

*Leave of Absence**Friday, January 23, 2009***HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Friday, January 23, 2009*

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: Dr. Keith Rowley, the hon. Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West, for today's sitting of the House; the hon. Jack Austin Warner, Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West for the period January 19 to January 31, 2009.

May I take this opportunity, hon. Members, to welcome back—joining us for the first time this new year—the hon. Vasant Bharath, [*Desk thumping*] Member of Parliament for St. Augustine. I hope you had a good Christmas and it is good to see you back with us.

PAPER LAID

The Homes for Older Persons Regulations, 2009. [*The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT**(PRESENTATION)**

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the first report (2009) session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the supplementation of the 2008 Appropriation.

DEFINITE URGENT MATTER**(LEAVE)****Yellow Fever Outbreak****(Failure of Government to Prevent)**

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 at today's sitting, Friday January 23, 2009, for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely the failure of the Government to implement measures to prevent an outbreak of yellow fever in the country.

Definite Urgent Matter (Leave)
[DR. GOPEESINGH]

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The matter is definite as it pertains to a specific matter, namely the detection of yellow fever in dead monkeys in the forests adjoining residences and the virus spreading in a southerly direction.

The matter is urgent because of the present possible and impending spread of the yellow fever and possible death to humans.

The matter is of public importance because of the fear of citizens following the dengue outbreak which they are now experiencing, of contracting yellow fever spread by infected aedes mosquitoes after thousands have been infected by dengue and several lives lost in 2008, and the inability to obtain the vaccines in several areas and several health institutions in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this matter does not qualify under this particular Standing Order but would have done so under Standing Order 11.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Hosting of International Conferences

The Prime Minister (Hon. Patrick Manning): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to address this honourable House and the national community on two important international conferences that Trinidad and Tobago will host this year: the Fifth Summit of the Americas and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

Almost one year ago I announced the country that Trinidad and Tobago will have the honour and privilege of hosting these two conferences. Today, I want to state quite unequivocally that the Government remains fully committed to the successful hosting of these two conferences and to meeting all of our obligations to our guests from across the Western Hemisphere and the Commonwealth.

From April 17-19, 2009, the Fifth Summit of the Americas will take place here in Port of Spain and will be followed by the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting from November 27-29, 2009. We expect to have more than 70 world leaders here in Port of Spain to discuss issues and develop collective responses that are pertinent to the lives of some 2.8 billion people living in the Americas and the Commonwealth.

I should also add that in the week leading up to the official programme of activities for each conference, a number of meetings will be convened to engage civil society, private sector leaders and youth representatives in ongoing dialogue on developmental issues and to facilitate their contributions to the respective multilateral processes.

There are misguided notions in some quarters as to why this Government has undertaken these international commitments. Let me assure the national community that when we took the decision to host these events, it was in the context of the very progressive vision we have for this country and after very, very careful consideration of the benefits that can accrue to our people and the wider Caricom region from leading multilateral initiatives of such importance and magnitude, we saw the opportunity to move Trinidad and Tobago to the centre stage of hemispheric and global multilateralism that could also lead to a strategic advantage for our own development and progress.

In this increasingly interconnected world where many uncertainties abound and change is constant, pursuing development cannot be an insular exercise. May I add that as one of the more successful economies in this hemisphere, we also have a lot to offer in terms of good practices that other countries are quite keen for us to share with them. The point I want to emphasize here is that we must engage in higher levels of bilateral and multilateral cooperation. We must pursue greater integration across this hemisphere and with major emerging economies and we must advance the interests and promote the well-being of our citizens. This strategy is essential for small developing nations like ours.

In specific terms, for example, through bilateral and multilateral agreements already signed and in the pipeline, we can further the diversification of our economy through encouraging foreign direct investment in the non-energy sector of Trinidad and Tobago. This will promote the sustainability of economic and social development in this country.

It is in this context that we must see the benefits of leading these multilateral initiatives which are an integral part of our foreign policy and which consolidate and extend the high and very positive profile that our country now enjoys in international affairs. Our growth and development as a country are very much tied to how we project ourselves in, and engage with, our Caricom neighbours, our hemisphere and the wider world.

Many of the challenges we face are transnational in nature and, therefore, to a significant degree require transnational solutions. This renewed engagement with the Americas and the Commonwealth of nations is being complemented by initiatives with West, Central, East and Southern Africa, as well as China and India, two of the most dynamic economies in the world.

There is much to gain from this intense involvement in global affairs. The benefits span the political, economic, social and cultural spheres. The obvious

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gain is of a political nature, as a relatively small country such as Trinidad and Tobago has a strategic opportunity to host the Presidents and Prime Ministers of this hemisphere and the Commonwealth to discuss pressing priorities against the backdrop of current international developments. As the issues on the global economic and political arena evolve, the summits create a forum for these leaders to discuss the modalities for collective action in addressing such issues.

The Government also understands the importance of these events for Caricom member countries. We have promoted the Fifth Summit as a Caricom effort and will use the opportunity to bring to the forefront of the Inter-American and Commonwealth agendas, development issues that are relevant to the realities of our small states.

Furthermore, by presiding over this process, Trinidad and Tobago is in a position to give priority to the challenges facing our sub-region and to propose mechanisms to ensure that the outcome impacts positively on the well-being of the people in our country. I am heartened to know that the other countries are appreciative of the approach adopted by this country to producing tangible results that affect citizens everywhere.

The theme of the Summit of the Americas is “Securing our Citizens’ Future by Promoting Human Prosperity, Energy Security and Environmental Sustainability.” For the Commonwealth, the theme is equally engaging: “Partnering for a more Equitable and Sustainable Future.” These themes address issues that affect all countries at a time when dramatic changes are taking place. The global economy is now experiencing a deepening slowdown with major economies already in recession and there is growing opinion that the situation will get worse before it gets better.

No country or region is insulated from the negative effects of this situation. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to find solutions together. In today’s interdependent world, we need strengthened partnerships more than ever. Our country is poised at this critical time in our development to facilitate the kind of dialogue within two important groupings of countries that will provide expanded opportunities for wealth-creation, alliances, business partnerships, poverty reduction, job creation, skills development, border security and crime prevention.

On Tuesday last, Mr. Barack Obama was inaugurated the 44th President of the United States. This new leader in the White House has enunciated the need for the kind of diplomacy which brings people together. The Summit of the Americas comes some two months after his inauguration and it will be the first multilateral forum in our hemisphere at which he will have the opportunity to interact with his counterparts on issues affecting us all.

The prospects for a new engagement with Latin America and the Caribbean must not be downplayed. We are therefore extremely honoured that he will grace our shores to share for the first time, his vision and hope for the future of our hemisphere. The United States, like the rest of the world, recognizes that partnerships are vital to dealing with economic, security, energy and environmental challenges and Trinidad and Tobago will provide the platform for the holding of these discussions.

1.45 p.m.

In 1994, when the leaders of the hemisphere first met in Miami on the initiative of President Clinton, it was against the background of sharing accumulated experiences, programming collective multinational and national actions and developing solutions to the programmes that affect the peoples of the Americas. I was pleased at that time to represent Trinidad and Tobago.

This mandate has not changed. Indeed, Trinidad and Tobago is seeking to make the declaration of commitment of Port of Spain different from the preceding summit documents. We are seeking to focus on strategies for implementation and functional cooperation. In fact, the conferences in Port of Spain will set the agenda for the next three years in both the hemisphere and at the level of the Commonwealth. The areas under focus are all extremely pertinent to the further growth and development of all nations, including Trinidad and Tobago. These include:

- the global economic situation;
- managing the environment and mitigating the effects of climate change;
- ensuring reliable and affordable supplies of clean energy; promoting conditions conducive to decent work;
- expanding economic opportunities for the youth;
- strengthening social protection and poverty eradication programmes;
- building human capacity and competencies through the strengthening of the education system at all levels—early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary;
- improving access to comprehensive quality health care;
- strengthening public security systems;
- care of the elderly, the disabled and other vulnerable groups;
- increasing competitiveness; fostering innovation; and
- entrepreneurship and improving the effectiveness of our implementation mechanisms.

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Mr. Speaker, these conferences give leaders the opportunity to talk to one another, to build partnerships and alliances and to understand the peculiar circumstances facing each country. The goal is to find pragmatic, implementable responses that bring economic and social benefits to all countries and for the requisite resources to be provided to existing hemispheric institutions and cooperation commitments to finance all the areas I have just outlined.

By broadening our collaborative base, we can ensure the viability of our economy and the sustainability of our society. New opportunities will arise for shaping and strengthening new and existing forms of North/South and South/South cooperation, including the increased flow of resources for technical cooperation. Furthermore, these events are integral events of the strategy of positioning Trinidad and Tobago as a financial and conference centre, which will in turn spawn economic opportunities for the provision of a wide range of goods and services.

This activity will not be confined to the April summit, but will continue through to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and other conferences which Trinidad and Tobago has already successfully lobbied to host. This is expected to be a sustainable venture as this country is being increasingly favoured by international organizations to be the venue for their respective fora. This interest acknowledges that Trinidad and Tobago possesses the relevant infrastructure and capacity of world class standards to undertake such ventures.

I want to emphasize that all leaders of the 34 countries in this hemisphere are expected to attend the Fifth Summit of the Americas. The international media will be here in full force and during that period the focus of the world will be on Trinidad and Tobago. It is an unprecedented opportunity for a country to be showcased internationally with the obvious concomitant redounding inevitably to the people of our country.

Following the high level summits, it is anticipated that more requests to use our facilities will be forthcoming and that there will be an increase in business tourists on a continuous basis. The opportunities for hotels, taxi drivers, artisans, caterers, interpreters, room attendants, tour operators, business equipment and other suppliers are therefore many. This is an important component of the return on the investment in the Waterfront Development Project.

One must not underestimate the value from the experiences of servicing a summit and consequent creation of employment and building of human and institutional capacity, including the upgrading of skills and infrastructure.

May I just remind the national community, that the Hyatt Regency Hotel and the two other buildings in that development are all owned by the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Private sector leaders will be meeting almost in parallel with the Heads of State and Government to discuss, in the case of the Fifth Summit, a new agenda for sustaining competitiveness. They will seek to define parameters for working closely with governments to restore stability and confidence in the global trade and economic system and to facilitate business growth and human prosperity.

Thus far, the private sector has been enthused by the forthcoming fora and has identified many issues it would like to see placed on the agenda. They are keen on the linkages to be made with the various regional and international businesses that have shown a keen interest in attending the meetings.

It is a known fact that every host country of these international conferences has reported increased foreign direct investment in the aftermath of these meetings. We have an extraordinary chance of opening doors to further trade and industry. As you can see, Mr. Speaker, in one fell swoop, so many national objectives can be achieved with these two conferences. I must, however, caution those who expect instantaneous results that the benefits of hosting these events will materialize post 2009, as we begin to implement the commitments agreed on April 19 and November 29, 2009.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of logistics, over the past several months we have been coordinating our preparations to host the conferences through a joint public/private sector initiative that has many of our citizens from the business community and civil society working alongside public officers and the National Summit Secretariat. The Secretariat has also been coordinating its efforts with the Organization of American States in Washington DC and with the Commonwealth Secretariat in London. In the area of security, many of the regional and international mechanisms for assistance used for Cricket World Cup will be reactivated.

I take this opportunity to thank all citizens who have participated in the preparation thus far. I also thank those countries that have graciously offered their support to us in preparing for these multilateral initiatives. I assure the national community that we will be ready with all the preparations.

In the planning process, logistics and security coordinators have been working quite diligently to minimize disruptions to our citizens and/or business community. However, I urge all our citizens to understand the critical responsibility we have to ensure the safety and comfort of our visitors. Some disruptions are inevitable.

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Beginning next week, the National Summit Secretariat will begin a series of public communication initiatives to keep the national community abreast of the arrangements that are being developed.

Mr. Speaker, we are less than three months away from the Fifth Summit of the Americas. Let us not underestimate the importance of our role as host and the benefits it can bring to the development of our country and our subregion. Together, the Fifth Summit of the Americas and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting will be the most significant undertaking on which we have embarked in the history of our country. As a nation and as a people, we must seize the opportunity to take our rightful place in global affairs and to chart our destiny. We must work in concert to welcome our friends from across the Americas and the Commonwealth and to showcase our talents, skills, warmth and energy.

Let us be proud of the respect our country has in the global community and show the world what a great people we are.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION) (2008) BILL

Bill to provide for the supplementary appropriation for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending 30th September, 2008 of the sum of the issue which was authorized by the Appropriation Act, 2008 [*The Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

Motion made, That the next stage be taken at a later stage of the proceedings. [*Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira*]

Question put and agreed to.

**FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT
(ADOPTION)**

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira): I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Be it resolved that the House adopt the first Report (2009) Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and on proposals for the supplementation of the 2008 appropriation.

Mr. Speaker, the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives met on Wednesday, January 14, 2009 and agreed to a number of proposals with respect to the accounts for fiscal year 2008. The proposals broadly encompass the

supplementation of the 2008 appropriation and write off of losses approved by Cabinet in fiscal 2008. The Committee also noted the transfer of funds between subheads of the same Head of expenditure.

The approval for the supplementation of the 2008 appropriation in the sum of \$1,073,918,701 is being sought to:

- (1) Retire an advance from the Contingency Fund of \$20 million;
- (2) Retire advances made from the Treasury Deposits totalling \$444,631,006; and
- (3) Bring to account disbursements on loans for the supply of offshore patrols vessels and the acquisition of fast patrol craft in the amount of \$609,287,695.

Towards the end of the 2008 fiscal year, the sum of \$20 million was drawn from the Contingency Fund to meet payment of all outstanding contract gratuities under Head 20: Pensions and Gratuities. These payments were deemed urgent and critical because they represented obligations to officers engaged on a contractual basis by the State.

In accordance with section 115(2) of the Constitution and section 16(4) of the Exchequer and Audit Act, Chap. 69:01, resources drawn from the Contingency Fund are recoverable at the close of the financial year in which the advance was made.

2.00 p.m.

During the 2008 fiscal year, the Government accessed advances from Treasury Deposits to lease critical expenditure under the following three Heads of expenditure: Head 18 Ministry of Finance; Head 31: Ministry of Public Administration; and Head: 40 Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries.

In accordance with section 17(1)(b) of the Exchequer and Audit Act, Chap. 69:10, advances made from the Treasury Deposits are recoverable within 12 months after the close of the financial year in which the advances are made.

In the case of the Ministry of Finance, the sum of \$235,765,200 was required to meet Trinidad and Tobago's contribution to the Caricom Development Fund. Article 158 of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas establishing the Caricom Community including the Caribbean Single Market and Economy states that this development fund is to be established for the purpose of providing financial assistance or technical assistance to disadvantaged countries, regions and sectors.

At this 27th regular meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of Caricom held on July 03—06, 2006, the contribution formula proposed by the

Council for Finance and Planning for the Regional Development Fund was considered and approved. In keeping with the formula, Trinidad and Tobago's contribution would be US \$37.07 million when the fund becomes operationalized.

By letter dated January 10, 2008, the Secretary General of Caricom indicated that Member States were being urged to frontload their contributions with a view to having the Caricom Development Fund inaugurated at the following Intersessional Meeting of the Heads of Government which was being held in the Bahamas on March 07-08, 2008. The decision to frontload contributions was made to enable the fund to generate sufficient investment income to meet its administrative costs in the first year of operation. Had this not been done, Caricom member countries would have been called upon to make additional contributions to cover these expenses. Since funds were not provided in the 2008 estimates to meet this commitment, an advance of \$235,765,200 was therefore made from Treasury Deposits to facilitate the payment of Trinidad and Tobago's contribution to the Caricom Development Fund, based on the formula agreed to by the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community.

To date, Caricom member countries have contributed US \$64,528,744.93 to the fund, which is detailed as follows: This is stated in United States dollars: Dominica, \$74,074.07; Trinidad and Tobago, \$37,070,000; St Kitts/Nevis, \$660,000; St. Vincent and the Grenadines, \$679,950; St. Lucia, \$980,000; Barbados, \$5,012,285; Jamaica, \$8,130,000; St. Lucia, \$212,431; Belize, \$1,260,000; Guyana \$1,450,004.86; and finally the contribution from Caricom Petroleum Fund on behalf of member countries, \$9 million.

In the case of the Ministry of Public Administration, funds were urgently required to meet the payment for the first instalment of US \$15,660,541.

In respect of sublease 1 between the Port of Spain Waterfront Development Company, a wholly-owned special purpose subsidiary of UDeCott and the State, the Port of Spain Waterfront Development Project was financed through the US private placement market with First Caribbean International Banking and Financial Corporation and its affiliate Barclays Capital Incorporated as financing agents. In order to secure the financing, the parties agreed in the financing documents that the internationally-accepted financing mechanism of the credit/tenant lease would be employed. This financing mechanism provides that the borrower, in order to secure the loan facilities advanced by the lender for construction would lease the land and buildings to be constructed thereon to a creditworthy tenant, the State in this case, who would make lease payments over the life of the lease that would be exactly matched to the blended principle and

interest payment required under the financing. In other words, the lease payments by design would amortize the principal and interest indebtedness under the financing. I wish to emphasize that credit/tenant lease is an internationally accepted form of financing arrangements for this type of transaction.

In keeping with the term of financing agreement, the State was required to enter into subleases with UDeCott Limited, in respect of lands situated at King's Wharf Port of Spain that were leased to UDeCott or its successor in interest by the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. An agreement to sublease was executed on January 31, 2007, among the Port of Spain Waterfront Development Limited, UDeCott and the Commissioner of State Lands at the request of the lenders. Sublease 1 was executed on January 02, 2008, in respect of lands of which the Hyatt Hotel Office Tower 1 and the car park were constructed.

Sublease 2 was executed on December 31, 2008, in respect of lands on which Tower 2 was constructed. By deed of rectification entered into by the same parties to the sublease, the terms of the sublease have since been reduced to 30 years with an option to renew. It was also agreed that US \$15,660,541 in respect of sublease 1 and US \$4,951,139 in respect of sublease 2 be payable semi-annually in respect of an instalment rent reflecting repayment of UDeCott's debt service obligation to its lenders for a period of 17 years, the debt service period. Approval for this transaction was obtained during the first quarter of the 2008 fiscal year and payments became due on July 01, 2008. Consequently, an advance of \$99,645,806 was issued from Treasury Deposits to meet the obligation.

As it relates to the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, the sum of US \$17.2 million or approximately TT \$109,220,000 was required to facilitate Government's equity injection, with respect to its 40 per cent shareholding in Alutech Limited. Alutech Limited is an integrated technical development centre, which will develop and pilot manufacturing processes at a pre-industrial scale for the production of aluminium downstream products, particularly light motor vehicle parts. The equity contribution was utilized to meet debt financing obligations of Alutech to First Citizens Bank, comprising a principal of US \$17,065,545 and interest of US \$134,455. Mr. Speaker, the decision to make an equity injection in Alutech Limited was made after the presentation of the 2008 Budget. In the circumstances, an advance of \$109,220,000 was made from Treasury Deposits to meet the cost of the investment.

Supplementary resources are also required to bring to account disbursements on two loans, one from BNP Paribas London branch and the Louise TSC Offshore Limited for the supply of three offshore vessels and another from the Australian and New Zealand bank for the acquisition of six fast patrol crafts for the Trinidad

and Tobago Defence Force. The disbursement for the supply of offshore patrol vessels was TT \$568,197,212, while the sum disbursed for the acquisition of six fast patrol craft was TT \$41,090,483.

In summary, the approval is being sought for the supplementation of the 2008 Appropriation in the sum of \$1,073,918,701 to retire the advances and to bring to account the disbursements under the following Heads of expenditure: Head 18: Ministry of Finance, \$235,765,200; Head 20: Pensions and Gratuities, \$20 million; Head 22: Ministry of National Security, \$609,287,695; Head 31: Ministry of Public Administration, \$99,645,806; and Head 40: Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, \$109,220,000.

The Finance Committee also agreed to the write off losses in the sum of \$11,614,514.50 for the 2008 fiscal year comprising \$9,633,000.45 under Head 18: Ministry of Finance; \$26,145.26 under Head 22: Ministry of National Security; and \$2,582,335.79 under Head 42: Ministry of Local Government.

The write offs under the Ministry of Finance were in respect of unpaid arrears on leases of vending booths and the pavilion at Maracas Beach; outstanding amounts on accountable advances; amounts outstanding on final year student loans; student cess loans and student devaluation loans and overpayments of salary and acting allowance to Mr. Feerahim Mohammed, retired Revenue Officer II, Inland Revenue Division. In the case of the Ministry of National Security, the write off is in respect of overpayment of salary to Mr. Alan John, retired Immigration Officer IV, Immigration Division. The write off under the Ministry of Local Government relates to arrears of rent owed by tenants in the New City Mall.

Mr. Speaker, I now refer to transfer of funds between subheads of the same Heads of expenditure. With effect from August 01, 1988, Cabinet delegated its authority to approve transfers between subheads to the Minister of Finance when it agreed, among other things as follows: request for transfer of funds between separate subheads under the same Head of expenditure should no longer be submitted for the Cabinet but can be decided by the Minister of Finance on the advise of the Budget Division. Consequently in fiscal 2008, the Minister of Finance approved the transfer of funds in the sum of \$253,490,064 between subheads under the same Head of expenditure. It should be noted that the transfers were approved by the Minister of Finance, based on notes from the respective Ministers requesting the transfer. It should also be noted that these transfers are requested to reflect changed circumstances in Ministries and departments and a consequential reordering of priorities. They do not increase the total appropriation in any way.

Statements showing the transfers approved by the Minister of Finance and explanations for some of the more significant transfers were attached as appendices of the agenda, which was provided to hon. Members of this House. Hon. Members may recall that on August 20, 2007 both Houses of Parliament approved the Draft Appropriation Bill 2008 for the sum of \$36,477,188,115, which became law.

2.15 p.m.

It should be noted that the total package approved for the 2008 budget comprised a total expenditure of \$42,260,949,246 constituted as follows:

- expenditure authorized by the Appropriation Bill, \$36,477,188,115;
- expenditure by direct charge on the Consolidated Fund, \$5,328,761,131;
- expenditure from the Unemployment Levy Fund, \$380 million; and
- expenditure from the Green Fund, \$75 million.

After taking into consideration the total projected revenue for the fiscal year 2008 and adjusting for capital repayments and sinking fund contributions, an overall fiscal surplus of \$89.2 million was projected at that time.

Mr. Speaker, in keeping with established practice, a mid-year review of revenue and expenditure was undertaken during April—May 2008 period. Following this exercise, a supplementation of the Appropriation Act, 2008 was passed by Parliament authorizing access to a further sum of \$3,490,016,910 from the Consolidated Fund to meet additional recurrent expenditure of \$3,173,373,910 and additional capital expenditure of \$316,643,000.

Taking into consideration the then projected transfer into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund of \$1,718.8 million by direct charge, further expenditure of \$721.8 million by direct charge, primarily to meet obligations to the defence force emanating from the settlement of remuneration packages, projected additional expenditure of \$35 million under the Unemployment Relief Programme; increased expenditure of \$990.7 million from the unallocated Infrastructure Development Fund resources, savings of \$606.1 million were identified across various heads of expenditure, and factoring in the projected increase in total revenue of \$6,355.5 million, an overall surplus of \$5.3 million was projected at the time of the mid-year review.

In September 2008, a second Finance (Supplementary Appropriation) Bill was approved by Cabinet and passed by both Houses of Parliament for the sum of \$3,900,000,000 which was deposited into the Infrastructure Development Fund before the end of fiscal year 2008.

Again, in September 2008, at the time of the preparation and presentation of the 2009 budget, the Ministry of Finance revised the revenue projection for fiscal year 2008 upwards to \$52,658.9 million. Correspondingly, expenditure was forecasted at \$52,619.7 million, resulting in an anticipated surplus of \$39.2 million. This position was communicated to Parliament at the time of the presentation of the 2009 budget on September 22, 2008.

Mr. Speaker, following the submission of data on actual revenue and expenditure at the end of the 2008 fiscal year by government ministries, departments, statutory authorities and other bodies and the Tobago House of Assembly, the provisional fiscal outturn for fiscal 2008 was prepared by the Ministry of Finance. Based on this data, overall spending was \$53,843.6 million and total revenue was \$56,660.3 million, yielding a substantially larger overall fiscal surplus of \$2,816.7 million. This surplus is \$2,777.5 million more than that projected at the time of the preparation of the 2009 budget. Revenue overshot the revised estimates by \$4.14 billion while actual expenditure was \$1,223.9 million greater than the revised allocation.

Mr. Speaker, total revenue collected in fiscal 2008 was \$56,660.3 million which was \$4,001,400,000 higher than revised projection estimated at the time of the preparation of the 2009 budget. The positive variance was mainly due to higher than anticipated receipt from taxes on income and profits in the amount of \$4,057,7000,000; unemployment levy of \$691.1 million; Green Fund in the sum of \$111.9 million; royalty on oil, \$305.8 million and profits from state enterprises of \$166.8 million. These were partially offset by lower than projected receipt from taxes on goods and services to the tune of \$250.2 million; taxes on internal trade of approximately \$197.9 million and non-tax revenue of \$385.5 million.

