to the farming community and encourage farming in agriculture and livestock by penalizing perpetrators of this crime. Section 2(a) of the Act provides for the establishment of a praedial larceny squad to be assigned by the Commissioner of Police and to comprise officers, including any member of the police service or supplemental bodies of police, established by the Supplemental Police Act and Special Reserve Police Act. Accordingly, praedial larceny squads were established and are operational in a number of police divisions throughout Trinidad and Tobago.
- (b) The units are referred to as praedial larceny squads, which is the name prescribed by law. The squads which were established by departmental Order on June 04, 2001, are assigned to areas based on the volume of agricultural and livestock farming taking place therein, and the incidence of praedial larceny. Their stated functions are:
 - (i) to investigate all reports of larceny of agricultural produce and livestock;

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- (ii) To formulate strategies in collaboration with farmers to prevent incidents of thefts of agricultural produce or livestock;
- (iii) To patrol farm areas; and
- (iv) To conduct stop and search exercises on persons and vehicles suspected of praedial larceny.

Currently, there are five praedial larceny squads operating within the police service; these are located as follows: Southern Division; Northern Division; Eastern Division; South Western Division and Tobago Division. Hon. Members are reminded, however, that praedial larceny is a criminal offence and can be acted upon by any member of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

Statistics provided by the police service on praedial larceny for the last three years, that is, from January 2006—to July 2008, reveal that over that period there has been a consistent decline in the number of praedial larceny reports. [*Crosstalk*] In 2006, there were 216 reports of praedial larceny; in 2007, that number fell to 177, reflecting an 18 per cent decrease; and as at July 2008, 94 reports have been received. In total, therefore, 487 incidents of praedial larceny were reported over the period January 2006—July 2008. Mr. Speaker, 176 or 36 per cent of those reports were detected, resulting in 76 convictions.

Mr. Speaker, part 9 (c) of the question is not applicable.

Mr. S. Panday: Could the hon. Minister indicate what the strength of the Praedial Larceny Squad in San Fernando is?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Unfortunately, I do not have that information.

Mr. S. Panday: Further supplemental, Mr. Speaker.

Could the hon. Minister tell this honourable House what is the number of vehicles dedicated to the Praedial Larceny Squad in the Southern Division?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: I do not have that information.

Dr. Rafeeq: Mr. Minister, you mentioned that there were five squads: Southern, Northern, Eastern, South West and Tobago. A lot of agricultural activities take place in Central. Are there plans to establish a squad in Central Trinidad and if so can you tell us how soon?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Hon. Member, I can tell you that we are reviewing the entire arrangement in place to deal with praedial larceny and we

will be in a position to indicate what the new strategies are that we intend to pursue, as it relates to that.

Mr. Bharath: Could the Minister tell this House how many posts remain unfilled within the Praedial Larceny Squad?

Hon. Members: He cannot answer that!

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Is that a supplemental or is that another question?

Mr. Speaker: Members, please be reminded that supplementals are only allowed out of the answer that has been provided.

Elswick Presbyterian School
(Details of)

231. Mr. Subhas Panday (*Princes Town North*) asked the hon. Minister of Education to state:

- (a) why the construction of the Elswick Presbyterian School Tableland, has not yet been completed; and
- (b) by what date is the construction of the said school expected to be completed?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Esther Le Gendre): Mr. Speaker, the Elswick Presbyterian School Tableland is an assisted denominational primary school under the management of the Presbyterian Primary School Board. The school is over 50 years old and dilapidated.

In 2005, students of the school were removed by the Presbyterian Board and placed at the Poole Presbyterian School where they have been attending classes since.

Mr. Speaker, the construction of assisted schools is now governed by a new agreement between the respective denominational body and the Ministry of Education. It allows, inter alia, for the Ministry of Education to provide 100 per cent of the funding for the construction of replacement primary schools, built on lands owned by the respective denominational body. These schools would be built to meet the requirements of the up-to-date primary school curriculum.

Fourteen denominational bodies have signed this agreement to date, and despite more than seven approaches to the Presbyterian Primary School Board of management and their relevant umbrella denominational body, the Presbyterian Board has refused to sign the agreement in full.

On April 04, 2008, the board did, in fact, sign an interim agreement, but in respect of two schools only, and Elswick was not one of these. However, in the interim and in the interest of maintaining a safe learning environment for the students of Elswick, the Ministry of Education agreed with the proposal of the board to provide 14 pre-engineered classrooms to accommodate students in order to relieve a situation where they were sharing space with the Poole Presbyterian Primary School.

These rooms are being constructed at the existing site, at a projected cost of approximately \$5.5 million. Construction work on the pre-engineered classrooms commenced on February 2008, under the project management services of the National Maintenance Training and Security Company Limited (MTS). Works were delayed due to the need to redesign the foundation to cater for previously undetected soil instability. Further delays were encountered due to contractual issues related to funding and payment. These were resolved in August 2008, and work recommenced on September 16, 2008. Construction is expected to be completed in time to allow for occupancy at the start of the new term in January 2009.

With respect to part (b) of the question, construction of a new school will be considered and scheduled in order of priority when an agreement with the Presbyterian Board facilitates this.

Mr. S. Panday: Could the hon. Minister tell this House the reasons proffered by the Presbyterian Board as to why they do not want to sign this agreement?

Hon. E. Le Gendre: Mr. Speaker, several reasons have been advanced in the media and I cannot attest to their veracity. What I can tell you is that the agreement was deemed to be fit and proper by the same board that signed in respect of two schools at Harmony Hall and Lengua. The Ministry is proceeding with this.

I think you would have to take the Presbyterian Board's issues to them directly because we are not aware of them.

Mr. S. Panday: Further supplemental, Mr. Speaker. Could the Minister indicate whether the Government would allow children to suffer because of a lack of a school, if the board does not sign an agreement?

Hon. E. Le Gendre: The Government is not in the business of making children suffer. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Ministry of Education continues to work with all denominational bodies. I can assure you that in any instance where the children are at stake or where their learning environment is unsafe, we will act with dispatch.

However, I ask the Member for Princes Town North to be aware that the properties on which these schools are located are the properties of the respective boards of management, and I am sure in his position as a legal expert, he would recognize that the Government may not proceed unto these properties without the express agreement of the boards in question.

Thank you.

Mr. S. Panday: So if the board gives the Government permission to enter upon the lands, will the Government build the schools?

Hon. E. Le Gendre: Any arrangement between the Government and boards of denominational bodies, are prescribed by an agreement.

This is the last I would have to say on this, I can assure you that wherever we have an agreement, we will and have proceeded to act with dispatch.

I thank you. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: This is the end of the questions that the Government is prepared to answer today. Members of the Government would note that there are 40 questions on the Order Paper for oral answers. Answering six questions is certainly not good enough; it really is not good enough. I do not know what else to do; I am appealing to ministers and the Government again; it is your duty to the Parliament to come and answer these questions.

We have two questions on the Order Paper, Nos. 48 and 60, which have been here since February. Question 48 reminds me of the previous Minister of Sport; he had a similar question that lasted for the whole session that was never answered. I hope question 48 does not suffer the same fate under this new Minister; it deals with the same issue. Again, let me appeal to Ministers, please answer the questions. Six out of 40 is a miserable failure.

Let me again also indicate to Ministers that when questions are asked of you and the answers are ready, please attend the House and answer them, because you put the Opposition and, certainly, the Leader of Government Business, in a very difficult position, because when supplemental are asked, invariably the Leader of Government Business is not in a position to answer these questions, not being the substantive minister.

I am again appealing to ministers, when you have questions to answer and the answers are ready, please attend the Parliament to answer these questions, unless you have a good reason not to be here.

I hope on the next occasion we will see some improvement with respect to questions being answered. [*Interruption*]

Mr. S. Panday: Mr. Speaker, I fear for your safety and future.

**DEFINITE URGENT MATTER
(LEAVE)
Families of Sick Children
(Government's Callousness to)**

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 12 of the House of Representatives, I hereby seek your leave to move the adjournment of the House, today's sitting of Friday 31 October, 2008, for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely the insult and callousness of the Government to families of very sick children who are in financial need to cover surgical medical costs internationally, particularly when Trinidad and Tobago cannot perform nor give the necessary medical care nationally resulting in the deaths of these innocent children.

The matter is definite, as it pertains to a specific matter, namely the death of 10-month-old Maurisa Khan who died awaiting \$1.8 million to have a liver transplant and many other children who, at present, are in need of surgery at hospitals abroad and whose families are unable to meet the required cost.

The matter is urgent because the Government has to immediately provide a financing mechanism and/or creation of a special fund to assist families to receive specialized care for their children.

The matter is of public importance because of the public outcry that the lives of innocent children are lost awaiting surgery, while the promised two new hospitals, one in Central, the other in Port of Spain, and a national health system, will not be implemented in the short to medium term thereby resulting in continued deaths of our children.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, while I sympathize with the issue raised by the hon. Member for Caroni East, it does not qualify under this Standing Order. It would certainly have qualified under Standing Order 11 or, alternatively, the Member may wish to consider bringing it as a Private Members' motion that deals with issues such as these.

Postponement of Motion

Friday, October 31, 2008

2.00 p.m.

POSTPONEMENT OF INTEGRITY COMMISSION MOTION

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, on the last occasion it was intimated that we would have done the Motion dealing with the Integrity Commission. Unfortunately, the hon. Member for Siparia is ill-disposed and we will not be doing that Motion. Instead we will be doing Motion No. 2, dealing with food prices.

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

[Sixth Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [January 25, 2008]:

Be it resolved that this honourable House condemn the Government for its failure in containing food prices at affordable levels for the entire population. [Mr. H. Partap]

Question again proposed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, when last we met on this Motion, the hon. Member for Tobago East was on his legs. He has two minutes of original time remaining. I now call on the hon. Member for Tobago East. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Dumas: Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to continue the contribution on the Motion on prices. In the previous contribution I sought to establish that the issue of high food prices was not unique to Trinidad and Tobago but was, in fact, a global phenomenon that is currently recognized as a global food crisis. In that context, I also sought to advance that the reasons for this global food crisis as proposed by a number of very eminent international institutions, including the World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the International Food Policy Research Institute, the Inter-American Institute for Co-operation in Agriculture, the Caribbean Development Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, all concluded that the issue of high food prices is a global issue.