The better than projected performance of taxes on income and profits was primarily due to improved tax take from oil companies, other companies and individuals of \$2,909.8 million, \$899.8 million and \$242.8 million respectively.

In the case of oil companies, the improved performance resulted from better than projected oil and gas prices which averaged US \$83.70 per barrel and US \$3.39 per mmcf in the first quarter; US \$89.99 per barrel and US \$4.47 per mmcf in the second quarter; US \$113.91 per barrel and US \$3.91 per mmcf in the third quarter and in the fourth quarter, US \$110.28 per barrel and US \$4.78 per mmcf. These oil and gas prices compared favourably with the original price assumptions of US \$50 per barrel and US \$3.55 per mmcf used in the preparation of the 2008 budget.

It should be noted that the actualized oil and gas prices of US \$110.28 and US \$4.78 per mcf was substantially higher than the US \$85 per barrel and US \$3.70 utilized to estimate oil and gas revenues for the fourth quarter.

However, when the estimates of revenues from oil companies of \$25,625.6 million prepared on September 30, 2008 to determine the deposit into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund was compared with the actualized oil and gas receipts for 2008 of \$25,657.8 million, the variance was a mere \$32.2 million.

The higher level of revenue from other companies and individuals which both form part of the category taxes on incomes and profits was influenced by the positive impact of the tax amnesty, which was granted to defaulting taxpayers on taxes due up to and including the year of income 2006. In addition, the positive variance of taxes from other companies was reflective of the extraordinarily high prices of ammonia, urea and methanol.

The positive variance in the unemployment levy, Green Fund and the royalties on oil was influenced by the same factors that accounted for the increase in taxes from oil companies.

In the case of state enterprises, positive variance was caused by higher than anticipated dividends and income from the National Enterprises Limited. The shortfall in the collection of VAT was related to lower than projected domestic sales and imports in the fourth quarter. The lower than projected take from import duties was influenced by the same factors as those which influenced VAT.

In the case of non-tax revenues, the shortfall from share of profits from oil companies was as a result of the profit being deposited in the Consolidated Fund in fiscal 2009 instead of September, 2008.

With respect to administrative fees and charges, the projected earnings from signature bonuses of \$282 million did not materialize since the respective contracts were still in the process of being finalized at the end of fiscal 2008.

Mr. Speaker, revised expenditure for fiscal 2008 was projected at \$52,691.7 million at the time of the presentation of the 2009 budget, whereas the actual amount spent was \$53,843.6 million, reflecting an increase of \$1,223.9 million.

Mr. Speaker, the major areas where expenditure was higher than projected were deposits into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund which was \$1,864.4 million higher; transfers to state enterprises, which were \$102 million higher primarily because of equity investment in Alutech; VSEP payments in the Ministry of Health for which an additional sum of \$60.7 million was utilized; and interest

payments which were more than projected by \$160.8 million. This increase in expenditure is attributed to the issuance of more Treasury Bills than was projected.

The impact of the preceding areas in which expenditure was higher than expected was partially offset by lower than projected expenditure in the following areas: personnel expenditure which was \$95.5 million lower because of administrative delays experienced with the filling of vacant posts and the non-payment of allowances associated with those posts; other goods and services which is \$125 million lower and the development programme for which expenditure was lower by \$530.4 million; expenditure under the Consolidated Fund fell short by \$283.9 million; and under the Infrastructure Development Fund it was lower by \$246.5 million.

With respect to other goods and services, the main reasons for the shortfall in expenditure were:

- (1) the non-procurement of furniture and furnishings as well as office equipment by a wide range of ministries and departments;
- (2) non-recruitment of contract officers by ministries and departments;
- (3) failure by some Members of Parliament to pay arrears to constituency staff and to establish constituency sub-offices as approved by Cabinet; and
- (4) a reduction in the use of rent/lease vehicles and equipment by ministries.

2.30 p.m.

It should be noted that of the \$53,843.6 million recorded as expenditure in fiscal 2008, \$9,163.8 million represented savings, which comprised \$6,587.8 million deposited into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, and \$2,576 million transferred into the Infrastructure Development Fund in 2008, but remained unspent at the end of the fiscal year.

In addition, an overall fiscal surplus of \$2,816.7 million was recorded in the fiscal year. Taken together, it means that of the \$56,660.3 million collected in revenue by Government in fiscal 2008, \$11,980.5 million was saved, and \$44,679.8 million was expended. Government's demonstrated commitment to the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund has already yielded significant, tangible, economic benefits for Trinidad and Tobago.

The Heritage and Stabilisation Fund has been repeatedly cited among the factors responsible for Trinidad and Tobago's improvement in its international ratings. Certainly, our citizens can be comforted in the fact that their future is in safe hands. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, before I close, permit me to deal a bit with a legal basis for the activity in which we are engaged here today. The Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago makes provision for the submission to Parliament of supplementary appropriations in section 113(3). This subsection specifically states:

“If in respect of any financial year it is found—

- (a) that the amount appropriated by the Appropriation Act for any purpose is insufficient or that a need has arisen for expenditure for a purpose for which no amount has been appropriated by the Act; or
- (b) that any moneys have been expended for any purpose in excess of the amount appropriated for the purpose by the Appropriation Act or for a purpose for which no amount has been appropriated by the Act,

a supplementary estimate showing the sums required or spent shall be laid before the House of Representatives and the heads of any such expenditure shall be included in a Supplementary Appropriation Bill.”

This provision in the Constitution is also used as a legal basis for bringing Bills for variations of appropriation to Parliament when resources are to be moved from one Head of expenditure to another.

Mr. Speaker, while dealing with these legal provisions, may I also take the opportunity to clarify the legal basis for the action being taken by the Government to curtail expenditure in 2009 fiscal year, to levels lower than that approved by Parliament in the Appropriation Act without returning to Parliament.

The Exchequer and Audit Act, Chap. 69:01 anticipating circumstances when government's revenues were lower than projected or circumstances in which other exigencies would occur, made provision for the Minister of Finance to curtail expenditure, as one of the instruments available to him—they say “him” in the legislation—under the general rubric of Control and Management of Public Finances. In section 5(2), it is specifically stated that:

“Notwithstanding any general or specific authority which may have been given by him, it shall be within the discretion of the Minister to limit or suspend any expenditure charged under any Appropriation Act or by virtue of

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section 18 and so authorised if in his opinion the exigencies of the financial situation render such limitation or suspension necessary.”

For completeness, section 18 deals also with the granting of credits.

May I conclude by reminding hon. Members that the report that we are about to debate deals primarily with the supplementation of the 2008 appropriation and write-off of losses approved by Cabinet in fiscal year 2008.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mr. Basdeo Panday (*Couva North*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. Minister has said, on the face of it, this appears to be a request of the Parliament to approve additional funds of some \$1 billion. I would like to put that in its proper perspective. When the budget for 2007/2009 was presented to this House it was a budget for \$40.4 billion.

Mr. Manning: What year was that?

Mr. B. Panday: It was 2007/2008; \$40 billion; fiscal year 2008. Very soon after, the Government came for a supplementary appropriation of some \$7 billion, and that is the same budget we are talking about. A few months later they came with another supplementary appropriation for \$3.9 billion, and now they are coming for an appropriation of over \$1 billion. That is a total of some \$53.9 billion for fiscal year 2008.

The first question to ask is this: Why does the Government come incrementally for the money it needs by way of instalments? Is it because they cannot plan? Is it because they do not know how much they will need for the entire fiscal year? Or is it to fool the population so that the impact of their expenditure will not be heard by the public in one fell swoop? [*Desk thumping*] Hon. Member, I did not know you were back. Welcome back, I am so happy to see you. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*] No, no, my Member for St. Augustine, I knew he was coming home yesterday, but I did not get the time to greet him.

Mr. Speaker, that is the first question we must ask. The fact that they come incrementally has a motive. It is either to fool people, mislead them, or it is because of their incompetence. This budget; this little supplemental vote of \$1.9 billion on a budget, which is now \$53 billion, has really got to be put in a wider context. That wider context is how much they have spent since they have been in government.

So, to put this in proper perspective, this \$53 billion that we are talking about comes against a background of fiscal year 2002, \$14.43 billion; fiscal year 2003, \$16.6 billion; fiscal year 2004, \$20.7 billion; fiscal year 2005, \$27.2 billion; fiscal year 2006, \$37.1 billion; fiscal year 2007, \$39.8 billion; fiscal year 2008—the one we are talking about now—\$52.6 billion, now \$53.7 billion. A total of \$209.4 billion spent by this Government since they came into power. And the question everybody is asking: What have we got to show for it? “Where the money gone?” That I think is the issue that we really have to consider when we look at this simple appropriation of \$1.073 billion.

Mr. Speaker, every time we come to this House, this regime of the PNM, under the hon. Patrick Manning—

Mr. Manning: Augustus Mervyn.

Mr. B. Panday: Augustus Mervyn; Patrick Manning Augustus Mervyn. He said I must add that after, I do not know why. [*Laughter*]—and Member for San Fernando East, comes to this House—and he repeated it today—to ask for more money—and he is training his Minister of Finance very well—they repeat as if it were a mantra of the prudent expenditure of the Government. How prudent are they in their fiscal management of the economy? They repeat that over and over as if by repeating it somebody would believe it. [*Desk thumping*]

This Government has the audacity to repeat over and over that mantra, even though in the world at large, it is now recognized as the apotheosis of corruption, waste and mismanagement. [*Desk thumping*] I will spell it for you because I know you are going to look it up—A-P-O-T-H-E-O-S-I-S, apotheosis.

Now, we hear the development of a new mantra, "Trinidad and Tobago is in goods hands". The problem is Trinidad and Tobago is in whose hands? Certainly not the hands of the people; maybe in the hands of some of the "fellas" sitting on the other side, but certainly not in the hands of the people.

As they come to Parliament, yet another supplementary appropriation, I say this time for \$1.073 billion, I have indicated the background against which this request is coming, and it must not be taken in isolation, in a vacuum, but in context of how much money this Government has spent during its tenure of office without the country seeing any tangible benefit. This monumental sum, as I say, comes after they have spent some \$209 billion.

When we ask what the country has to show for it, we are told, well you have the Hyatt and you have this building and so on and so forth. Did the Government

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invest in Hyatt because it could not get the private sector to do so? Why was that not a private sector project? *[Interruption]* You said you own it. Did you not say you owned it? I thought you just said you owned it. *[Interruption]* Of course, you would have to speak; I am here now, you have to speak. *[Desk thumping]* *[Laughter]* These operations do us good, you know.

2.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, incidentally while I am on that point, may I be informed whether the Government has reacquired Hilton, because that is my information.

Mr. Imbert: We never sold that.

Mr. B. Panday: You never sold it?

Mr. Imbert: No.

Mr. B. Panday: Okay. All right, we will go. *[Inaudible]* But as I say, I will tell you what we do have to show for it. Few buildings maybe here and there, but what we have to show for it after an expenditure of \$209 billion, we have a crime rate that is among the highest in the world.

Mr. Speaker, do you know that we come just below Rwanda? Rwanda has the sixth highest murder in the world. It is regarded in the international circle as a killing field, and we are one. We are seventh—Rwanda is sixth as the nation with the highest per capita murder rate in the world—and that is after this expenditure that we have just seen. We probably have the worst—my colleagues will deal with it in greater detail—public health service that you can think of. It is a disgrace even by Third World standards.

Mr. Speaker, we produce such great people. Jizelle Salandy, our boxing hero—sure you heard of her—was injured in an accident and went to the hospital and there were not beds, she had to sit on a chair. She sat on a chair —*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: A bench.

Mr. B. Panday: There was a bench?

Hon. Member: It was her colleague.

Hon. Members: Oh, oh, oh.

Mr. B. Panday:—for a whole day until the following day and had to go back home at the San Fernando General Hospital. If I were you I would leave too.

Dr. Moonilal: But that is true.

Dr. Rafeeq: She had dengue.

Mr. Maharaj SC: Before she died.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. B. Panday: Mr. Speaker, okay, okay. But we know that people go to the hospitals in our country and cannot get a bed. They must sit on benches, on the floor or wherever, after we have spent \$53 billion this year and \$204 billion over the past five, six years. Is that something to be proud of? Are we in safe hands? After that kind of expenditure, there is runaway inflation. Runaway inflation with food prices being unaffordable by a large section of our population, who now live below the poverty line, because they cannot get enough food to eat when the day comes and you are proud of that. We are in safe hands. Whose hands?

When we look around after \$53 billion, \$209 billion, we see a deteriorating infrastructure which is hard to believe. A mere 1.3 million people in this rich country that is going to be the showpiece of the world which is in good hands. One million, three hundred thousand people cannot get such a basic necessity as a regular supply of drinking water. You are worse than Third World.

Mr. Speaker, this is the country that they are so proud of running in which not only do people have no drinking water, but the country's roads are so inadequate. Traffic jams all over the place. The roads are either inadequate, they are in a state of bad repair or nonexistent which results in this country losing hundreds of millions of dollars per year in the loss of manpower because our people are jammed up in the road; they cannot get to work or when they get there, they are so frustrated and so on. That is what is important, not the Hyatt Hotel. I am sorry the Prime Minister has gone. I wanted to tell him the issue of the international conference is not whether they should be held or should not be held; is not whether the country may derive some kind of benefit from it. That is not the issue. The issue is, it is a priority in the light of this. That is the issue. That is what I am speaking about. [*Desk thumping*] Nobody tell you not to have conferences; we say have conferences. If you have unlimited money, have conferences if you give people water. Have conferences if they will fix the roads and hospitals and so on. Have conferences whole year, that is no problem. Have as many conferences as you want, but please set your priorities right, give people water first. Fix the roads and the hospitals. I am sorry the Prime Minister did not hear that. He is going to come back here and say how many benefits they are going to get from it.

Dr. Moonilal: Build a car park.

Mr. B. Panday: He is going to come back here and say that. Mr. Speaker, ask any of the farmers in this country how they feel after this Government has spent \$53 billion in one year, this year? Am I saying something offensive?

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: No.

Mr. B. Panday: Okay, I would not want to do that, you know. So, Mr. Speaker, all this money that we have spent, and today farmers are crying out for even access roads to their lands to grow food. Food prices are sky high. There is a food shortage, fuel security—*[Interruption]*

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: It is going down.

Mr. B. Panday: Of course. If it was 100 and it is now 99, it is down, yes. The question is where did they go from to come down? That is the issue.

Mr. Speaker, in the minutes somewhere, they talked about they saved money—I will find it as I go along—because farmers did not claim compensation for their crops. We have come to this House crying blood, sweat and tears for the farmers who are inadequately compensated for their damaged crops and they put in the minutes here that, "Listen, we have saved money. We saved money because the farmers did not claim." I am saying this loudly so that farmers could hear. After all that expenditure, we have a criminal justice system that is grossly inadequate. A grossly inadequate judicial system whereby— I do not have to do it. I am sure my colleagues are going to deal with the entire criminal justice system, and that is the background against which I wish to bring into this debate, the background of corruption, waste and mismanagement.

Mr. Speaker, I want to start off by making reference to what the Minister said. I am lucky that most of it is contained in the minutes that were supplied to this House. As she rightly said, the reason for the supplemental brought is \$20 million to retire to the contingencies funds, to retire advances made from Treasury Deposits, \$444.6 million and \$609 Million for loans for offshore patrol vessels.

The first question to ask, you did not know this in your 2008 budget? We have been talking about patrol vessels for an exceedingly long time. Surely, any Government that can plan will know that these are things that are going to be required. But it is not put there at all. I will deal with that a little later on. Of course, \$20 million for pensions and gratuities and after all this expenditure, all a pensioner can hope to live on, is \$2,800 a month.

Mr. Speaker, my colleagues will deal with the Caricom Development Fund which from a cursory glance of the information supplied, no money has been

distributed from it. But my colleagues will deal in greater detail with that. I see also that funds were not provided in the 2008 Estimates to meet this commitment, and we ask why we could not anticipate a thing like that. And as far as the UDeCott is concerned, most interesting developments taking place both inside this House and outside the House, again, I will leave that for my colleagues to pursue.

Mr. Speaker, I am leaving all of this for my colleagues because you see, this Opposition has performed brilliantly well in the last session that we have had. [*Desk thumping*] As a matter of fact, this Opposition is returning to its pristine glory of the Government in waiting. [*Desk thumping*] Not only the Government in waiting, but its pristine glory of being the alternative Government. [*Desk thumping*] Now if I am to judge from the actions of the Prime Minister, it would seem that he wants an alternative Opposition. I want him to know that that is not my concept of constitutional reform. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I have already dealt a bit with the expenditure of \$609,287,695 and my only question is: Why was this not included in the budget? I go now to write-offs. I am raising these points about write-offs only because this Government claims that it is capable of proper management. We are writing off \$1,327,453 in respect of rents. Moneys did not pay for leases of vending booths, and pavilion at Maracas Beach.

3.00 p.m.

[*Mr. Panday's cellphone rings*]

Oh, Mr. Speaker, I am sorry. I am very sorry, I thought I had turned it off. Forgive me, I really am sorry. You see, Mr. Speaker, my mind is on making my “maiden speech” in this House. [*Laughter*]

Yes, Mr. Speaker, vending booths to the tune of \$914,875 and the pavilion at \$412,000. First of all, I think it would be interesting to know to whom these facilities were leased and how the lessors were selected. Why were the rents not collected if you are so efficient? This great Government cannot even collect rent? It has been reduced to worse than a rent collector? Is that efficiency? What steps are taken to prevent a recurrence? That is what good management is about.

I note it says that Tidco was responsible. If it was and Tidco failed to perform its duties, as simple a task of a rent collector, it would be very interesting to know who the directors of Tidco were at the time. I hate to think it was the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara and our Minister of Finance. I do not know, maybe someone will guide me. I am casting no aspersions, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: I will talk about it later.

Mr. B. Panday: Okay. I would say good management would face the following questions: Who were the managers at Tidco at the time? Are they still on any boards? Are they still doing public functions? Surely, they do not deserve to be on such boards if they cannot even be a rent collector. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the vendors and so forth, \$1,300,000. Are we learning a lesson from all this? Are rents being collected from tenants of state-owned housing and accommodation? Or are we repeating the same mistakes over and over? I have heard and I have received reports of many people who have been allocated housing by the State, are not living in those houses and are renting them at high rents.

Is that fair? Is that good management? It cannot be when you allocate housing to a PNM hack and he or she rents out that building, has his own house or is living in New York and rents out that building to someone else at an exorbitant rate. Is that fair to the population of Trinidad and Tobago particularly those who are in need? Should the ones at the bottom suffer all the time? That is why I am raising these points.

We are being asked to write off some \$2,582,325 of rents which were not paid by the tenants of the New City Mall between January 2000 and September 2003. I sympathize with those people who are trying to make a living, but had you collected that rent, would you not have been able to provide proper facilities for those poor people who are trying to make a good living, instead of them having to sell under the kind of conditions that they do? That is my argument. If you are an efficient Government, you will collect those rents and improve the conditions under which these people work.

By letter dated March 19, 2003, SPL surrendered the lease, I think that is at Maracas. I do not know who or what SPL is but they had surrendered the lease to Tidco and left owing of course, some \$412,000 and that I am told is very good management.

On the accountable advances we are writing off \$2,132,983 on unaccountable advances. I do not know who those officers are—people who did not account for their overseas travel. I do not know if they are still in the service, I do not know if they still owe but \$2,132,983 is a lot of money and I wonder if that money had been paid how many hospital beds we could have bought; how many roads we could have fixed for farmers and so forth.

Mr. Speaker, I want the House to know that we are writing off loans granted to final year students to the tune of \$743 million, loans accessed by students, \$3,552,000; total sum outstanding on student evaluation loans, \$1,168,000, a total

amounting to \$5,463,902.94. Let me first of all say that I sympathize with all students who are studying, particularly those who cannot afford. I remember my own days when my parents were so poor that they could not afford to send me one single cent while I was studying abroad. I worked in the day and studied in the night and when I obtained a part in the play at West End Theatre in a play called *The Bird of Time*, I worked a whole year during the night, but I studied in the day.

So I have great sympathy for students who have to work and study. My only argument is if you had collected those moneys, if you were efficient enough, would you not have been able to provide assistance for students who did not get? That is all I ask.

Mr. Ramnath: But Junior Sammy could pave the airport twice.

Mr. B. Panday: Mr. Speaker, do you know why some of these moneys were not paid? Because it was the policy of the Government that these loans or scholarships were granted and when you qualify you will return to work for the Government, but because of a lack of planning, scholarships were granted for which there were no jobs. That is training by “vaps”. That is training in a vacuum.

If you want to have intelligent training, you have to be able to calculate your labour needs and when that is done, then you train people to fill them and in that way when students graduate they have jobs to go to. Not when they graduate the students join CEPEP and you bring Chinese to work on the building sites. That is not planning. So the students who have suffered and who were not able to pay back, this was because of the fault of the Government for not giving them the jobs which they were promised when they went to study. The result of that is a brain drain.

All, or most of our students who qualify leave and go and our intellectual manpower is the greatest source of our development. It is true that the entire human resource is valuable and important, but we are losing our intellectual manpower because of bad planning. And you say you are good planners.

It says here the other reason is further efforts to contact these have been unsuccessful and some are deceased—those I imagine are the lucky ones—while current addresses and telephone numbers are not available. Mr. Speaker, as I see it, that is bad management.

I wish to turn now to the item that deals with transfer of funds. Under this item, transfer of funds is called a savings and it does not spend money which was allocated for something it told this House it was going to do, when it is not done and the money is transferred elsewhere that is called savings.

Now, transfer of funds means first of all the Government did not do what it told this House it was going to do, that is the first thing. It means if it is said that it is going to do something, then halfway along the course the Government changes its mind and does something else and then comes for us to validate a *fait accompli*, something it has already done. So this House has no say.

I want to examine some of the transfer of funds. It is so clearly noticeable when you look at the transfer of funds that you see most have been transferred from an item called “Vacant positions, salaries and COLA—I did not understand the other part in brackets—(without bodies)”. Dead or living ones, I am not sure. I do not know what that means but when you look you will see that most of the items from which they transfer moneys to do other things, was moneys this House voted for hiring people, paying salaries, COLA and so forth.

It would appear to me that has to be one or two things; either incompetence, that is, it was unable to do what it told this House it was going to do, or that this is a trick. It is what you call—there is a name for it you know, Mr. Speaker. I will find it later. That is to say that the Government knows it is not going to use the money for that. Is it blind funds? You can help me.

Dr. Browne: No I cannot help you.

Mr. B. Panday: I am not surprised, you cannot help anybody.

Dr. Browne: You cannot help yourself.

Mr. B. Panday: You know I do not mean that.

3.15 p.m.

It is a trick. They do not intend to spend this money in the first place. There is a name for it and I will remember it before I am through. But let me, for some detail, say that the Auditor General’s department had voted \$1 million for a “Vacant post, salaries and COLA (without bodies)”. They transferred that amount for “Other Contracted Services”; a tendency to create contracts so that you do not have to be under scrutiny; you give your partners it. So instead of creating jobs and posts, you create contract posts, and that is what they used that one for.

Under the Judiciary, under sub-item 8, are “Vacant posts, salaries and COLA, (without bodies)”. The sum of \$2,484,740 was allocated by this Parliament for paying salaries for vacant posts. Why were these vacant posts not filled? What were the vacant posts that you were planning to fill? Were they judges? Because we all know that the administration of justice is in chaos. Were these to hire and

pay for judges, magistrates, court personnel? Has the administration of justice suffered because of a failure to make these appointments? Do you know what happened? As the result of their failure to use the money for that purpose, the funds were transferred to the Family Court. “Family Court institutional strengthening”.

I have no problem with that, but would good planners not know that in the fiscal year 2008, “We are going to need to strengthen the institutions of the Family Court”? Would they not have known that? I am sure the Chief Justice or those who administer the justice departments in this country would have known that there would be need for refurbishing these courts. Instead of appointing the judges, you move the money for something you did not tell the House all about.

I come to the heading: “Parliament”. Let me take this opportunity to say something which I ought to have said a long time ago. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate Miss Jacqui Sampson and her staff, [*Desk thumping*] no doubt under your leadership, for the establishment of an excellent website. They deserve all the congratulations this House can give them. It is so useful; I tell you, it is. It is well thought out; it contains a vast amount of information. On my research on constitutional reform, for example, I can go into the website and find documents that were prepared by Wooding; the Wooding draft of 1974, or something like that; Acts of Parliament. I save so much time; I do not have to run about to the library, and so on.