They have all—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. R. Dumas: Mr. Speaker, I do not need to worry with them because the context is quite clear that the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla came to this House with an argument that we had a phenomenon of high food prices and that the Government has failed to control the impact of those food prices on the population of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. R. Dumas: Mr. Speaker, as I was pointing out, in the face of the mutterings from the other side of timeliness, et cetera—grumblings and mumblings—it is quite clear that the Opposition has no idea at all of how food prices emerge in this country and as usual they sought to blame what was then, and is still, a global phenomenon, on the activities of the People's National Movement Government.

In that context we pointed out then that the cause for movements in the prices of food was an issue of an imbalance between supply and demand, and the reason that you had for that included at the time, poor harvest due to climate change; it included an increased demand for food arising from emerging countries like China and India.

Mr. Sharma: What about the crops you are bulldozing? What that has to do with China?

Hon. R. Dumas: Do I have to protect myself—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Fyzabad, I think you have already contributed in this debate, so let the Minister have his say. Please, Minister.

Hon. R. Dumas: We added further, Mr. Speaker, that the question of what is traditional food material being used as feedstock in biofuel production, was also a contributor to the cost of the rising prices.

We suggested further that the increased agricultural input cost related to the price of oil was also an issue. We pointed out further that in the face of that world crisis, some countries restricted their exports in food. But the Government was not idle. The Government put together a programme that treated with the issue of information supply to the general population and that was being admirably handled by the Minister for Legal and Consumer Affairs.

We are clear that this Government took every precaution and the ultimate irony was when the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development met with the farmers of this country and discussed the issue of management of food production input cost; the relationship that is to be created

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between the Government and the farmers in creating the mechanisms for lowering food input, of course found itself under criticism of the Opposition. Today they grumble that this Motion is out of time. If the Motion is out of time, I am quite willing to sit and have the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla withdraw the Motion. Do I need to really treat with this matter?

Mr. Sharma: Of course. You are embarrassing yourself.

Hon. R. Dumas: Mr. Speaker, the issue of national food security has always been an item high on the agenda of the People's National Movement and every previous People's National Movement government. It is a matter of record that the question of the transformation of the economy from an export agricultural-producing country to one in which agricultural export commodities such as sugar, cocoa and so on, have taken a back seat to food production in this country, is an initiative of the People's National Movement.

The change under successive five-year development programmes, the PNM has focused on producing food for national consumption, including dairy production, pig production, vegetable and food crop production and, therefore, has changed the reliance of this country's agricultural production on export activity. That is the reality. I know they cannot take it, so he leaves.

The PNM Government has introduced and increased mechanisms for facilitating agro-processing in this country with the dual interest of increasing the shelf life of the commodities produced, as well as enhancing employment and trade, therefore generating economic development activity across the country. That holds for the large vegetable producers and the vegetable canners. The dominance of food processors from Trinidad and Tobago in the Caribbean market is well known, as well as the manufacture of things like hams, bacon and the processing of milk. These are activities that were all initiated and carried forward under successive PNM governments.

Part of the national food security programme was to ensure that the Caroni lands—because, you see, we forget, you know; we forget that the Caroni lands were part of the plantation programme being held by Tate & Lyle, and when the Opposition comes to the table and treats the Caroni lands as some preserve of a particular group of people in this country, I want them to know that we understand that this was plantation activity; that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, under the People's National Movement administration between 1971 and 1975, bought these lands as part of the heritage of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and subsequent movement away from the plantation activity to one now

of introducing and reintroducing vegetable production, food production on those lands, is the way that we should go consistent with national policy.

We are suggesting, therefore, that the food security activity of this Government cannot be faulted. We want to state that the Government has also put into the University of Trinidad and Tobago a capacity for treating with the research requirements to support the food security drive of the country. If the University of the West Indies has moved away from research and activity which support agricultural production in this country and has now become an institution of questionable capacity in terms of the contribution to the technology for domestic agricultural activity, I am sure that that cannot be laid at the feet of the People's National Movement.

The reality is that the Government has had to reverse indications that some people wanted to move the department of agriculture out of the university. I do hear people on the opposite side making the point that Government is making an incursion into the areas in which UWI is predominant and moving to support the University of Trinidad and Tobago, completely forgetting that the activities are to balance both and to create a university that treats with our concerns in terms of food production by creating a hands-on experience; a hands-on capacity that the University of the West Indies has walked away from in the UTT.

We want to suggest that if the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla really understood what he was talking about, he would be aware that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has, in fact, treated with the food security issue; treated with the pricing of food as part of the management of food security and food sovereignty of Trinidad and Tobago.

When the Member based his Motion on the fallacy of Government's inaction, he then pretended that his concern was really the challenge to middle income and low income households. But as a Member of this Government, we have had to endure the Opposition opposing every single facility that the Government sought to put in place to protect middle income earners, to protect low income earners—every single facility. They have opposed the housing programme of this Government; they have opposed every proposal to raise incomes of the people of Trinidad and Tobago; they have opposed the interjections for lower income families; they have opposed the social security services as put in place by the People's National Movement; they have opposed the proposal for tertiary education which is a permanent activity to create a virtuous cycle for the development of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. You have opposed family income transfers. Do I need to go on? Which of these have you supported?

Mr. S. Panday: The method of distribution of the houses.

Hon. R. Dumas: Mr. Speaker, the consensus that has emerged in the world is that commodity pricing is what drives—

Mr. S. Panday: It went down—

Hon. R. Dumas: I am speaking, Sir. International commodity pricing is what drives food prices.

2.15 p.m.

Do you know what is quite interesting? When the Government suggested that maybe, the market mechanisms in Trinidad and Tobago create a situation in which the price movement on the grocery shelves are forever downwardly sticky, it is difficult to have prices move downward on our market, That must be because there is concerted action by some people to keep the prices high and if not, to push them up.

When we make statements like that we are maligned. I remember that the missing Member for Couva South suggested for three days in the newspaper and on the television that I was wrong to suggest that some people in some areas, or acting in some areas that impact on the price of food, are reluctant to pass on any savings in the cost of inputs to the consumer. I was maligned by the honourable gentleman day after day in the newspaper and the TV. I repeat the argument that in Trinidad and Tobago, somehow when the commodity prices move downward they are not reflected on the grocery shelves. We can say that for sure, because at this point most commodity prices in the context of food are moving downwards, southwards as it is described. That is not being reflected on the grocery shelves of Trinidad and Tobago.

Maybe, again, the People's National Movement Government is responsible for keeping up the prices. Maybe, the Supermarkets' Association and every other association of tradesmen in this country will suggest that we are maligning them. Their defendants and the Opposition will suggest that we are maligning them when we say that it is time that the prices reflect the world movement downwards, in the same way that the grocers were quite willing to move the prices upwards when the international prices were moving.

I am suggesting that at every level suppliers in this country are abusing the population of Trinidad and Tobago. All the suppliers who are trading internationally know that the prices are moving downward and have seen the prices return to the prices of the period of October to December 2007, but the

change downward is not reflected on the grocery shelves. We have made every attempt to ensure that the information is available in terms of international commodity price movement and local commodity price movement. The grocers do not respond.

The demonstration for every commodity is there whether we take it from beverages, fats and oils, green and other foods. They are moving southward. In Trinidad and Tobago, the ones who sell to us are not facilitating the movement of the prices downward for the consumer.

Mr. S. Panday: What are you doing about it?

Hon. R. Dumas: The information is there and we will use it appropriately.

The Government's policy has treated with the issue of the impact of prices on the individuals. This Government came to this House with the budget before this one and proposed that the lowest wage earners in this country will have a minimum wage different from what it was previously. The howl that was set up about the process that the Government was using was enough to delay the implementation of the minimum wage. The howl that was set up when transfers were proposed for senior citizens in every other way; the protest came from the Opposition. [*Interruption*] Some of us have convenient memories. The only time the Opposition began to discuss the issues of mitigation of the impact of prices on the poor was at election time, when suddenly, it became convenient for them to make an offer which would have been impossible for them to meet given their previous and present positions.

I remember asking in the last budget debate: From where will you fund those proposed increases? From where will you fund the \$3,000 minimum wage that you were proposing? You came to Parliament at election time suggesting that the least anybody should work for in Trinidad and Tobago was \$3,000 a month. One week after another Member came from that side trying to trump again because at that time there were two parties. One party proposed \$3,000 as the minimum wage and another Member from another party then in opposition came with a proposal that the lowest should be \$4,500. They were bidding with funds that they did not have and responsibilities that they could not deliver and attempting to fool the nation. We need to be serious. Again, the Motion is another demonstration of the Opposition's, if not incompetence, delusionary advances.

As a government, we are quite clear that the issue of food prices as an impact on food security for communities, families and individuals in this economy is a matter that requires close attention. In an attempt to depoliticize this action, the

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Government has proposed to the Opposition that maybe, concerted action is necessary and the Opposition may want to put on the table their proposals for managing this matter in a responsible way. [*Interruption*] We have heard the argument but unfortunately, a wish is not expressed without a plan and a programme. In every single way, whether it was accessing the land or distribution of the land, every mechanism that has been put forward as a proposal to ensure that we end up with the goal of grow more food, we have trouble.

The last time we made it clear to this House that the concept of reducing the expenditure for the household by removal of VAT was a measure that was followed and VAT on most food items was removed. The Member for Siparia did not like what I had to say and she put me before the Privileges Committee.

The reality is that the conscious effort to remove VAT at one time has been sustained over the period up to today. The Government has denied itself the revenue that was available from putting VAT on food. That VAT removal on food has existed for all levels of the population. It is not discriminately applied; it is across the board for all families and individuals. Almost all expenditure on food is without VAT except for luxury items.

The committee on high food prices was put in place to respond to what was seen as the food crisis and has recommended both short-term and long-term measures. The emergency package of actions was taken that immediately addressed a number of issues. The need for food assistance was recognized. There were efforts to make food available to people in their communities. Food availability was increased. The food card which was described as—the way in which the Opposition attacked callously these measures is evidence. This card which was a lifeline to some families, the Opposition callously began to describe it as a “smart man card”. That is the kind of nonsense that we got from the Opposition. I remember the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla. This card which was a lifeline for some members of the community, they began to make it a measure of derision if a member of a family took it to the grocery. That is the way we treat with the honour and dignity of our population.