We must really change that ruling we made under the use of laptops. I tell you, it is a tragedy not to be able to have at your fingertips in this House the availability of all that tremendous resource during the debates in this House. [*Desk thumping*] I humbly ask. Mr. Speaker, you do not need to worry that there will be a proliferation of computer users here. Three quarters of the Members of this House are computer illiterate.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Speak for yourself.

Mr. B. Panday: You and I are in the quarter. I said three-quarters; I did not say all. [*Laughter*]

If it is going to disturb the Parliament, I imagine things can be done to prevent the disturbance of Parliament. We can shut off the speaking tones. But, really, it is a tremendous resource and the parliamentary staff must be congratulated for that.

Again, under Service Commissions: For contract employment, \$1.6 million was voted. I would like to know what was anticipated here. When this budget came before the House, what did we anticipate? What happened?

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There are several others but I know my time is going to come to an end shortly. Under the Personnel Department: Vacant posts, salaries and COLA, without bodies of course. We voted \$1,200,000 and we put that—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Couva North and the Leader of the Opposition, has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. B. Panday: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thank you, colleagues.

When they voted \$1.2 million in fiscal year 2008 for vacant posts and salaries and so on, what posts were anticipated? Because this is the Personnel Department and that money was moved to "Office accommodation and storage". You do not move appointments of people into storage. There was one case in which I think you failed to appoint the people and bought equipment, so you ended up with equipment but no people.

The Ministry of Finance: This is the one that has bothered me most of all, having regard to the complaints of the business community, having regard to the complaints of people who say that prices are rising because of the inadequacy of the customs department. First of all, under Ministry of Finance, Personnel Expenditure, Customs and Excise Division, \$2,700,000 was allocated to fill vacant posts. Of course, these are also vacant posts (without bodies). That money was not spent on vacant posts but instead went to Travelling and Subsistence of \$2,500,000 and Other Contracted Services of—there is a figure here that says \$4.9 million, but I cannot explain it.

The point is, again, under sub-head 3, the Customs and Excise Division, the replacement of vehicles. They allocated the sum of \$1.4 million—they allocated \$870,000 for Office Equipment; Other Minor Equipment, \$2 million. They moved that money out of that for the customs department and put it into "Upgrade of Physical Infrastructure on the finance building". The point I wish to make here is that there have been complaints by the business community, by everyone that I can think of, that the customs division is sorely understaffed; sometimes untrained; sometimes guilty of other things, but most important it has an impact on business activity; it has an impact on prices, because it increases the cost to business people who pass on the cost eventually to the customers anyway, and it is the poor man on the street who is buying things that eventually pays for the

failure of the Government to provide proper staff for the Customs and Excise Division. I would have thought that they would need vehicles, because the customs officers are required sometimes to go to where the container is, on the premises of the consignee in order to do their jobs. But they move out all of that money.

Housing and Planning: This is the one that I find really unbelievable. The Parliament had voted in the 2008 budget, \$800,000 for contract employment. That was moved out to pay for Salaries and COLA. I imagine that probably had something to do with an industrial agreement. But the Ministry of National Security, we had voted for it, \$21 million for rent, lease of vehicles and equipment. One of the greatest concerns to this country is the level of crime. I could not help laughing this morning when I read in the newspapers, someone asking the Minister of National Security: "Are we going to have what we had in 2008?" He says: "No. That will never happen." Although as of today we have more murders than numbers of days in the year. The rate of murders is higher than it was in the relevant period last year and the Minister tells you: "No, it is not going to happen again, you know."

I do not want to be unkind, but does that not display a level of shamelessness? I do not want to use unparliamentary words either. But how do you describe someone going to the press and saying, "No, it will not happen", when they are taking away from the budget the moneys which were allocated for rentals of vehicles, and so on? Because one of the most prevalent complaints is when the people say: "When I call the police, they have no vehicles." We voted \$21 million so that they may have the vehicles and they moved that. They moved it to some other head: Public Order and Safety, Police Services, Improved Works on Police Stations.

For crying out loud, would any intelligent government not know that we are going to improve a certain number of police stations in the year and therefore we are going to need so much money and we are going to put it into the budget? That is planning! But they did not do that and, of course, the point to which I alluded a little earlier on in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, \$1 million was allocated for relief of flood damage and they moved that to pay for Wages and COLA, and under the Youth Apprenticeship Programme, \$3 million was allocated. Of course, all of that is going to pay for Wages and COLA, and so on.

It would be really interesting to find out how many persons were trained under the Youth Apprenticeship Programme in agriculture and where are they now? But I would not be surprised; they are probably like the students who borrowed money and you cannot find their address or phone numbers.

The Ministry of Education: That is that second most important thing on the national agenda. They have moved \$12,500,000, which was allocated for Vacant Posts, Salaries and COLA. This time they do not have, “(without bodies)”. I want to know why it is not the same. Why do they not have “without bodies” on this one? But in any case, it went to pay for allowances for daily-rated workers. I would have thought that that is something that would be calculated long beforehand.

3.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, under the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, the implementation of the Fair Share Programme, \$500,000, has been removed; for a national survey of youth activity, money has been removed; \$500,000 has been removed for a skills development programme; for a national human resource programme, \$1.5 million; institutional strengthening of the Conciliation Division, \$300 million. One asks: Are these things not important? When you asked for the allocation, did you not say they were important? Did you not argue vociferously that they were important? How come during the year they were no longer important and you had to move the money to something else?

One thing about which I am very concerned is the \$1 million which was allocated to a women's entrepreneurship resource centre. Why did we move out the money? Are we not a society that says that we want to remove the gender discrimination in the society? How can we say that in one breath and at the same time remove \$1 million allocated for a women's entrepreneurship resource centre?

Another matter—of course there are others with which my colleague will deal—is under the Ministry of Tourism. For lifeguard services, \$3.2 million was allocated. They moved it and put it for promotion, publicity and printing. Everywhere you go, you hear the lifeguards complaining that their facilities are bad. Lifeguards are important if your tourist industry is to benefit. As you know, lifeguards are important to the tourist industry. They make our tourists feel safe. I would have thought that moving moneys from Wages and COLA, particularly \$3.2 million, so that you can put advertisements in the newspapers, was unacceptable. It is not something we should do.

In conclusion, I want to say that the documents before me reveal a catalogue of corruption, waste and mismanagement. It reveals a tale of woe for our people. All I can say is that what they are suffering today is the result of what they did on November 05, 2007, a mistake I am sure they will never repeat. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Tourism (Hon. Joseph Ross): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to contribute to the Finance (Supplementary Appropriation) Bill for fiscal year 2008.

I listened very carefully to the hon. Member for Couva North, Leader of the Opposition. He ended with a very nice note on tourism and I will deal with that in a short while. However, he made some very interesting comments and some of these points I think it important that I address and clear the air on what I would consider a bit of misinformation and, in some cases, I do not think he was too clear in what he was saying.

Let me start by looking at the first thing he mentioned. He said that the Government came with an original budget of \$40.4 billion to this Parliament and, during the course of the year, further requests were made and at the end of fiscal 2008 we ended up with a budget of \$53.9 billion.

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member asked whether the Government could not plan and suggested that the reason for all these supplementary requests was to fool the population, insinuating that the Government knew beforehand what it needed but did not want the population to realize the kinds of funds it was going to spend.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am very surprised that such remarks would come from someone who has been in government for a while, who has been in this Parliament for so long, someone that has spoken budget after budget and has been involved in various aspects of the budget preparation over the years. Even during their tenure, they would have had to come to this Parliament for supplementary approval. It is a normal process in budgeting, particularly when dealing with the government's budget and budgeting generally.

Absolutely no one can say with any great degree of certainty that in preparing a budget for the country you are going to spend exactly this or that amount of money. There will always be changes in your plans as you go along that require changes to your budget, particularly in times like these where we are faced with rising prices. There must be adjustments. I am very surprised that the hon. Member would say that the Government knew beforehand that it was looking at \$53.9 billion, but did not want to come to the population with something like that.

The Member went on to argue that we must put this \$53 billion in context and look at what the Government spent from the year 2002 right up to 2008, suggesting that this country received absolutely nothing over the years. He talked about the crime rate being the highest in the world, the public health service being in a mess, runaway inflation and rising food prices.

This House was engaged in debate on rising prices in the last session and it was absolutely clear to all and sundry in Trinidad and Tobago that there were reasons for the rising food prices, most of them outside of the control of this Government. There is no need for us to go on about that.

He looked at the deteriorating infrastructure and wanted to suggest that we could have spent all that money to solve the traffic problem. As someone who travels to England regularly, the Member can tell you that it is fraught with traffic—24 hours a day. In all large cities, there is traffic. This is a problem that is not only unique to Trinidad and Tobago, but exists in countries all over the world and has nothing to do with our deteriorating infrastructure. As a matter of fact, the infrastructure in Trinidad and Tobago is there for all to see. The Government has been investing in infrastructure and there is a significant improvement. [*Desk thumping*]

The Member spoke about the housing situation and about the Government allocating houses to people who are not living in the building and who are not paying rents. It is not something I enjoy saying, but I believe that the hon. Member for Couva North was not referring to us. I recall—it came up in this House before and I will repeat it—Savannah Villas being a classic example. A government was supposed to be building houses for the lower and middle income people in this country, but we saw that these apartments were given out, not to the lower and middle income, but to people who could have afforded. You can give the examples. We have cases on that side where those Members and their friends and their friends' friends got more than one apartment.

I know of cases where people were leaders—I am talking about senior officials in major organizations in Trinidad and Tobago—who had apartments in the Aranguez Villas, and these were people who were working for significant sums of money. Fortunately for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, I believe that it was the Government of the People's National Movement, when they resumed office, who corrected some of these problems.

3.45 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the hon. Member also spoke about the inefficiency on the part of the Government with respect to collecting money from students who were granted loans and so on. He even went on to talk about collecting from people who have retired from the public service and advances to public servants. There is a system in place in the public service, I am sure, for collecting these moneys from students, but it is not always a very easy thing to follow up on students who are not living within Trinidad and Tobago and who are studying

abroad. It is not always easy. There must be provision for some kind of losses. There must be provision for some kind of uncollectible amounts. This is what, I believe, was brought to this House. These amounts were deemed to be uncollectible. You could not have located the individuals who borrowed these moneys, so you had to make provisions for writing off these sums of moneys. I am wondering if the hon. Member for Couva North was really honest in his deliberations on this point of collecting money from students and advances made to public servants. We must make provision. No organization, whether public or private, can determine that all its receivables would be collected, particularly when you are dealing with situations like this; not even the banks or some of us when we lend money to our friends.

It brings me to another point that the hon. Member was making. The hon. Member spoke about the writing off of receivables by Tidco. It is very important that we put this writing off of receivables by Tidco into its proper context. It is not simply to say that anyone acted irrationally by making these write offs. We must understand the whole process. We must understand what was involved and what led to these write offs.

As the hon. Member would be aware, the Tourism Industrial Development Company was established somewhere in 1993, to facilitate the growth and development of investment, trade and tourism. That was the purpose of Tidco when it was established in 1993. Tidco, as a result, took over the assets and liabilities of a number of smaller organizations. In establishing Tidco, it took over the assets of the IDC, MDC, TDA and some other smaller organizations. Tidco, it is my understanding, was divided at that time into four major units: one dealing with tourism, one with film, one with marketing and one unit dealing with trade and investment.

In October 2005, the Government took the decision to wind up the operations of the Tourism Industrial Development Company for whatever reason. In so doing, a board was appointed with the responsibility for, among other things, ensuring that the financial obligations of Tidco were met and also for overseeing the disposal of the assets for Tidco. I believe around that time, I am looking at the balance sheet for Tidco, unaudited for 2005, Tidco had assets to the tune of \$1.1 billion and liabilities to the tune of \$1 billion. The board was set up with the responsibility for ensuring that the assets were properly disposed of and that all the financial obligations of Tidco, at the time, were being adhered to.

In addition, following the closure of Tidco, the board recruited a number of personnel; I think it was 12 persons, to conduct the post-closure obligations of the organization. Having decided to wind down Tidco, the necessary thing to do at

that time was to ensure that you had the requisite kind of resources so to do and to ensure that your post-closure obligations were taken care of. Post-closure activities are not always simple. They cannot always be conducted in a very quick manner and sometimes they can be very, very difficult to carry out to successful conclusion. These tend to center around your personnel, financial and legal issues.

With respect to the personnel issues at the time, one of the major things that Tidco had to do was to wind up its pension plan. It is my understanding that Scotia Trust, CLICO and the Corporate Secretary of Tidco are working, at this point in time, on the timeline to bring about this winding up of the pension plan by April 30, 2009. In so doing, I should make it abundantly clear that the Government's major concern in the winding up of Tidco's pension plan is to ensure that all commitments to members of the plan are honoured and that all members of the pension plan are treated equitably and fairly.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you would appreciate that there are certain rules that must be complied with winding up a pension plan. It calls for actuarial valuations, the establishment or the writing up of annuities, disposal of the surplus funds and so on. These things would tend to take some time. There were other issues that Tidco still has to face, with respect to the transfer of lands and other things.