We did address it properly. We did not only treat with the short-term mitigation. We had coping strategies put in place. The suggestion of this administration to increase the income at which the taxes would have an impact was clearly identified. It was that any income below \$60,000 would not be taxed. In other words, that was increasing the disposable income of all workers in the country. That is a measure of giving up revenue. If the Government was not clear that it had a concern for the impact of prices and the movement of prices on the

population, that is not a measure in which the Government would have engaged. We can treat with the question of expenditure displacement if you wish. There are so many areas that the Government treated with, that allowed additional transfers to the families. If you did not have to pay for certain items in your education or items to facilitate your attendance at school, this money is now available for expenditure in other ways.

Food is one of those ways in which the poorer people will spend a higher amount. We have seen this administration push down the poverty levels from 30 to 17 per cent of the population. If we are clear that the activities of the Government have contributed to that change, then certainly, this Government has not ignored the impact of pricing on the population. This administration has seen 95,000 new and sustainable jobs created that have existed consistently. *[Interruption]* Again, they go deriding the population of this country. The Member for Couva South called a significant portion of our population unemployable.

Mr. S. Panday: The Prime Minister said that.

Hon. R. Dumas: Your leader called them unemployable. In this administration, I have seen 7,000 plus of these people constantly employed every day feeding their families and making a contribution to the welfare of Trinidad and Tobago.

2.30 p.m.

This administration started the programme called MuST, from which I am sure by now, more than 100,000 members of the population of Trinidad and Tobago have gained significant skills and those skills have been used to contribute to agricultural production, housing production and construction in various ways. That is the reality. *[Interruption]* You want me to tell you where they have produced food in Princes Town?

One of the deficiencies that the people who depend on the Members of the Opposition have to face is the lack of survey that they have in their own constituencies. They do not know their constituencies. I suggest to each of them that there are members of their constituencies who are graduates of the MuST Programme; every one of them. There are people right inside their constituency offices in the OJT Programme. It is time to say the truth.

Mr. Speaker, in the case of imported food, the tariff was reduced in some way. We had the establishment of the Prices Council and the Consumer Advisory Board to monitor prices. We had the establishment of the trade and investment

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policies put in place by the Government, in which the mechanisms in trade allow the country to source its food from appropriate avenues. This is also a food security measure.

One feels that one should start this discussion all over, but I want to mention quickly two things. I want to put this in context because Members opposite must also take responsibility for their tenure. I make bold to say, in the case of Tobago, as a planning officer in Tobago, I experienced where mechanisms for seed and seedling development in the Tobago budget were stripped by that administration and food production in Tobago became a nonentity. I suggest that the contrast today is evident. All over Tobago, the situation of land distribution to farmers is as in Trinidad; the provision of water systems and irrigation systems is as in Trinidad; the production of plant stock is proceeding; the education of farmers and farm workers, the YAPA workers, again a programme coming out of Tobago, is in evidence.

I suggest that there is absolutely no truth in the argument that the administration has neglected the issue of food prices, but there is ample evidence that the food security has been enhanced by the activities of this administration.

I thank you.

Miss Mickela Panday (*Oropouche West*): Mr. Speaker, I thank you. In March this year, whilst attending the International Women's Day celebration on the promenade, I listened to one of the speakers as she described the plight of the women from Port of Spain East. It all sounded so painfully familiar. The minimum wage is \$9 an hour; a chicken costs \$50 and a mother has five children to feed.

This was one month after we started this debate on January 25, 2008, when the Government was making excuses instead of looking for solutions, knowing full well that the situation would only get worse as we saw a world food crisis emerging.

Today, we see the same thing happening 10 months later: excuses, excuses and more excuses. What this Government fails to realize is that it does not matter where you are from, the colour of your skin or for whom you voted, we all have to eat. High food prices are not only affecting those who did not vote for the PNM; it affects everyone in this country; the old and the young alike.

So how can this Government justify squandering our money when parents cannot afford to feed their children? It is no secret that food prices have been

rising steadily since around the beginning of 2006. Between the start of 2006 and 2008, the average world price for rice rose by 217 per cent, wheat by 136 per cent, maize by 125 per cent and soyabeans by 107 per cent. In Trinidad and Tobago, since 2002, under this Manning regime, food prices have risen annually.

Based on figures from the Central Bank, between 1999 and 2006, the price of food increased by an average of 14 per cent per year and, in 2007, by 16.8 per cent and still this Government refuses to do anything about it and that is why we are in the position we are in today.

This is not a problem that has cropped up out of nowhere, so it should not come as a surprise to Government that today low income earners find it difficult to feed themselves and their children. But, like everything else with this Government, what does not affect them, they turn a blind eye to. So, in typical PNM fashion, their response to this Motion then and even as we have seen today was to blame the increase in food prices on the UNC, on inflation and/or external factors.

Mr. Speaker, while it is accepted that indeed international factors such as poor harvests in various parts of the world, increasing biofuel usage and lower food reserves no doubt have played a significant part in the food crisis that we are facing in Trinidad and Tobago today, the Government must shoulder the entire blame for failing to take adequate measures to keep food prices at an affordable level and for overseeing the complete collapse of the domestic agriculture industry.

Mr. Speaker, it could not be simpler. In order to deal with increasing food prices, we need to increase our supply of locally grown food and the first step in doing so is by giving lands to those willing and capable of farming. How sad it is when we see today, in Trinidad and Tobago, the complete opposite happening. There are people who are not interested in farming being given lands and those who, sadly, find themselves squatting, have their crops destroyed.

Only yesterday, the *Daily Express* reported the plight of the farmers of Picton Street, Diamond Village, whose crops were bulldozed on Monday by the EMBDC. The newspaper reported, and I quote:

“On Monday bulldozers moved in on the land...destroyed several acres of pineapples, pommecythere, dasheen leaves, pumpkin, mangoes, oranges and peas...”

It continued and quoted the CEO of the EMBDC, who said:

“EMBDC has the responsibility to develop thousands of acres of Caroni land for the establishment of residential houses...”

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Now, Mr. Speaker, anywhere else in this world, this would have been seen as nothing short of ludicrous, especially in these times we are facing around the world, when strikes, demonstrations and protests have erupted as millions of people face the horror of rapidly rising food prices in countries such as Haiti, Brazil, Cameroon, Egypt and Indonesia.

The price hikes are shocking, but only give a glimpse of what is happening as worldwide millions struggle to feed their families. Numerous media outlets keep reporting what is happening: The enormous jump in the price of rice of 75 per cent in two months; of wheat, up 130 per cent over the last years and how the world price of rice rose by 10 per cent in one day. But this Government refuses to take notice of what is going on around them internationally or to accept and do what they can to alleviate the problem domestically.

Mr. Speaker, comparing the 12 months increase ending January 2008 with those of December 2007, the price of bread and cereal rose by 14.1 per cent. The price of milk, cheese and egg rose by 28.4 per cent. The price of meat rose by 13 per cent. The price of fish rose by 17.2 per cent, fruits by 34.8 per cent and vegetable prices by 30.2 per cent.

How then are the people of Trinidad and Tobago going to live? When the first sign of increased prices began rearing its head and started affecting local crops, the blame game began, as we have seen again here today. Mr. Speaker, you will recall that initially the Government had alleged—and I was absolutely shocked today to see the Member for Tobago East do it again—that the middlemen were the ones exploiting the situation with excessive mark-ups and the consumer, you and I, as contributory factors in pushing food prices up, when the problem really was, is and continues to be that Trinidad and Tobago is simply not producing.

We import milk. Why can this not be produced locally? At one time, there used to be a thriving dairy industry supply to Nestlé. The *Guardian* of Monday, October 08, 2007, a year ago, carried an article entitled “Sour milk for dairy farmers”. It is too easy for them to forget.

Dairy farmers at Carlsen Field claim they are going bankrupt as 90 per cent of the milk, both liquid and powder, consumed in Trinidad and Tobago is imported. This is the dilemma for over 500 farmers who claimed they were overlooked in the 2007/2008, and now the 2008/2009 budget presentation.

Advisor to the Carlsen Field Dairy Farmers Association, Samaroo Dowlath, said that production has been on the decline for years now as dairy farmers have not been getting support from the authorities. Dowlath said that the farmers

needed a grass bank and land for a processing facility for pasteurizing milk, yogurt and other milk by-products.

The president of the association, Mr. Speaker, Gerry Lezama said, and I quote:

“The Prime Minister was unable to take the meeting because he was busy.”

Dowlath said what the association was seeking 100 acres of Caroni land for its dairy production. Dowlath said that farmers also wanted to convert the underutilized lay-by at Carlsen Field on the Solomon Hochoy Highway into a farmers' market. He said that the farmers had plans for a feasibility study to establish a commercial processing facility but needed support from the State.

2.45 p.m.

I quote so that we would not hear the little grumbles: “yuh lie, yuh lie” coming across.

“‘We are seeking to add value ourselves to how we can get Government to increase the level of support they provide by way of price support for the farmers,’ Dowlath said. But for the Prime Minister, that isn’t important enough.”

After that desperate plea, almost one year ago to date, I stand to be corrected if I am wrong; these dairy farmers have not received the support they have so desperately been asking for.

Why then, whilst the HDC is steamrolling over farmers to find land for houses, can the Government not assist in locating the land for a processing facility for pasteurization? What are the Government’s priorities? People have to eat first, in order to survive. As the situation worsens, the Government will soon realize that people cannot eat concrete. Once again, their priorities have been misplaced. It is not only milk. Why can we not produce cheese?

The Member for Tobago East has gone, but I wanted to remind him that there is a local goat cheese producer, I think in Tobago, who is able to profitably manufacture specialty cheeses from goat’s milk. There used to be a specialty cheese facility in the constituency of Couva South. We used to produce rice. The rice industry has also collapsed. This is at the time when countries such as India, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and Brazil, to name a few, have either completely banned or are restricting the export of rice to protect their domestic markets.

Why is it that peas and beans cannot be grown locally, when there is an abundance of pigeon peas on a seasonal basis in this country? We currently

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import ground provisions from the smaller Caribbean islands, which have the same soil type as we do. If these countries today are able to cultivate, harvest, transport to the ports, ship and sell these goods wholesale at competitive prices to that produced locally, why we in Trinidad and Tobago cannot do the same? The reason is that the Government is not interested in providing incentives and/or the proper support for farmers. They believe in the words of the then Minister of Legal and Consumer Affairs that:

“The Government’s role is to mitigate the impact of rising food prices, as opposed to the cause.”

For the record, that is to say that it is not the Government’s job to do all it can to prevent food prices from rising; it is their job, after the prices have risen, to ease the impact of it, as was said by the Member for Tobago East. The way to ease the impact, according to both the then Minister and today the Member for Tobago East, is by introducing social programmes and increasing old age pension. This Government seriously cannot believe that this is the help the farmers in Oropouche West and throughout Trinidad and Tobago have been crying out for.

Time after time, farmers have been expressing their concerns about labour shortages, praedial larceny, access roads, flooding and distribution networks, to name a few. These are issues that the Government refuses to address. There is also the tendency, this is another problem we hear them talking about over and over again, for glut and shortage cycles of domestic production caused by poor central planning and poor facilities for post-harvest processing and packaging, which could can surplus material for export and even lagged domestic consumption.

The Government is not interested in any solutions. These problems that I have discussed are not problems that are particular to Trinidad and Tobago. These are problems that other developing countries in the world and the Caribbean have faced. The difference is the governments in those countries are progressive-thinking and they care about the farmers and people in their country, but not so with this Government.

According to the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, the average citizen has nothing to complain about because there is no problem, as published in the headline emblazoned over the front page of the *Express* of Tuesday, April 29, 2008:

“Agriculture Minister breaks his silence...what food crisis?”

Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, Sen. Arnold Piggott, says there is no food crisis in Trinidad and Tobago.

His comments come as supermarket shelves nationwide are bare of flour and rice, which have been in short supply and escalating in cost, prompting some level of panic buying from consumers.

‘I would not like us to say that we have a crisis in food in Trinidad and Tobago, because I don’t know that we do. I am not aware that we have a crisis at this time. What we have been doing is seeking to prepare such that we don’t find ourselves in a crisis,’ Piggott said yesterday during a press conference”—that is what he said during the press conference that was held at Kapok Hotel—“at the Kapok Hotel in Port of Spain.

‘We are importing food from many countries, we are producing substantial quantities of food in Trinidad and Tobago.’”

He clearly has no idea what he was saying, because when I read that I thought: Is this Minister for real? The article continues:

“This the first time Piggott had spoken publicly on the issue of the growing demand and cost of food.”

It was quite strange, because his comments were also in contrast with those from the Member for Princes Town South/Tableland who had been encouraging that same week prior to that, consumers and citizens to change their eating habits and start planting home gardens to survive the worsening food crisis. With all due respect to the Minister who is not here, probably he did not think this debate was important enough, that is not going to change anything. In giving us in the corner, as the Member for Oropouche East would say, little packages of seeds, that is not going to help the problem.

In July 2005, the Government set up a committee to examine, which we have heard about a little while ago, incentives to deal once and for all with the problem of rising food prices, as promised by Mr. Manning in his 2005 budget speech. We may surmise that the report helped form the basis of promises for the then 2006/2007 budget and yet food prices continued to escalate, with the Government showing no real tangible sign of genuinely addressing the problem.

This Government cannot deny that over the last seven years, under their rule, real agricultural contribution has fallen dramatically. The shortsighted closure of Caroni (1975) Limited caused a major supply shock to both domestic and export agriculture and allowed vast acreages of oranges, portugals, rice and other crops to be simply abandoned. Yet, in his contribution to this Motion, the Members for

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Prince Town South/Tableland congratulated the Prime Minister for his decision to—thank you for joining us Minister—close down Caroni (1975) Limited.

This country has become totally dependent on imported food to feed our people and our ability to exchange petrodollars for food has allowed imported food to mask the problem. Hence, the Member for Tobago East can stand here today and tell us there is no problem and he does not see any need to treat with this matter. One would have assumed that the rising food prices would have attracted persons to get involved in farming. Instead, it has done nothing to stimulate the development of the industry, simply because it is so obvious, as with anything, farmers know that there are just too many risks involved.

The 2004 Agriculture Census told us that the number of family farms had been reduced by more than 37 per cent and pointed out that the collapse of the sector is due to declining productivity and/or competitiveness, inadequate infrastructure, adverse weather, lack of technological advances and insufficient government support, that is, as we know, subsidies.

This view is supported in the article entitled: “Last chance for farming” reported in September 06, 2006, which said:

“Over 19,000 local farmers are concerned that they are being edged out of existence to make way for heavy industrialisation.

Mr. Norris Deonarine, President of the National Food Crop Association has lambasted the government for ‘frustrating farmers out of the business’...He said that mostly middle-aged traditional farmers have stayed in the industry and they are turned off by a complete lack of support and a negative attitude towards their trade. ‘Most of them are ready to give up agriculture as a livelihood’ Deonarine said. ‘They are the ones with the most knowledge about growing anything in this country’.”

In fact these people he was speaking about, were the people who today possess the culture in Trinidad and Tobago that we have seen grow year after year. This is a most telling point, because no new blood is being lured into agriculture and this country is at a risk of losing the veterans in the field; its most valuable human resource in this context, as the body represents the kind of experience that comes from having personally tilled the soil.

Every year, this Government has been proclaiming that 1,000 youths—we have heard some more today—were going to be trained in agriculture in the YAPA programme. They would add to the stock of farmers who would then be able to

enhance agricultural production. The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, in 2002, assured the population during his budget contribution:

“We are taking these young people and training them, exposing them and advising them. Those who are really interested, we shall make the lands available to them. We shall assist them; we shall hold their hands and walk with them so that they will be successful.”

Nice words. It almost goes without saying that this plan obviously failed. It was then repeated by the Prime Minister in subsequent budget speeches. If persons were in fact trained, obviously the industry was not economically attractive enough to entice them to stay.

The much touted Vision 2020 declared food and nutrition security, as we have heard again today, as one of the major development goals. Yet again, this year’s budget did nothing but promise to revive the agricultural sector, which did not distinguish this particular budget from any of the predecessor’s promises and budgets.

If nothing else, the Prime Minister and then Minister of Finance and the Minister of Finance who is not here either, are consistent in their failure to keep their promises to this sector year after year. The Prime Minister, in his 2006/2007 budget speech promised for the umpteenth time that in 2007, we would have seen a dramatic rise in food production, as the former Caroni (1975) Limited workers received their lands after three years of suffering; again the same promise was made for fiscal 2007/2008 and 2008/2009.

3.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, every year the Prime Minister stresses the importance of the agricultural sector and the commitment of his Government to bring this sector into the 21st Century, and every year he fails to deliver. [*Desk thumping*] In his 2004 budget speech the Prime Minister said and I quote:

“This Government has assigned a very high priority to the modernization of the agriculture sector and will immediately introduce new and appropriate technologies, improve infrastructure and generate a wave of new investments in the sector.”

Four years later, he is still making similar noises and giving the impression that they are new and fresh ideas when, in fact, they are the same promises over and over with no substance, and there is clearly no hope of implementing the grand plan. The Prime Minister has been extremely consistent in stating his goals because he said:

“Our goal is to increase the sector’s contribution to economic and social development, and employment creation while providing an increasing level of the food requirements of the nation.”

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When I read that I thought it was a typographical mistake or a reading error, because that is exactly what he said in his 2005 budget speech which is no different from what was promised the year before or the year before that. In fact, similar utterances may be found in the record of budget speeches since 2002 and, as we ever so recently heard, the game continues.

In 2005, he said:

“Our programme for revitalizing the Agriculture sector is expected to gain momentum in the next fiscal period.”

He had promised:

“A reform of the Fiscal Regime for the agriculture sector and the streamlining of existing support arrangements as well as the introduction of tax credits and investment allowances to create a more effective fiscal regime in 2004.”

He promised a national agriculture information system for further modernization of the sector. He said that databases were already developed on technology, markets, livestock, crops, disease control, fertilizer use, seeds and other relevant agricultural information, but nothing materialized.

He also promised that the Government would promote fish production through the establishment of the Fisheries Monitoring and Surveillance Unit, and put sustainable management techniques in place for renewable marine and inland fisheries. Again, not materialized.

Mr. Speaker, if any of these promises were delivered, by now we would have seen an agricultural sector capable of delivering high quality foodstuff and capable of feeding this nation at an affordable price, but as everyone knows, this is unfortunately not the case. His lack of commitment is affecting the majority of people in Trinidad and Tobago.

Again, sadly, this year's budget by the Minister of Finance did little to make the current situation any better as headline inflation keeps increasing. Mr. Speaker, since the standard of living depends on the cost of living, and inflation hits the middle and lower income groups first and the hardest, the main disappointment with this budget, in particular, given the worldwide economic crisis, is the failure of this Government to come up with an answer to the problem of rising inflation, which if it has not already, will eventually hit the business community investments and employment. [*Desk thumping*]

All the financial and economic experts agree that the basic cause of inflation is the Government's wild spending on prestige projects and they have given no

indication that they intend to curb that spending. In fact, from this year's budget, we see that the Government intends to increase it. One can, therefore, expect inflation to continue to rise as the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Sen. The Hon. Mariano Browne said earlier today.

Mr. Speaker, the basing of the budget on an expected price of US \$70 a barrel was the wrong way to go. [*Desk thumping*] If the projected price was lower, then the Government's expenditure would have to be lower, if we wanted to have a balanced budget, let us say US \$50, then the revenues available to the Government would be lower and this would force lower spending. In the event that the price was higher, the excess revenue would then be put into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. This would ensure continued growth in the economy and an insurance against falling standards of living which we are seeing today. On one hand, the Government is asking people to save and on the other hand they engage in spending of the most wanton wasteful nature. [*Desk thumping*]

If we do not deal with inflation, consumers will have less real income to spend and they will have to spend it on food and basic necessities. That is another pressing reason why we need to diversify the economy. It is unclear if this Government understands what diversification means.

Diversification for us means the promotion of agriculture, fish farming, tourism, manufacture and commerce, but for the PNM it means movement away from the dependency on oil to the dependency on natural gas, for example, aluminium smelter, more methanol plants and, of course, a financial centre. Mr. Speaker, we need to diversify the economy and encourage and support persons in the agricultural industry if we are to survive these crises.

This takes me back where I began earlier. This Government needs to address the issue of land policy. That is the issue of land tenure and access to land; giving land to those who are willing and capable of farming.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Deonarine, in the same interview I was referring to earlier, noted that the land use policy has never been implemented. He said:

“There have been so many studies done by the Ministry itself on land capability, yet no real understanding of this place is being demonstrated by the Government.”

So, what then is the solution? The Member for Tobago East was asking us because clearly they do not know. The solution is simple. We need to develop technology-driven agriculture. [*Desk thumping*] Greater emphasis needs to be

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placed on research and development as a guide to agricultural production. This is the view of the UNC! A multipronged approach to training and retraining farmers, include an understanding of genetically modified seeds; focus on irrigation to ensure water supply during the dry season; infrastructure that concentrates on access roads and deliberate incorporating of technology and mechanization, as tools to ensure greater productivity. The basis of all this must come from an evaluation of our productive soil.