We come to the point that the hon. Member for Couva North, the Leader of the Opposition, was making about the writing off of \$1.3 million that was owed to Tidco by vendors, particularly at the Maracas Beach. This sum was made up mainly of vending booths \$914,857 and the lease of pavilion at the time to Seaside Pavilion Limited. The amount owed was something in the vicinity of \$412,000. The lease arrangement with SPL was for that company to pay \$10,000 a month or 5 per cent of their gross turnover, whichever is greater. It is my understanding that the Board of Directors of Tidco did everything within its powers to recover all outstanding receivables for all outstanding amounts for these rents—*[Interruption]*—I would come to that—but they were unsuccessful because of inadequate supporting documents. Since you urged me, I should put it on the record that a large part of these uncollectible receivables emanated during the regime of the UNC. When they are talking about this Government's inability to collect, I want it to be understood that things, because of the lack of adequate controls during their regime at Tidco, made it almost impossible for our Government to be able to collect those moneys, because try as Tidco's board did, they could not have found adequate documentation to support a lot of these claims and as such, the board had no alternative and they could not have come to any other conclusion but to seek to have these amounts written off. Cabinet agreed to write off the amounts of \$1.342 million.

The hon. Member for Couva North also, in his closing remarks, expressed his concerns at the transfer of money from lifeguard services to promotion and other such activities. *[Interruption]* He could not tell the difference. It will take anybody who is serious about getting their work done, where you have savings and shortages, to transfer those savings to ensure that you get the job done.

The Tourism Development Company and the Ministry of Tourism had to come to the conclusion that, because we were having these kinds of savings under the lifeguard services at the time and funds were needed to augment promotional activities, it would have been prudent to use the money to promote Trinidad and Tobago. Our lifeguard services did not suffer as a result. What was happening was that it was very difficult for us to get the lifeguards that were needed at the time, so there were savings in those areas. It was not because of inefficiency, poor planning or any such thing; it was because of the lack of the availability of persons to fill certain positions.

4.00 p.m.

I want the hon. Member for Couva North to recognize that what we did by transferring these funds was to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago got the best available value for the funds that were made available to the ministry.

Madam Deputy Speaker, just as the lifeguard services are crucial or critical, marketing is also a critical function of tourism. I want to tell the hon. Member that to the best of my knowledge, as a result of moving those funds, they did not impact negatively on the safety of persons on the beach. *[Desk thumping]* That is critical.

I was really surprised when I listened to some of the comments made by the Member for Couva North. What was actually demonstrated here this evening was the lack of knowledge, the lack of appreciation and deliberate mischief. In any circumstance, under any situation, governments must arrange and rearrange their plans as time progresses and this is what this Bill is all about. Certain things that were supposed to be carried out during the course of the year, the Government, in its prudent management, utilized the funds that were made available. On an overall basis, it made sure that it was utilized effectively, efficiently and in the best interest of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank you. *[Desk thumping]*

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you. *[Interruption]* I rise to make a contribution on this matter involving another attempt by the Government to come to the Parliament to seek parliamentary

approval for their own acts of incompetence and inefficiency; and their own failure to plan properly and to budget properly for goods and services for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Effectively, we are here today to validate and approve the spending undertaken by this Government, because of its failure to plan, budget and the lack of strategic thinking that goes into budgeting and planning. To hear the Prime Minister today, and on other occasions, speak about prudent management and that the country is in good hands and so forth, and to come today to realize that this Government could not collect rent while the country is in good hands, this is quite a shame.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to begin by congratulating the Leader of the Opposition on a brilliant return to the Parliament, and returning the Opposition to its pristine glory with such an eloquent response to the Bill. As you know, the objective of the Leader of the Opposition is to return the Opposition to its pristine glory; not to be confused with the objective of the Prime Minister which is to return his Government to its christened glory.

Let me move forward with this matter and to say that in dealing with the matters before us, when one looks in totality at the measure and, particularly, the section that deals with transfers to and from various ministries and various departments, there is a certain pattern that emerges, and that pattern is defined by certain features.

Before looking in detail, one recognizes that moneys are moved from areas dealing with repairs, maintenance, purchase of vehicles and the provision of essential goods such as pharmaceuticals and so forth. So, moneys are being moved from these areas and, invariably, they go into areas for fees, contracted services or whatever they may be.

In the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, there is \$3 million for fees, and we do not know what these fees are and for who or for what. Why, four months ago, did you not know that you need millions of dollars for fees? They go for publicity and printing when moneys are moved from the purchase of essential goods.

When one looks at the public service, not a day goes by without complaints from public officers about the lack of facilities and lack of staff. In fact, I venture to say that in almost every Government ministry there is a complaint about lack of adequate staffing. The only government agency that may be overstaffed is the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Every ministry complains about the lack of staff and vacancies, and when you come with a measure like this and move money from creating positions and filling vacancies and so forth, you

have a sense that inefficiency and incompetence will continue. The goods and services that the population requires are not going to be delivered.

As the Leader of the Opposition pointed out, it is really a crying shame that \$21 million earmarked for the purchase of vehicles and equipment for the police service is removed for a sub-heading that includes “public order”. Is that to buy riot gear, baton and helmet and so forth to beat up protesting citizens at the Fifth Summit of the Americas? Is it that you need to staff the Riot Squad properly so that when the protesting citizens come for the summit they would be well staffed and equipped to beat up citizens? Madam Deputy Speaker, \$21 million could not be spent for police vehicles!

I want to remind this House that one year ago the Government came to the Parliament and tabled a Motion for the House to take note of its initiatives in combating crime. That was in January 2008. This hapless, clueless Minister of National Security, on that occasion, with the murder rate in 2007 at 377, said that they were putting plans in place to strengthen the Homicide Division, to equip the police service to change and they will deal with the criminal elements. That was in January 2008.

In January 2009, with a murder rate of 550, in today’s *Newsday* it says that Minister Joseph assures fewer murders this year. They have a way of “boofing up” the criminal elements and hoping that will deal with crime. In fact, do you know what is a sick joke? The heads of security agencies are developing a tendency to attack the criminal elements when they are at a cocktail party.

A few weeks ago, celebrating with the national security agencies during the Christmas season, there was a headline “National Security heads say criminals will be on the run”. They said that when they were having a cocktail party. That is how they operate.

In today’s *Newsday*, Minister Joseph said that the murders taking place in the country remain confined to the southern, central, western and Northern Division. Now, I want to announce to this population that they could take some reassurance that they will be saved in the sky. That is the Minister of National Security.
[*Interruption*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, there was an increase in murders. The Minister said that the murder rate will not be accepted, but they have accepted the one for last year. Did they reject that? How do you accept and reject the murder rate?

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[DR. MOONILAL]

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Madam Deputy Speaker, last year, when we debated the crime Motion, on that occasion, you would recall that I took the burden of drafting a letter for the Minister of National Security to resign. The newspaper editorials and so forth—I could quote one headline from the *Newsday* dated Tuesday, June 10, 2008 and it says: “Joseph should resign”. The country is calling upon him to resign.

I have drafted a letter on this matter because the Minister will not resign. It is a short letter that I am going to read into the record. The letter is addressed to:

January 23, 2009.

Sen. Martin Joseph

Ministry of National Security

Knox Street

Port of Spain

Dear Sen. Joseph,

I have painfully taken note of the widespread public outcry surrounding the unprecedented spate of criminal activity over the past years, culminating in the highest rate of murder of 550 in 2008 and the continuing failure of our best efforts to curtail such criminal activity and violence.

It is now widely believed and accepted that under your stewardship as Minister of National Security, we have failed to manage the spate of criminal activity which has engulfed our country.

In contemplation of the highest conventions of ministerial responsibility in our Westminster system of government, and acting in accordance with section 77(3)(c) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, I have today advised His Excellency, the President, to revoke your appointment of Minister of National Security.

May I on behalf of a grateful nation thank you for your service to our country, and wish you all success in your future endeavours.

Yours faithfully

Patrick Manning

MP Prime Minister

This is a letter for the Prime Minister to dispatch. I am going to give him this letter and I am even going to give him a pen. [*Interruption*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Prime Minister should act on this matter. The Minister of National Security has failed. He is the biggest singular failure in the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago and by the Prime Minister failing to act on this matter, the Prime Minister is guilty of criminal neglect and has exposed this country and our citizens to criminal activity and violence. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, they all jumped up in the last few days and congratulated the President of the United States of America, Barack Obama and, indeed, earlier the Opposition had issued its own congratulatory note and so on.

4.15 p.m.

You know what happens here, is that while we congratulate President Obama, and we are elated, we all seem to be happy by seeing him, but we are really alien to his values and his beliefs, because he believes in equality, in democracy, in participation, in providing security to the people of the United States. So, we must stop this type of false, superficial glee and pleasure, because we like seeing him, we like the picture of him as President, but we are not concerned with what he stands for. That is the issue.

I am sure when he comes to Trinidad and Tobago and is told that this country has not yet properly implemented legislation to give effect to equal opportunity laws, he may be watching the Government with a "coki-eye" when he notes the civil rights struggle in the United States and his own struggle for equality and democracy. They are all happy because they like the picture of him; they are not concerned with his values; with what he would say. In fact, I am also reminded, at his inauguration earlier in the week he had a brilliant line, among many others. President Obama said and I quote:

"Those of us who manage the public dollars will be held to account, to spend wisely, reform bad habits and do our business in the light of day."

This is not Trinidad and Tobago he is describing, because it is at the Commission of Enquiry we are learning about the Government business now. We would not have learnt about that before; public accountability. What is public accountability when you cannot provide basic goods and services; when you create—what is the term—sleeping funds. That is the concept.

You pass a budget with certain headings knowing that you will not spend it, and four months later you will move it to another subheading, and that is what you would use for political patronage, nepotism and corruption. That is what we are about here today. You look at the issue of accountability and decency raised

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by President Obama, and you ask yourself in this country: Do we have accountability? Do we have that level of decency?

It is on the front page of a newspaper today that the Member for Diego Martin West was cleared of any wrongdoing in a particular HDC project, the Cleaver Heights project. The ball is regrettably back in the court of the Prime Minister, and if the Prime Minister has evidence of any wrongdoing of the Member for Diego Martin West, he should present himself for the Commission of Enquiry and be subjected to examination and cross-examination; to present his evidence. Otherwise, the Prime Minister is under duty to apologize to the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago for, whether innocently or deliberately, misleading the Parliament on those issues. [*Desk thumping*]

You have Prof. Uff and whoever there listening, collecting the evidence presented there; if you have the evidence, allow the attorneys and so on to examine you, but you come in the Parliament, humbug the whole programme—they usually abandon the Standing Orders when his Excellency has to address us—and make a speech casting aspersions on the Member for Diego Martin West, and when the time comes to present the evidence you do not have it. In fact, after hearing the Prime Minister I had to look at the Minister for Diego Martin West differently. Anytime I see him I would be thinking about \$10 million. Therefore, the issues before us involve issues of accountability and good governance.

I want to move to the Ministry of Labour, an area that I have some concern with; under the heading: Transfer of Funds. One would notice that at the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development there are some areas where funds have been transferred, the Fair Share programme, and I ask the Government to state categorically, in due course, its position on this Fair Share programme, and your need, given that it is a policy, is it a priority. Because there is a difference to the Government as it relates to policy and priority. Your policy may not be your priority and your priority certainly is not your policy. What policy you had about removing the Chief Justice and jailing the Opposition Leader? That was concerned with what policy? That was your priority, not your policy. So, there is a gap between policy and priority.

So, while you talk plenty about Fair Share and so on, you have removed the money from that critical programme; incidentally, which was also a programme initiated and conceptualized by the United National Congress. [*Interruption*] I am correct. The distinguished former Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development is nodding affirmatively. It was incidentally a concept of the United National Congress.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the National Survey of Youth Activity is a critical tool at this time. The Leader of the Opposition alerted us to the fact that money was being removed from the Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture (YAPA) in the context of a declining agricultural sector, where we do not know who got the money for YAPA; who were trained; what they are doing; what they are not doing—presumably agriculture—and you are removing money from a national survey of youth activity that will help with planning.