This Government is content with merely assigning two-acre plots to farmers and trying to convince them that planting peas is sufficient. Sadly, this will do little more than repeat the mistake manifested in the Wallerfield livestock experiment.

How do you know that the soil nutrients in a particular area, or its PH factor or colloids will deliver the best possible yield of pigeon peas? By handing out little squares of land, you may be dooming those farmers who get land from that area by spending thousands of dollars on fertilizers, chemical treatments, et cetera in order to convert that land for that use.

Mr. Speaker, we would like to propose that the Government undertake a plot by plot assessment of the land and determine what crops can best be grown there; proper training to ensure that farmers can grow crops efficiently; and a reintroduction of the cooperatives in agriculture whereby farmers engaged in similar cultivation can share resources including machinery and the bulk purchasing of fertilizers.

Mr. Speaker, this is what is required to rescue the agricultural sector to bring it into the 21st Century; a deliberate, conscientious and protracted partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and the farming community which, of necessity, must include tangible support from the Government and which will not limit itself to conventional approaches, but consider horticulture, aquaculture and organic foods, et cetera.

To do this, we need to enhance our agricultural extension services, our access to local and international research and development, and our training facilities for local farmers. We need to recognize that our farmers may not go to school, so we must bring school to them. [*Desk thumping*]

In the 2004 budget speech, the Prime Minister had proposed to use some 100 acres of land to establish a demonstration organic farm, of course, like all the other promises made, the Government has done nothing and nothing has materialized.

Mr. Speaker, I have already indicated that this Government lacks true commitment to the development of the agricultural sector. The deliberate negligence of the dairy industry and the domestic rice industry by the Minister patently ignores areas in which we have tremendous expertise and which we have been operating with little assistance to date from this Government.

I am deeply saddened by what appears to be a hastily compiled list of reworded, rehashed old promises and the apparent absence of a framework; a road map including deliverables with regard to this sector. I see this as an attempt to put in place a ready explanation for the failure of this Government to produce or do anything with agriculture. There is no policy here, just a mix of programmes without any time frame. This Government has absolutely no idea how to resuscitate the agricultural sector, so I hope that it would take some of our suggestions on board. [*Desk thumping*] The repeated, rehashed and reworded promises of the Prime Minister, we have all heard them before.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, a word of advice to the Government. After listening to this year's budget, it is clear that this Government is not taking the impact of the financial meltdown in the United States of America seriously.

3.15 p.m.

Much of our development is fuelled by foreign investment, and there will be less coming in as a result. The international financial turmoil has already begun to affect energy prices; this will mean less revenue in the Treasury. Oil prices are likely to fall further as a result of falling US and international demand. While interest rates are likely to increase, collapse of the financial system would mean less investment capital available for the Caribbean.

Fewer investments will mean fewer demands for goods and services including building materials, and this is bound to affect local businesses. With a fall in demand from foreign and state companies together with local consumers, the future of local businesspersons could be threatened. The recent boom in the real property market is due largely to demand for by and built to let, to meet expatriate demand, not local demand. Mr. Speaker, with a fall in foreign investment, this demand is likely to fall, so affecting the real estate market too. It would appear that the boom is over.

For these reasons, in light of this, I would like to support this Motion.

I thank you.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Sen. The Hon. Arnold Piggott): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for affording me the opportunity to be in this House, and to make a contribution to the Motion before the House pertinent to food prices.

It has been well established by the international agency, United Nations that food prices have been escalating around the world. In fact, it is reported that the food price index increased by some 26 per cent in 2007, compared to 9 per cent in 2006. It has also been well established that there are certain factors, which have led to this rise in prices, and they include demand from increased global expansion of population; increased demand from economic growth; increased spending in the developing countries, such as India and China; high oil prices; increased use of arable lands for other purposes than for food. That is the scenario of the world.

The phenomenon of increased food prices is not at all contained in Trinidad and Tobago. Trinidad and Tobago is not the world; Trinidad and Tobago is an island within the world. The sooner we get to understand that food price inflation, as it is referred to, is not made by the People's National Movement, the Government in power at this time, the earlier we come to understand, wake up and begin to make a serious contribution to agriculture in Trinidad and Tobago, by all those on the other side, who should know about agriculture and who should know better.

To say that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has been doing nothing in agriculture is to seek to mislead the population in full. It is not at all the proper thing to do by responsible parliamentarians or responsible individuals. This country imports more than 90 per cent of staples, and more than 80 per cent of legumes that it consumes. Based on the last agricultural census in 2004, having consulted with our stakeholders, we have made the following assessment of the state of the sector. Some 210,000 acres of land are classified as agricultural holdings, of which 56 per cent, 118,000 acres, is presently being utilized for crop and livestock production. Some 92,000 acres therefore are out of production; they are not now producing crops. It is well established that the output and productivity levels in the farming community and on the lands under cultivated, are very low, therefore we are producing much less than the land can produce. So, of the crops being utilized, 72 per cent are in crops; 11 per cent are in livestock.

Clearly, all of us need to do more in Trinidad and Tobago; the Government does not plant food; the Government facilitates agricultural production. Yes, the Government does not plant food, the Government facilitates agricultural

production. What we do is to provide facilities for people to be engaged in that situation. Some of the challenges Trinidad and Tobago faces in terms of food price inflation of local produce are unnecessarily long supply chains for local produce; very unreasonable mark-ups; inadequate production and marketing information systems; and inefficiencies and lack of transparency in prices.

The example that I would like to give speaks to a basket of goods that you may shop and buy from time to time, and those goods move from the levels of \$100 in one case, to \$130, based on where you buy or where you shop. It may move to \$151, again depending on where you shop. So, along the value chain, when you move from the farm gate to the supermarket, you can find yourself paying almost twice the amount of the cost of food. All of us have a role to play in this endeavour.

I heard the hon. Member for Oropouche West talk about the UNC proposal for enhancing food production in Trinidad and Tobago, and perhaps she has been reading the *Hansard* or listening to the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. [*Desk thumping*] What I said some time ago in this House or in the other place, is that I called on all of my colleagues, to help raise the knowledge bar, not to confuse or mislead the general population, but to raise the knowledge bar. I said, whereas in earlier times, agriculture may have been viewed as laborious, menial and unprofitable, today by virtue of new technologies and mechanization, agriculture can be viewed as modern, innovative, knowledge based, and technology driven.

When you talk about greater emphasis on technology, we already said that. We enunciated that in this House and we have publicize it to the national population. We talked about offering bio-safety, healthy lifestyles, healthy foods and profitable operations. We are not talking about agriculture as being menial, being down on the ground. We are saying let us move the whole process along the value chain; let us not just plant the tomatoes, the ochroes and the guavas; let us reap it; let us process it and get some agro-processing going, and add some value to it.

We talked about technologies such as greenhouse technology, the grow box technology and tunnel ventilation. [*Crosstalk*] Tunnel ventilation exists in Trinidad and Tobago for poultry. [*Desk thumping*] Substantial amounts of poultry being produced; plenty produce is coming through. Greenhouse technology is coming; we have the PCS Nitrogen model farm; already three greenhouses have been installed. We have in Chaguaramas, greenhouse technology being installed.

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So, when you come and bring in proposals that are a mere rehash of the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, or the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, think again. [*Desk thumping*] You talked about greater emphasis should be placed on research in agriculture. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Sen. The Hon. A. Piggott: Already under the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education—sitting next to me—the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) has established a Faculty of Bio-sciences, Technology and Agriculture. [*Desk thumping*] The Research Division of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources is to be integrated into that faculty. That is research and development; that is progress. You talk about what are we doing; we have done that already, technology is moving; research is moving.

You talked about cooperatives in agriculture, well that is old school; we say commodity associations; farmers' associations. We are talking that; that is what I have already enunciated in my statement in this Parliament or in the Senate. So, you are really mimicking what the Minister has said. You talked about deliberate collaboration with the farming community; we are out there every day.

You talked about extension services; we have already said in our plan, in our strategies here, in item 10, “proactive provision of extension and training services, and support for contract production and marketing”; it covers both your points. What are you talking about then? Item 9: Restructuring, research and development to allow for greater output productivity. We talked about reduction of praedial larceny; we talked about expansion of access to labour. [*Crosstalk*] Yes, we are moving along, and we are doing it. Action is what we are about! That is what we are talking about.

When I was coming down in my car just now, I heard you talking about the first thing to do is to give out land. I also said that in the other place; that the first basic position is to give out land. What have we done? You said we have done nothing. We said we have brought the land to the EMBD, because we said the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, a ministry, a bureaucratic system is too slow to move the land to the people. We said we would have a state company within the Government take the land—and distribute it.

Miss Panday: Which is bulldozing the people's crop, Sir!

Sen. The Hon. A. Piggott: You are talking 1 per cent of the issues; you should talk about the 99 per cent of what we do. [*Desk thumping*] Do not play

with that, because we are moving along. We said there must not be illegal activity in the areas, and you must not use agriculture to be illegal. [*Desk thumping*] You must not conduct illegal activity using agriculture. That is what we said, and therefore, we are moving the lands to the EMBD that would then be able to move the lands much faster. After all it is like A, B, C, we say move the land, provide the incentives, and give them the access roads as we have given them in Tabaquite. We have put access roads; I heard you talk about that as well.

This is not about PNM country. We cannot have Developed Country status in Trinidad and Tobago without developing all of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And so, we shall go all over the country and provide access roads. The hon. Member for Tabaquite will tell you—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister please, take your seat. Hon. Members opposite, the Minister is guesting this afternoon, perhaps as he is sitting in the wrong place he is being very vociferous, so give him an opportunity—[*Interruption*] You are occupying the seat allocated to the Member for Point Fortin—

Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: No, is it, hon. Minister? Are you sure? My apologies. Please, let us listen to him. The Minister does not often come to the House, and when he comes here let us show him some respect, please. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Piggott: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am assured that they have never seen an enthusiastic, energetic delivery man in agriculture, as they have seen on this side. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] This is not a “bhaji” and pumpkin Minister. [*Desk thumping*] This is a Minister of delivery. I have come in this Ministry to deliver to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and I give you the assurance one more time, that we plan to develop Trinidad and Tobago to developed country status.

3.30 p.m.

We cannot have a developed country in Port of Spain, or in San Fernando, or in Tobago; we have to develop Tabaquite, we have to develop Oropouche, we have to develop St. Augustine, Caroni East—my brother—we have to develop all of it. Of course, Mayaro has to be developed as well and we are going to work our way and get there to developing all of it.

Now, I am hearing about crop assistance and relief assistance. Floods are natural disasters but we have in some cases some wayward, unruly, illegal behaviour in the country. Some lands have been given out in some places and

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some people have taken the opportunity, instead of using the land for agriculture they have engaged in construction; some people having taken to diverting the watercourses and the river courses and have led to flooding down the plains; some people are dumping on the riverbanks—and I hear the Member for St. Augustine saying yes and I am happy that he is agreeing with me because he has seen that this is happening—and we must not allow this to happen. We must not. We must take action and not allow agriculture to be used in that manner.

We also have people who go and plant on the riverbanks or close to the river in flood-prone areas knowing that there will be flood. Are they planting to produce food for the people of Trinidad and Tobago or are they planting to make a claim on the Government to raid the Treasury? What are they doing? What we would like them to do is to engage themselves fully in agricultural pursuits.

I have evidence here for regional south of some 340 claims for flood assistance. We have already investigated 331 of them and so far we have found 195 valid claims for processing. It means therefore, that a number of these claims are not at all valid. They are not claims that are reasonable or honestly coming forward. We also have 803 applications from the regional north and we have investigated 761 of them. We have paid out or we have cheques already prepared, substantial amounts for flood assistance for the people in the farming community. So, we are not discouraging the people—we are encouraging them to farm. What we do not want them to do is to behave in an illegal and indisciplined manner in terms of dealing with agriculture.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, before you proceed further, I am sure you are in the wrong place you know. [*Inaudible*] Does it have Hon. Minister there?

Hon. Member: Yes, yes.

Mr. Speaker: You had shifted it? Okay, yes, please continue. [*Inaudible*] You will put it back? Yes. Really and truly that is not your correct place, but it was done for the budget purposes. [*Inaudible*] No, all I am saying is that previously the sitting arrangement was for you to be next to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, but apparently it was shifted during the budget presentation and not replaced, so that is what is confusing me. Really and truly the hon. Minister is to the left of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Nevertheless, since you are continuing and the name plate is there, please continue.

Dr. Moonilal: But he should not be the Minister of Agriculture neither.

Mr. S. Panday: “Ooh.” [*Laughter*]

Hon. Member: I wonder what you should be. Do you have something better to give him?

Ms. Kangaloo: Ask him where he should be, “nah”.

Sen. The Hon. A. Piggott: Mr. Speaker, I have just said to the House that because they have not found—on their side—and because they have branded a ministry, “bhaji” and pumpkin, they feel I should not be the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. [*Interruption*] Sorry, Mr. Speaker, I am a guest in this House, let me restrain myself. [*Interruption*]

Our programme is for producing for Trinidad and Tobago 25 per cent of the national food demand in the six food groups. Right now we are producing just under 15 per cent. This means producing a wide range of vegetables, fruits, root crops and livestock products. Vegetables, fruits and staples constitute a fair amount in terms of the impact on food prices, and we know that. Vegetables, fruits and staples comprise a fair amount in terms of the impact on food price inflation.

We are working assiduously in taking control of this situation. We want to bring 20,000 acres of land into agricultural production, some from the ex-Caroni workers, some from the large farms—3,000 acres there—and another 3,000 acres from other farms. This will result in increasing the percentage of land under crop production by 20 per cent.

Mr. Bharath: Minister, would you give way? Thank you Minister, I appreciate it. Would the Minister inform the House why he would think it is absolutely necessary for his agencies to bulldoze bearing crops, crops that are to be brought to market imminently as opposed to giving the necessary notices or as opposed to taking action prior to that point where these crops are full grown and are ready to be brought to market?

Sen. The Hon. A. Piggott: Mr. Speaker, I have dealt with that matter in this House, in the Senate and in the public domain—the issue of destruction of crops—I do not know that anybody in the Government wishes to see agricultural production destroyed; in fact, it was in the newspapers yesterday. I answered that question and I am sure you read it, where I said—in response to a question when I distributed some leases—that it hurts me for agricultural production to be destroyed. But on the other hand, if you get eight months notice that you should reap your crop and that when you are done, you are done, and you proceed after that, having reaped your crop to go back and plant, are you telling me—

Mr. S. Panday: You cannot get two crops in eight months.

Sen. The Hon. A. Piggott: How long it takes to get corn, perhaps? How long it takes to get tomatoes, perhaps? How long it takes to get ochro, perhaps? Do you see what I mean, Mr. Speaker? It is that the people who should know better do not know better. *[Interruption]* They do not know how long it takes to produce any kind of food crop in Trinidad and Tobago, but I have answered the question, Mr. Speaker. *[Interruption]*

We shall continue with our access road programme and I mentioned that we would do this across the country and we have proposals as to how we are going to get that done in terms of—a Roads Authority is going to be established which you have heard about before, but we are not waiting on the “Roads Authority”, we are going ahead to package our roads and to get the access roads done. Tucker Valley Demonstration Farm, a model farm, is expected to become productive by the end of 2008 and we are working assiduously in bringing those elements into productive use.

I heard something about prices as well. My information is that we have launched the National Agricultural Marketing Information System (NAMIS) and I want the Member for Oropouche West to hear this because I believe it was referenced under her statement. On a daily basis wholesale price volumes are collected at the northern wholesale market in Macoya. This information is published daily on our website and also at digital display boards inside the Macoya market for the benefit of vendors and buyers. I know that the Member for St. Augustine is familiar with that because he must pass there every day and he sees it. A large display board located outside the market in the vicinity of the traffic lights provides 24/7, both wholesale and retail prices.

We also have the “Market Watch”. This is a weekly publication in the three daily newspapers. It allows consumers to be informed about prices for selected commodities at various outlets throughout the country. Both wholesale and retail prices for 14 commodities are published. Retail prices are shown for the farmers’ markets, municipal markets, vegemarts and supermarkets. This publication also shows prices for selected seafood items. Commencing in November, prices for poultry, beef, goat, lamb, and grocery items would also be included in the market watch.

One significant impact of the “Market Watch” has been the reduction in the spread—and perhaps I should say it a little more slowly—between wholesale prices and retail prices, especially at supermarkets, they are taking note that the information is out there in the public domain, that the consumer is educated. *[Desk thumping]* We are educating the consumer. Price spreads at these outlets have come down from 120 per cent in December 2006 to 70 per cent currently.

Did you hear me? Price spreads have come down from 120 per cent in December 2006 to 70 per cent at this time.

We also have in operation, farmers' markets and currently NAMDEVCO operates five farmers' markets at Diego Martin, Macoya, Valencia, Debe and Point Fortin, and yes, we are going into Chaguanas and Sangre Grande by December 2008. The objective of the farmers' market is to link farmers directly to the consumers and vice versa, thereby eliminating the middlemen and making produce more affordable to our consumers, the people of Trinidad and Tobago. This objective has been achieved. The cost of the selected food basket taken at the farmers' market is the lowest against all retail outlets in Trinidad and Tobago. Currently, around 300 farmers sell produce at various farmers' markets to thousands of buyers.

The school feeding programme: farmers are engaged in growing items such as callaloo leaves, bodi, pumpkin, "bhaji" and tomato among other items to meet the needs of the programme. Root crops will be sourced from farmers including ex-Caroni workers. I already referenced the large farms and I want to reference another aspect. Because, when I spoke in the other place, in the Senate, I did make the point that Trinidad alone will not be able to produce food by itself for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago and that what we are looking towards is a Caricom initiative. There is something called the "Jagdeo Initiative" in terms of agricultural production and we are pursuing that diligently. We now import from St. Vincent some 5.5 million kilogrammes of root crops, bananas and plantains. From January to May 2008, this figure was 3.6 million to date.

I must tell you, Mr. Speaker, just last month we concluded our Pest-Risk Assessment (PRA) on certain products and commodities out of Guyana and some 22 items or so are now certified for import into Trinidad and Tobago. The Government is at work. The Government is at work, what do you want? You want food? You want reduced prices? We are doing that. We now can import from Guyana bodi, beans, eddoes, ginger, green plantain, pumpkin, rice, sweet potato, hot pepper, pineapples and limes among others. We are seeking to bring more supply. Our job is to bring more supply to meet the needs of the demand. It is money going after products. It is demand going after supply and the more we supply the lower the price will get, so we are working. This Government is at work. [*Desk thumping*] You need not ask us what we are doing. We are working.

Mr. S. Panday: Spiting local farmers and spiting the country as a result.

Sen. The Hon. A. Piggott: Well, I have already said that this country cannot come to developed country status without developing all of Trinidad and Tobago.

Rising Food Prices
[SEN. THE HON. A. PIGGOTT]

Friday, October 31, 2008

We have taken the position that not one of our people should be left behind and therefore we are doing so much to the farming community—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Sen. The Hon. A. Piggott:—we are doing so much in social development. A great deal of work is going on there. We are providing stipends to people who can ill-afford to buy what they need to put on the table. If you want me to talk more I can talk. I can talk more. [*Inaudible*] I wonder what the hon. Member is suggesting. Is the hon. Member suggesting that until we can fully meet the needs, the food and nutrition security of this country, we should not have food in the country? Is that what the hon. Member is suggesting? [*Interruption*] Well, I beg to differ. [*Crosstalk*]

3.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, just yesterday, two days ago, I was so pleased to be in the company of some 200 farmers in Gaston Court in Chaguanas. There I delivered 125 leases [*Desk thumping*] and this is following the 88 leases that I delivered some three months ago, [*Desk thumping*] and this will be followed by 1,158 leases by next quarter. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: How many did you all do?

Sen. The Hon. A. Piggott: We are delivering what we promised. [*Desk thumping*] What we are doing is opening up for farmers, new opportunities for employment. What we are doing is opening up new opportunities for investments in agriculture. What we are doing is opening up new opportunities for income generation and distribution. We are opening up new opportunities for making meaningful contributions to food production in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, all our efforts are geared to a commitment to facilitating the reduction in the Food Import Bill. The Food Import Bill is the one that is creating havoc with our food price inflation; it is significant. We are seeking to broaden and realign our extension services as I said before, and partnering with the private sector to provide an expanded and ongoing training programme. I am so pleased as well to announce that PCS Nitrogen Model Farm, which is close to beginning production—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Beginning?