National Human Resource Management Information System, \$1.5 million removed, and money goes for what is called fees, \$3 million for fees. Fees for what? For who? To do what? When we are in committee there is a certain intolerance and arrogance by the Chairman of the Finance Committee, to accept questions and to respond in a timely manner. So, at the Finance Committee stage there is an intolerance and arrogance to receive questions; then we come to the House and we need to table the very questions. Three million dollars for what fee? For who?

You look at the institutional strengthening of the conciliation division, \$300,000 gone. When trade unions and workers complain about staffing, about human resources at the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, you have removed money, and it goes to fees. For what? We do not know. I have a question mark there. So, the conciliation division that plays a critical role in dispute resolution between trade unions and employers will be understaffed because the money went for fees. *[Interruption]* The Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development will have his turn to respond, and I imagine he would want to respond on this matter.

The question is: Fees for what; to whom and when? Because they were paid before; that is why we are here because they have been paid. Is it related to fees in Tobago for the recently concluded elections? What are these fees that were paid, because three months ago you did not know you needed fees?

These are important issues because it makes the budget a farce. It makes the process of budgeting and the budget debate useless when we come to the Parliament a few days after to validate these measures. The Government is fooling absolutely no one, and you can go on and on in the sections, and indeed we will go on and on.

Madam Deputy Speaker, another area I want to raise relates to public administration, and it is a simple question we have been asking at the committee stage. We are told that there is a sub-lease involving the Port of Spain waterfront

project. I noticed the Prime Minister in conference with the Minister of National Security; I can get my letter sent immediately if it is necessary. I am sure, Madam Deputy Speaker, you would want to suspend the Standing Orders for that as well.

Sublease involving the Port of Spain Waterfront Project. Who are they leasing from? There is a fascinating development taking place here, a question. Certain special purpose companies are saying that they are making profits or they are generating revenues. I want to make the general point, then get to the specifics. How can a special purpose company make a profit? What are they selling? I have noted that the Estate Management Development Company said that they made a profit. What are they selling? Shoes?

Mr. Manning: Services.

Dr. R. Moonilal: What services? To who? But these are the state, so you are selling yourself? That is what they are doing. Mouth open, story jump out. So, the Hyatt Hotel that is run by the Government is selling the Government and declares a profit. That is what they are doing. [*Crosstalk*] I want to tell you that on the box for those pills you are taking, they have something about standing like this in Parliament every minute. [*Laughter*] And my few minutes you are about to take away.

Mr. Manning: I thank the Member for Oropouche East for giving way. The special purpose state enterprises, the ones of which he is referring; that is the RDC, SESL, PSAEL and East Port of Spain Development Company Limited, are charged with the responsibility of upgraded facilities in the country. They provide engineering services for which they charge a fee, and therefore they turn a small profit. In the case of the Hyatt Hotel; it is a hotel that provides hotel services to the public at large, including the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and out of that clientele they provide a service, they make profits and they declare a profit at the end of the year. Perfectly legitimate; perfectly normal.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you. Madam Deputy Speaker, the Prime Minister has admitted somewhat that state agencies are returning a service to the Government and claiming a profit. When Caroni (1975) Limited was returning a service to the regional corporations, returning a service to communities, returning a service in medical services, through health centres, schools, cemeteries, Caroni (1975) Limited was not making a profit.

You understand the difference? That is, when you wanted to close down Caroni (1975) Limited and send home 10,000 workers, they were not making a profit, but today a special purpose company selling the Government services and you are calling that a profit. You are also calling that revenue. You are

transferring \$265 million into the community development services, into the CEPEP, and then you claim we make a revenue; they have revenue; from the Government, from the taxpayers.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I have a confidential report, “Ensuing a Better Environment for All; CEPEP Impact Study 2008”.

Mr. Dumas: How is it confidential?

Dr. R. Moonilal: It is only for us here in this Chamber. This document is a propaganda document funded by the CEPEP. What they do, in a nutshell, is interview people who are getting CEPEP money and say, “How are you feeling? Good?” They said they are feeling good. They say, well, CEPEP is a success. They interview workers who are receiving money and say: “How do you feel about this programme?” The workers say that they are feeling good, and that is a success.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this report which I will deal with after the break, produced by a company called Q-U-R-E—how do you pronounce that—this company called QURE produced a confidential CEPEP report. I went on the Internet—this Internet that myself and the Leader of the Opposition, the quarter of us who could use it—and when I Googled Qure:

“A discreet private clinic in Hull area, offering non-surgical cosmetic treatments...”

A service offering effective treatment of wrinkles. [*Laughter*] “I want to tell all yuh, all yuh carrying this joke too far, eh.”

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, thank you very much. The sitting of this House is suspended for the tea break, and shall resume promptly at 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Before the break, I was raising a concern as it relates to a report presumably written by a person or a company, I am not sure, by the name of Qure—Q-U-R-E. It is called the 2008 CEPEP Impact Study. I am raising this in a particular context of the Motion before us, because we made the observation earlier that one of the problems the Government is reporting is their failure to fill vacant positions, that in several areas across ministries and departments, there has been a failure to fill vacant positions. So you have understaffing in several areas and critical areas of Government.

Now this is a problem when pressed further, the Government will tell us that they cannot find people. They cannot find people to fill these positions. But if we have spent billions of dollars on training institutions, UTT, MuST, YAPA, GATE, on everything, after seven years we cannot find qualified skilled people to fill vacant positions, that speaks to a failure of our training policy and our training systems, because had we been training people and providing support, whether at the University of Trinidad and Tobago or elsewhere to train the persons, today, you would have been able to find people and put them into the vacancies regardless of ministries, department, et cetera, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, the Government embarked in 2002 on a particular policy and today, the public service and public administration suffer because of a policy adopted by this Government in 2002, where they embarked upon political programmes that were disconnected with labour demand. So they had the entire labour market in a tailspin. There was a complete lack of alignment between supply and demand, and one has to look at programmes such as URP, CEPEP and so on, as a way where the Government has absorbed labour away from the private sector, but also from the productive public sector. Many times we talk about the absorption of labour away from the private sector and that is correct, but also we are taking labour away from the productive public sector. The report I cited earlier deals with that issue, which we find expressed in our matter before us today, the failure to fill vacancies.

Mr. Speaker, this report at times appears to be a public relations exercise of the CEPEP and gives data based upon interviews with workers, contractors and so on, and there are some interesting issues that come out. For example, in the area of recommendations, having praised the programme for all that it is doing—and indeed in this report, the report cites as an informant, someone who can testify that the CEPEP programme is working. It cites the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. He testifies in this report that it is working well. So you understand the problem. But the recommendations are interesting. Nineteen recommendations, and I will read a few:

- review of the pace structure of employees;
- review of the length of time employed;
- provision of more permanent benefits;
- health benefits;
- sick leave;
- holidays;

- provision of uniforms; and
- incentives for additional skills, training and education.

Mr. Speaker, it also deals with the issue of dealing with contractors who consistently violate CEPEP policies. So while this programme has absorbed enormous labour away from the private sector and the productive public sector—and it is also note worthy that the programme and the beneficiaries are also skewed in a particular direction—the programme has spent—to use the data provided in this report—between 2002 and 2006 in that period, \$1.2 billion. Today, when this Government has indicated that they are borrowing money to live—because you could say what you want with economic jargon and technicality and so on, you are borrowing money to live. *[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: Deficit financing.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Oh yes, that is the big term, deficit financing. And whether we finance from the heritage fund or we finance from loans—I think that was a mind-boggling debate—but it is deficit financing and it is effectively borrowing money to live. You can use whatever concept you want. You spend the money; the money "gone" and you have to borrow the money to live. That is what we are doing today. And when you consider in this programme alone, \$1.2 billion "gone", \$800 million at the Brian Lara Stadium and \$1 billion Waterfront Project; they built a car park in Port of Spain. In fact you know there is a state enterprise of a car park now. The State is running a car park.

Mr. Ramnath: "They making a profit?"

Dr. R. Moonilal: Oh yes, they will declare a profit. They will park their own car there and declare a profit. So they are running a car park.

Mr. Speaker, in this report you would have taken note of almost a quarter of a billion dollars to the Caricom Development Fund. A quarter of a billion dollars gone and not one Caricom citizen, man, woman or child will benefit from that money. Not one. When you look at the list provided for in the documents and response to questions, Trinidad and Tobago pays more than 350 per cent than the next Caricom partner to us, Jamaica. Jamaica is paying US \$8 million; Trinidad and Tobago pays US \$37 million/\$38 million. So, over 300 per cent more than another, the nearest Caricom partner. You put that quarter of a million dollars to the Caricom Development Fund, but not one citizen has benefited from that. That is in addition to money distributed bilaterally in the Caricom region. It is in addition to the Petroleum Support Fund.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at this, we can answer the question as to where the money has gone. It "gone" to the Brian Lara Stadium and the Waterfront Project. It is wasted. The Scarborough Hospital began at the \$125 million, and today, there is no hospital, and I think it is around \$300 million. That is where the money "gone". So that this generation and the next generation will ask the question, when you had the money where did it go? What did you do with it? You will point to the Government-owned hotel, the Government-owned car park, while our development priority required us to prioritize to supply water, to provide security, to provide schools and medicine.

Mr. Speaker, for a couple of minutes I want to return to the CEPEP programme. We have never condemned the principles behind make-work programmes or Government programmes. Certainly, there are people in the national community for one reason or another who need this type of support. You cannot deny that. But that cannot be a majority of the working force. You cannot say the majority of the working population requires dependent make-work programmes, it must be a minority. In a developed country that will be between 5 per cent and 10 per cent of the working people in what is called "Low wage, low skill category."

In Trinidad and Tobago, in this report it says that 71 per cent, almost three quarters of the persons who started as CEPEP workers are still CEPEP workers, which means they have not graduated beyond that to get into business, to set into the private sector, to be recruited into the public sector as well. So the Government has destroyed the capacity of the labour market to graduate and absorbed working people in productive employment. That is why today, they are talking about bringing professionals from everywhere in the world: nurses from the Philippines, doctor from Cuba and worker from China.

The Chinese workers are also doing technical work which we could have trained nationals for. Citizens of Trinidad and Tobago could have been trained to do the technical work, carpentry, plumbing, and electrical work and so on, instead we have to go to China to get that because we have absorbed our labour into dependency programmes like this—and even the contractors because the contractors in many cases are also workers. This began as an incubator programme, a programme to build a cadre of contractors who would graduate to work in the private sector to supply services and goods to the public sector.

Mr. Speaker, do you know according to this report, almost three quarters of the contractors have also remained at one level, never graduating? And today, according to our Motion before us, you cannot find in several ministries and

agencies skilled persons to occupy vacant positions and the CEPEP contractors themselves have been negligent. It is my information that a Member of this Parliament, a Member of the Government sitting on the Government Benches who is also a CEPEP contractor, has failed to pay NIS and VAT and was blacklisted by the CEPEP authority, by the management from providing work and from being awarded contracts; a Member of the Government in executive office, a CEPEP contractor who cannot pay NIS and VAT.

Mr. B. Panday: Is that a Member of this House?

Dr. R. Moonilal: A Member of the House, regrettably. My business here is not to embarrass—it is just a few of you—anyone or all of you. That is not my intention. I think the person knows who he or she is and should take steps and explain himself.

Mr. Ramnath: Could you say whether it is a he or she if you do not want to call names.

Dr. R. Moonilal: So, Mr. Speaker—or should I do like the Minister of National Security and confine myself to north, south, central and western? But the point is that there are delinquent CEPEP contractors sitting on the Government Bench, have not paid NIS, VAT, blacklisted from providing labour and so on, and that has served to corrupt the system and absorb labour and take labour away from Government and private sector services.

Mr. Speaker, I hope the person in question would respond in this debate even, and tell us the position. But my parting issue before I move on, while we have a glossy report here on some propaganda involving the programme, the Auditor General conducted an enquiry and prepared a report not too long ago in 2006, in which there were allegations in that programme. The Auditor General noted in several parts of the report—this was laid in the House and it is a public document now—that that programme was unable to account for millions of dollars. They could not provide procurement policy; could not provide paper work; they could not provide the records to support spending over \$250 million.

So, Mr. Speaker, we should be as a responsible Parliament, consistent with accountability and transparency and so on. Looking at the report of the Auditor General, this is where the money went, this is where the money "gone" to use the term, made popular by the Member for San Fernando East. The Auditor General pointed out the failure to account for the \$250 million to provide the necessary paper work, the necessary policy document, to provide the necessary authority to spend. They could not be supplied with lists of contractors, value of contracts and

tendering processes. They reported a lack of financial management, corruption in the selection of contractors,—the Auditor General’s report on CEPEP.