Hon. Member: Oh, oh, oh!

Ms. Kangaloo: But you said it was not set up.

Sen. The Hon. A. Piggott: Let me tell you something, I said before it is close to beginning. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, the Member is close to conducting an operation somewhere, but he is not there yet. So we have built greenhouses. The greenhouses must be first built before we begin to plant it. I think the other side does not understand clearly what is meant by conceptualization and realization. [*Desk thumping*] I think it is an understanding problem. It is an understanding problem.

Hon. Member: Tim, you should know that.

Sen. The Hon. A. Piggott: I know some of my parliamentary Members on that side are brilliant people. Some of them are brilliant you know, and some of them understand it. They understand the thing, but they are being naughty.

The PCS Agricultural Resource Centre as it will be called, will commence training of new agriculturists very shortly. We will be meeting with PCS Nitrogen administration in the next two weeks to discuss the modus operandi for training the farmers, the ex-Caroni workers.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I thank the hon. Minister for giving way, Mr. Speaker. In the same context that you are meeting with PCS Nitrogen, is it possible that you can discuss with them the lowering of fertilizers, which the farmers have been complaining of bitterly, and which have escalated in certain instances to almost 500 per cent?

Sen. The Hon. A. Piggott: Mr. Speaker, I am tempted to say “noted”, but, because is it not only noted, because of the proactive nature of this Government, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago under the PNM administration, led by the honourable Patrick Manning, we have already engaged PCS in conversations and we are engaging other players in the industry, in conversation with respect to inputs to the industry. We are not asleep, we are wide awake and we are always ahead of you. I know that there are good batsmen and sportsmen on that side, but I think we run a bit faster than some of the sportsmen on that side.

Mr. S. Panday: You run away.

Dr. Moonilal: We are the good sportsmen.

Sen. The Hon. A. Piggott: Mr. Speaker, we have already provided some \$600 million in infrastructure development for the Caroni lands for the 7,000 plus ex-employees, and we are continuing our programme of infrastructure across the agricultural sector. I want to share a little more before I end. You must be glad that I am going to end because you know—[*Interruption*]

Mr. S. Panday: No, we are listening to you. You are doing good. Continue.

Sen. The Hon. A. Piggott:—all of what you had, has been blown away, so you must want me to end.

Hon. Members: No.

Sen. The Hon. A. Piggott: Mr. Speaker, you should all be aware that NAMDEVCO is working on market arrangements for fresh produce, arising from food production. You must be aware that NAMDEVCO is providing market intelligence to the farmers. You must be aware that Trinidad and Tobago Agri-Business Association (TTABA) is bringing some organizational structure to the industry. You must be aware of that and I want to tell you that we expect that the institutions which we have put in place, the Agricultural Development Bank, NAMDEVCO, TTABA and EMBD will be working closely together to ensure that our plans and programmes in agriculture are successful. I want to tell you as well, that it is this Government that has put into the allocation for the Agricultural Development Bank to lend money to the farmers. That allocation has moved from \$75 million in the last fiscal year, to \$125 million. Fifty million dollars more. [*Desk thumping*] This is not a Government that is not concerned with agriculture, food production and supply of food to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. You cannot ever say that. It is just not possible for you to say that.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make a special plea to those on the other side, opposed to Government's programmes. Those who are opposing the Government's programmes whether they are infrastructural development, office complexes, water taxis, road networks, rapid rail, our extensive—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Piggott: Pardon me?

Dr. Moonilal: You are not real.

Sen. The Hon. A. Piggott: Why do you not listen? Our extensive social programmes. Do not listen to just the words that I speak, listen to the sentences that I speak. I know you are an intelligent man. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Panday: You made that speech last week, I remember it now.

Sen. The Hon. A. Piggott: We support the right to food for all. You will hear me, you will hear me and you will hear me and you will hear me. So long as I am in agriculture, you would hear me say a number of the same things that are relevant to agriculture for Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to encourage you to see the good in the programmes that the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is engaged in. I want you to encourage your people to do the right thing. I want you to encourage them to be disciplined. I want you to encourage them to grow what they eat and eat what they grow for food and nutrition security. That is because you are not aware that since May, we launched a programme called “Grow what you eat, and eat what you grow. Sow your seeds and reap”, and we say that you do that for food and nutrition security. So if you heard it before, you will hear it again and you will hear it until this Government builds the entire programme of agriculture in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Ha, tell them again.

Sen. The Hon. A. Piggott: Wishful thinking. May I invite all of you present and the national community, to join with me and the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, in shaping the future of agriculture together in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much for affording me the opportunity to make a contribution in this Motion.

Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There is some anticipation here over what I am about to say, [*Laughter*] but I am sorry if I am calmer than I should be, because for seven years we are hearing the same thing. So, I do not know what else could be said and what else could be done. I want to tell this evangelical Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources— I know that he is acquainted with the spirits. I know that. [*Crosstalk*] I do not know what you have in mind—that if the price of food would go down, the louder you speak, we would live in a paradise. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Free food by now.

Dr. R. Moonilal: We would be eating free. But the Minister felt that if he came and raised his voice—now there must be some Environmental Management Authority rule against this type. Every Minister of Agriculture from the PNM, they bring with some loud speaker kind of mouth. But I want to tell the Minister in a soft way, in a soft manner, Minister, there is an article in the *Newsday*, Friday, October 31, 2008. I repeat, Friday, October 31, 2008, *Newsday*.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Today.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Today, page 8, “High foods prices for Christmas”. Now, why do you not prevent articles like this from getting in the media, given all the zeal, policy, practice, programme and training?

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Dr. R. Moonilal: How could the *Newsday* Editor dare confront this Minister with such a bold and incorrect headline in the *Newsday*, page 8. I mean they go contrary to every single thing that you are saying. But Mr. Minister, I want to tell you that citizens of Trinidad and Tobago know the prices of commodities. You could jump high, you could jump low; you could talk loud, you could talk soft; they know the prices that they face. Whether it is Hi-Lo, Food Basket, Mucurapo market, Tunapuna market, Port of Spain, they know the prices that they face. Farmers know the problems that they face.

Mr. Minister, I am sure in your outstanding professional career, many of the tasks you assumed earlier in your professional life would have prepared you for this challenge in agriculture, but I want to tell you that you are out of sync with the farming community and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I want to say that the proof is in the price, not just the taste, but the price and the price of food has been escalating for several years in this country. Notwithstanding the tone of your voice, the loudness and all these policies that you highlighted on the piece of paper, nothing has changed. It has reached to this stage because your Government, led by the Member for San Fernando East, committed the ultimate sin of closing Caroni (1975) Limited. You closed down the one large farm the State had, and today, cannot open one large farm having promised three about four years ago.

Today, I see in the Newspaper you are handing out titles to land to some people and so on. I do not know if they are Caroni workers, they look like typists. I did not see anybody looking like a Caroni worker, unless they were the typists in Caroni (1975) Limited. [*Crosstalk*] Your Government went and trained Caroni workers to make toolum, shortbread and cake. You are right, your Government does not grow food, you destroy food. [*Desk thumping*] You destroy crops. People plant the land. Twenty-five years they are planting food crops, selling to the markets, selling on the side of the road and you go and bulldoze it, and you jump up and say people should use the land according to lawful purposes. But for 25 years people are planting their crops there, what lawful purposes. What rubbish and nonsense you are talking?

Mr. Imbert: “Hey, hey, hey. Hello, sit down.”

Dr. R. Moonilal: No, you will not interrupt me.

Mr. Imbert: Sit down!

Dr. R. Moonilal: Unless it is some procedural matter, I am not going to sit down.

Mr. Imbert: Sit down!

Mr. Speaker: I can assure you it is a procedural matter.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, November 07, 2008 at 1.30 p.m. We will be following the Order Paper.

4.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Before I put the question on the adjournment, there is a matter to be raised by the hon. Member for Princes Town North.

Minister of National Security (Failure to Bring Regulations)

Mr. Subhas Panday (Princes Town North): Mr. Speaker, I raise this Motion under Standing Order 11 of the House of Representatives. It really deals with asking the House to condemn that Minister of National Security for failure to bring to this Parliament orders and regulations in order to implement the Constitution (Amdt.) Act, No. 6 of 2006, for the appointment of a Commissioner of Police.

Mr. Speaker, this has a genesis. Sometime in 2004, the UNC attempted to help the Government to deal with then escalating crime. Mr. Dookeran, Mr. B. Panday and Mrs. Persad-Bissessar met with the Government and came up with a package of legislation to deal with crime—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. S. Panday:—for example, the DNA and the breathalyzer, which up to today they have not implemented. Also included in that was the police reform legislation. It was thought that there was a necessity to reform the police service. Regardless how much money you throw at crime, if you do not have an efficient and competent police service to implement the law, you are just wasting time. That is what this Government has done. [*Desk thumping*] No vision; no vision. Having done that, the Constitution (Amdt.) Act was passed in April 2006.

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In order to give life and in order to implement the law there was need for regulations. This Government, knowing fully well that then Commissioner Paul was about to retire, sat on their haunches and took 15 months to bring the regulations before this House. While persons were being killed, this Government sat for 15 months before they brought regulations to start the initiation of the process to appoint a Commissioner of Police.

That process, in April or sometime later in 2007, in July, the regulations came to the House, and they came by negative resolution. In the meantime, that Act was assented to on April 13, 2006, the regulations were tabled in July 2007.

We ask them here today, "Are you interested in dealing with crime; why did you take 15 months to bring simple regulations?" Regulation 165 spoke about the criteria qualifications and regulation 166 spoke about the process.

The Police Service Commission immediately embarked upon putting the process in train and spent a lot of money. Advertisements went in the local press, the regional press, the international press and on the Internet. Subsequently, 18 persons applied for the job; not one, but 18 persons applied for the job.

After that they set up a system whereby Penn State University would do a preliminary investigation and interview of the 18 nominees. Subsequent to that, the number was reduced from 18, to nine and then to five persons. In order of meritocracy, the Penn State University sent the nominations to the Police Service Commission. Having sent them, the Police Service Commission then took it upon itself to do further investigation on the shortlist of persons that was presented to it. They did that because they were trying to get the most qualified, the most competent and the person with the most impeccable character. Hence, they even put them to polygraph tests to find out who were liars who were not liars.

At the end of the day, on June 13, 2007, the Police Service Commission sent their nomination to the President who then presented it to the Parliament. You would be surprised to know that this Government that took 15 months to produce regulations, when they found out that the person they got was not the person they wanted, playing with politics, playing with crime, playing with the lives of people, stood in this House on July 04 and shut down the regulations; the regulations which they took 15 months to produce.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what they said? They lie so much, this PNM Government so deceitful, they play in the gutter and the muck so much; they said that they were not attacking the nominee, Mr. Stephen Williams, but they were attacking the process.

In regulation 165, they did not like the definition of police service. Hear the nonsense that they spoke. They said that the process was too convoluted; they forgot what their own Prime Minister had said to this House. The Prime Minister had indicated to this House that the reason we were going through that process was because the post of a police commissioner was so important that they could not take chances and they must embark upon a process which would produce the best, the most qualified, the most meritorious and the person with the most impeccable character for the job. What did they do? They attacked the process.

Imagine they set the timetable. Imagine this Government made the regulations and set the timetable. They said that one of the weaknesses was that it took, at least, four months before the appointment could be made. So what? Could the Police Service Commission not speak to Penn University before they made a recommendation? That was so the process would be transparent, fair and effective.

Mr. Speaker, they went on to say that persons with degrees could apply from abroad, but persons without degrees could only come from the local police service. That was the level of foolishness they spoke in this Parliament. They said that they were attacking the process, but I ask the question: If the process was convoluted and the aim of the process was to have transparency and have the best person put in the office of commissioner, why not use the advantage which resulted from the convoluted process?

Furthermore, we asked them, since that was the first time we were embarking on the process, when you had the regulations in place already, you would not need that amount of time. That was the kind of fallacious argument they tried to pull on the people's eyes, when people's children were being killed.

They said, "Oh, we do not want it." What foolishness by a government; apparently they are encouraging the crime. But their wickedness manifested itself during his own debate when he said, "Stephen Williams, we have nothing with him; he might be a good man", but then he attacked him by saying, "You know that man never managed a region." He went on to say, "He is No. 26 in line for promotion." He attacked the person also.

It seems to me that the PNM, once they cannot control everything, once they cannot control the police service, they would mash it up. They do not care about crime. [*Desk thumping*] This Government does not care about crime. We want to tell the people, all of them who voted for you, the Member for Diego Martin West would have told you, "Take it in your ruckungkertungkung". [*Laughter*] But we are not like that; we are sorry for persons who have lost their children, even if

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they voted for the PNM. It is time that we kicked them out of office on this issue of crime. This PNM should go; if you all have any shame, go; resign now. [*Desk thumping*] You have failed this country.

They struck down the regulations and decided on seniority. That Police Service Commission, I wonder what wrong "with dey head"? They took the cue from the Minister and went back from meritocracy into seniority. What do they have? You appoint an Acting Commissioner under whose watch in three months there were 173 murders. And he is going with the papers, just like the PNM, having press conferences and trying to deal with crime by the press, by publicity, by the media.

One would have thought with such an important thing, that on July 04 you would have come with regulations before the House went into vacation at the beginning of August. No; "dey doh care". They said that they wanted to consult us; many of us sat and waited on a call from the Government to assist them in drafting the regulations; nothing.

They have come here today—when the House reconvened, one would have expected that the first thing to be on the Order Paper would be the new regulations to deal with crime, because crime is an important problem in the country; but this PNM does not care; they do not care. Today we must condemn this Government in the strongest terms for not bringing these regulations up to this point in time. [*Desk thumping*] We want to tell them something today: The PNM is the cause of crime. The PNM is the cause of the police service being in the position it is today. The mess that we find the police service in today is as a result of the PNM.

Mr. Speaker, do you know that you have an Acting Commissioner? You do not have a Deputy Commissioner in the country; you have an Acting Deputy Commissioner? Everybody in the police service is an actor. Why are you doing this to the police service? We must put the police service on the right footing. All these meetings you are having, talking to criminals and telling criminal gangs, "Come, we want to talk", we say no. You must put the police service on the right footing before you deal with crime. Before you deal with crime, there is the need for us to put the police service on a strong footing, and this Government has no intention.

Today, as we meet in this Parliament—[*Interruption*] "Allyuh cyar take de jamming, because allyuh incompetent." [*Desk thumping*] I have looked at the regulations and I amended them. I did it in five minutes. I am willing to pass it to them so we can have the law put in place. If they do not do that and they do not

bring those regulations right away, we would know that they are playing politics with the police service. They want the Acting Commissioner to stay there so they could extend his time and prevent the police service from moving forward to do their duty.

4.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, earlier on when the Member was contributing, he referred to “that” Minister of National Security, and I have been hearing talk about “that” Member; it is “the” Minister of National Security.

Mr. S. Panday: Mr. Speaker, wherever I said “that”, can it be changed to “the”?

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: And apologize.

Mr. S. Panday: I am like that, but I will tell you something, I cannot trust you any longer. You said, “trust me”, I cannot do it.

The Minister of National Security (Sen. The Hon. Martin Joseph): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am here to respond to the Motion: “The failure of the hon. Minister of National Security to introduce the relevant regulations and/or order to establish the process and/or procedure for the appointment of a Commissioner of Police.”

I would like to advise the House and hon. Members of the status of the undertaking by Government to revise the selection process order for the appointment of a Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Police. In responding to this Motion, I wish to remind hon. Members that the process to select a Commissioner of Police last year was convoluted and lasted almost 11 months. It commenced in August 2007 when the vacancy was advertised and concluded on July 04, 2008 when this House debated the notification of the President in relation to the candidate for the position of Commissioner of Police.

The Government did not approve the nomination on the basis that the process that was used to select the Commissioner of Police was flawed and did not result in the best and widest possible pool of candidates from which a selection had to be made. The Government sought the input of relevant parties in an effort to streamline the process and make it more efficient. The Attorney General; the Ministry of National Security, the Director of Personnel Administration; the Leader of Government Business, as well as representatives from the department of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel and the Law Reform Commission, collaborated to make amendments to the selection process order.

Minister of National Security
[SEN. THE HON. M. JOSEPH]

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In an effort to strengthen the legislation governing the selection for the Commissioner of Police and Deputy Commissioner of Police, Cabinet agreed earlier this month to amend the existing constitutional orders. This was to ensure that the process to appoint a Commissioner of Police and Deputy Commissioner of Police will be shortened. It must be underscored that the process that obtained previously proved cumbersome and impractical.

In an effort to expedite the process to select the most suitable candidate, the following amendments will be proposed:

CURRENT PROCEDURE	PROPOSED PROCEDURE
The vacant position must be advertised twice.	Vacant positions would be advertised only once.
Vacant positions must be advertised at least four months before the appointment is to be made.	Vacant positions would be advertised for a period at the discretion of the Police Service Commission but shall not exceed one month.
The Police Service Commission is responsible for the advertisement of the vacancy and contracted firm is to only conduct the assessment process.	The contracted firm will be responsible for advertising the vacancy and all aspects of the assessment, including background and security checks.
The firm that is to be contracted must forward to the candidates various documents, including the assessment guidelines at least one month before the conduct of the assessment process.	This period is to be abridged to two weeks.
Candidates are given an opportunity to be heard where enquiries of the Police Service Commission result in an adverse report of a criminal, legal or ethical nature.	A time period for making representation to be heard will now be included and restricted to 14 days.
The appointment of the Commissioner of Police and Deputy Commissioner of Police qualification and Selection Criteria Order 2007, reflects that the Commissioner of Police and Deputy Commissioner of Police must have no	The Police Service Commission has recommended that such criterion be reduced to 12 years for a Deputy Commissioner of Police. This requires an amendment to the Qualification and Selection Criteria Order.

less than 12 years experience of increasing responsibility in law enforcement.	
The Order states that the Commission is only allowed to communicate with the contracted firm after the firm has compiled the order of merit list.	The Commission will now be able to communicate with the firm prior to the compilation of the order of merit list. This is necessary especially where the Commission is aware of adverse information on any candidate during the assessment process that should be brought to the firm's attention.

I would also like to indicate two additional matters that did not augur for the most effective process. Qualifications of applicants: Paragraph 2 of the Qualification and Selection Criteria Order states that a candidate for the office shall have a recognized degree in either law, criminal justice, criminology, et cetera and no less than 15 years' experience of increasing responsibility in law enforcement. Paragraph 4 of the same Order states that an officer who does not hold such academic qualifications but possesses core criteria, that is leadership skills, vision, integrity, and has 20 years' experience or more in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, shall be considered. This, in effect, means that if an applicant does not have a university degree, he or she can only come from within the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. Under this process, international or regional applicants can only be considered if they have a recognized degree in one of the specified fields.

Possible headhunting: The procedures to appoint the Commissioner of Police do not allow for headhunting. It is the view of the Government that with respect to the selection of a person to such high office, there should be the ability to headhunt if the process does not yield a suitable candidate.

Clearly, the process I have outlined was flawed and resulted in a protracted process that did not give the best pool of candidates from which a selection was to be made. The Government has noted the comments of the Member for Princes Town North in the debate in this honourable House on July 04, 2008. The hon. Member expressed the view that the Opposition was not equipped to make an informed decision on the nomination of each candidate because of a lack of information relating to the candidates.

Mr. S. Panday: And funds.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: I do not know about the funds. In this regard, it may be necessary to amend the Constitution to make provision for the submission of a CV to be submitted along with the name of the candidates prior to the debate on any notification.

I wish to state that the Government recognized the urgency of this matter but considered its meticulous approach necessary so as to ensure that the process is sufficiently improved and that we do not end up with the flaws that we experienced previously. The Orders are currently being redrafted and the Government has undertaken to provide the draft revised orders to the Opposition prior to them being laid in Parliament. I wish to assure this honourable House and especially the Member for Princes Town North that the proposed amendments will be laid in Parliament at the earliest possible time.

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

Youth Parliament

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before I move the Motion for the adjournment, there are two items of information which I would like to bring to your attention: One is the Youth Parliament on Monday, November 03, at 12.30. I am urging all Members of Parliament to attend, even if you have to attend for a short period. It is our annual Youth Parliament sponsored by the local branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

Marshal of the Parliament

Mr. Speaker: The next item I wish to bring to your attention is the fact that the Marshal of the Parliament who has been with us for the last three years, Mr. Brian Caesar, is moving on and we now have a new Marshal. He is Mr. Jules George. I want, on your behalf and on my own behalf, to thank Mr. Brian Caesar for the services he had rendered to this Parliament—[*Desk thumping*] over the last three years and wish him well in his new endeavour.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 4.25 p.m.