To this day, we have heard nothing from the Government as to whether or not they have taken any corrective steps, that they have taken any steps to come to the bottom of this to find out who took the money and where the money "gone".

5.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, that is why today we are in the crisis we are in, The crisis that you cannot fill vacancies and you cannot fill a pothole. There was a pothole on the Diego Martin Highway which looked like a grave. I saw on the front page of a newspaper a pothole looking like a grave, and smiling next to that was the “Minister of Nothing Works”. He stood next to the pothole giggling. It was the most obscene sight.

Mr. Speaker, I want to refer to the area of education. That is why we cannot fix roads and provide utilities. In the area of education you also see a continuation of a pattern where moneys are removed for the provision of goods and maintenance and placed into other areas for publicity, fees, et cetera.

I hope I am not misreading this but subhead 3: General Administration, Other Minor Equipment, \$47 million. How old is the last budget? Was it not a few months we met to pass the budget?

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we are looking at education where \$47,623,000 was removed, and this is what they call Other Minor Equipment, General Administration. It is no secret that in this country schools are complaining because of lack of resources and the failure to provide in some cases teaching staff as in Hermitage Presbyterian School; the failure to provide basic equipment for schools, and today the money goes into allowances and security services because of crime, and it all comes back to crime.

The failure really to develop this country is rooted in crime and you have to provide security services to the tune of \$36 million. Imagine security services for the Ministry of Education is \$36 million, that is why you will not be able to get equipment for schools, you have to first provide security.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, it comes back to crime. The crime level in this country has affected everything; hospital services, the education sector, employment in certain areas. People are scared to go to work and if they go to work they are scared to return home. Innocent people are held up and it is getting more and more dangerous and frightening in this country. So it is not surprising and teachers complain that they need to be protected. There are schools where parents and students were attacked violently, so it is not surprising that you have to spend some money on security services, but that is also as a result of the widespread crime which has gotten completely out of hand. I am happy that the Minister of National Security is here to shed light—I do not know what light—on what is happening and what they are doing.

Mr. Speaker, on December 20, there is a headline on page 4 of the *Newsday* which is not funny, it is tragic.

“Bandit calls girlfriend during robbery

‘Baby, what you want?’”

The bandit is robbing a shop, picks up a cellphone and says: “Baby, what you want?”

“Baby, I robbing a clothes store...It have real nice clothes here for you. What you want?”

Mr. Speaker, this would have been funny had it not been tragic, but this is where Trinidad and Tobago has reached, that they do this with such contempt.

I want to make reference to an article on Monday, November 27, 2006. Hear this one:

“PM tells criminals:

Get Out Now

In two years, criminals will be forced to leave the country because of Government’s ‘hot’ crime fighting tools which are being put in place, Prime Minister Patrick Manning has predicted.”

He said in two years criminals will be out, two years later it is the businessmen who are out. It is the honest hard-working citizens who are leaving. I say that because no amount of words, plans and posturing will change the fact that nothing could be done that under the PNM Government they will not by definition deal with crime. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, you cannot take \$21 million out of the vote for vehicles and equipment as it seeks to do today and say it is serious about fighting crime. The Government cannot deal with crime because much of the crime that we have in Trinidad and Tobago is Government-supported crime. The Government, as a policy, has participated in criminal activity by fuelling funds to criminal elements. It has participated by supporting gang leaders and gangs with contracts to various departments of the State; it is Government-made crime and that is why today they cannot deal with that. It is a loose tiger that it can no longer capture. Crime can only be dealt with under a UNC government. [*Desk thumping*] Believe it or not, it cannot deal with crime because it is involved. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, we have answered the question, “Where the money gone?”; we have looked at the pattern that is emerging, and I thought it was so unfair that the Government chose the Member for Barataria/San Juan to respond to the Leader of the Opposition. I thought it was unfair.

In all fairness to the Member, nothing will prepare him for that type of contribution to respond to the eloquence of the Member for Couva North. I was trying to follow the gentleman and challenging as it was, I did pick up on some issues raised. I want to tell him that the issues—

Mr. Ramnath: He is good man.

Dr. R. Moonilal: The hon. Member made the point about Tidco and the UNC and invariably, when they are faced with a problem today, they look in the back pocket for the UNC and come up with what happened in 1998/1999 and 2000/2001.

The issue here is the failure to collect rent and whether you have paperwork or not, when was this discovered, yesterday? It is your responsibility as the Government to collect rent and the Minister of Public Administration knows that. I am sure he would have similar challenges with government property to collect rent.

Mr. Speaker, it is really the issue of the Government putting policies, structures and quality staff in place to ensure that rents are collected. To ensure that something as basic as collecting a rent can be done. That is really the issue. If there is a failure to do something as small as that, then what will you do when you have the bigger challenges?

The Member also spoke about the tourism sector and this is the season when we focus much of our attention on tourism; the provision of hospitality, the infrastructure, the support to the entertainment community and the protection of tourists. One wonders whether the Government and the Ministry of Tourism are up to the task of managing a successful Carnival, far less providing security.

Mr. Speaker, these are the challenges that the Member for Barataria/San Juan would be better advised to deal with and just confess that they could not collect rent. It is not only at the Maracas Beach Facility, it is in other areas where they failed and had to write-off millions of dollars.

There are others my colleagues would venture, but I want to note a couple in passing. You look at the Ministry of Works and Transport and the Ministry of Local Government where they could not spend money to maintain vehicles and move that for contracting services, and you see this nebulous thing called contracting services, that could be anything. It could be the caterer, which actually is the menu because it is the caterer and beverage provider—contracted services.

So you will not be able to fix the engine in a vehicle because really you have increased the vote for catering, food and drink; and this Government is well known as a government that enjoys a good time in office. It is known for that. In fact, I understand that the Government Ministers are queuing up now to sign up to play mas. They could take another note, it was President Obama who, a few days ago in what is really a symbolic measure, instituted a wage freeze on his staff. It is symbolic in that it is not much money given their problem, but look at the symbolism and power of that statement. Would the Government of Trinidad and Tobago also go in that direction to provide the population with some indicator that it is serious about belt tightening and reducing spending and so forth? That is a challenge that it faces, and one I daresay it will fail at.

So in closing, the Opposition cannot and will not be supporting this measure given our statements and the fact that this is indicative of a greater level of incompetence and inefficiency in the Government, its failure to budget properly at best, and at worst its capacity to institute measures to provide funds for corruption, patronage, nepotism and indeed sheer waste. That is why this country is in the economic mess it is in today, because of the mismanagement of the economy. You can jump high or low.

When the Government talks about managing the economy—well my friend from St. Augustine is back and I am sure he is eager to present a discourse on matters of economic and trade policy. So I would not go too far. The Government believes that when it rattles off a set of figures that it impresses someone. The Minister of Finance, who like me is not trained in economics, rattles off all kinds of numbers and somehow thinks that means something. It means absolutely nothing. To boast about its spending and how much money it has means nothing. What means something is the quality of people's lives; whether they get pharmaceuticals, water, and whether they are provided with security.

5.30 p.m.

I have to bring the good people of Kuchawan Trace to the Hyatt. This afternoon I learnt that they were the owners of the Hyatt; the good people of Debe.

Their failure to provide goods and services is the critical issue here. Health, education security, water, those are the issues. It is not how you spend and jumbling all the figures, and so on; it is really their mismanagement of the economy that has led this country into the situation where we literally have to borrow money to live.

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

The Minister of National Security (Sen. The Hon. Martin Joseph): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to participate in this debate on the Finance (Supplementary Appropriation) (2008) Bill and also the Motion for the House to adopt the First Report (2009) Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

While I am here specifically to bring some clarity as it relates to the expenditure associated with Ministry of National Security, the \$6.9 million as it relates to the offshore patrol vessels, it is necessary for me to respond to some of the comments made by the hon. Member for Oropouche East. The hon. Member for Oropouche East has accused this Government of not being able to deal with crime and that is the reason we cannot deal with crime because we are fueling guns; we are supporting those persons who are involved in criminal activities.

I want to start off by refuting that, because while the issue of crime and violence is something for which one must not play politics with because it is too important an activity, one has to find the root of the problems. The hon. Member for Couva North said you play with the—I cannot remember the exact quote that he used in the past, but in essence, what you do has a way that it comes back to haunt you at some subsequent point in time.

Mr. B. Panday: What goes around comes around.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: The Member for Oropouche East talked about the question of guns in the hands of criminals. If we trace the whole question of guns in the hands of criminals, unfortunately it stemmed back to when the UNC was in office.

Mr. S. Panday: You are in office now!

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: While we talk about one kind of crime, there are all kinds of crimes: there are white collar crimes; there are other types of crimes

that plague the country and I have to be very kind of—if you notice I am circumspect in the way in which I am bringing this argument forward to respond, again, as I said, to the accusation made by the Member of Oropouche East who said that we have encouraged criminal activities and we cannot deal with criminal activities because we ourselves are involved. I am saying that you can trace it right back to when the UNC was in office and there was a level of criminal activity that was taking place under the UNC that caused other people to believe that it was possible for me to—

Mr. Ramnath: What a lame excuse. You should be ashamed.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: It is not any lame excuse. The reason I am saying this is because the timeframe for which the sowing of the seed and the development of the fruit, especially in the area of crime, takes some time. The very same communities which we are now plagued with, with respect to the criminal hot spots; the question of the injection of the guns; the supporting of the criminal activities, took place when the hon. Member for Couva North was Prime Minister. He himself is on record as saying that under the very URP from which the criminal activities emanated, he had to move one of his ministers who was then responsible for URP because of the criminal elements that were injected into the URP at that time. I am sure the hon. Member for Couva North knows what I am talking about; knows who I am talking about.

Hon. Member: You promoted the criminals.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: You hear he is saying we provoked these criminals. I am saying that because the seeds were planted sometime ago and we are now reaping it. It is not that we are making any excuses, what I want to put on the table as I respond to the situation, is that the environment in which we are now operating is a changed environment and what we are seeing is that the institutions that are responsible for treating with the changed environment were themselves not prepared to deal with the circumstances.

This Government finds itself in a situation where it is easy to say: fix this; resolve that, but it goes beyond talk; it goes behind the institutions that are responsible for treating with it. I am saying this because it is no gainsaying that this Government is not happy with the progress made so far as it relates to the transformation of those institutions responsible for providing security and safety in this country. There is no gainsaying that. There is no gainsaying that as Minister of National Security responsible for overseeing what is happening in the Ministry of National Security that I am pleased with the progress that we have

made. There is no gainsaying that. We cannot be. But at the same time, one has to be very careful in terms of how we go about unnecessarily criticizing the institutions that have found themselves in a situation where, given the current environment, they cannot adequately respond.

It goes for most of our institutions in this country. However, the institution where the results of its inability to respond adequately and effectively, is in the national security. There is no question. Do you think we are happy that in 2008 there were 500-plus murders? We cannot be. Because the families of all those persons who are distressed, we cannot be happy with that. Do you feel as a government we are happy with respect to the level of insecurity, the level of fear that exists in the society? The answer is no; we cannot be. But in saying that, what you cannot say is that the Government has not been doing everything in its power in terms of providing the resources, et cetera, to the law enforcement so that they can improve their performance.

When we came to this Parliament sometime ago and indicated the fact that we were going to; one, purchase three offshore patrol vessels; purchase fast patrol craft; basically improve the ability of law enforcement to interdict guns and drugs coming into the country, they were talking about wasting of money.

This Government has invested tremendous amounts of taxpayers' dollars in a radar system that allows us to be able to see the pattern of flows into the country. The radar system is up. Seeing the pattern of flows, seeing where it is happening is just one prerequisite. So seeing it, we recognize our inability to interdict. It takes only seven minutes with a go-fast to move from any point in Venezuela to reach any point in Trinidad. It is recognized—they do not like to hear it, but it is a fact that we are a major transshipment point for drugs and guns. There is no question about that. There is no question that the drugs come accompanied by guns. There is no question that the guns are remaining in this country. I have to be careful again about how I speak, because we also have to be careful about our neighbours. But what is happening in neighbouring countries is also affecting what is happening here. To be simplistic in terms of the challenges that we face is to create unnecessary problems and hardships for our citizens.

So the radar system is up; seeing the pattern of flows, but then inability to interdict. So recognizing the inability to interdict, recognizing the limited assets that are available to the coastguard—and let me just say something else.

Hon. Member: After seven years.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: When we speak, we have to be careful about how we speak and the reason is because criminal elements exploit weaknesses in law

enforcement. That is a fact. So that when you stand up publicly and you say these are the weaknesses that exist in law enforcement, et cetera, criminals are hearing you. *[Interruption]* They may suspect, but when a Minister of National Security gets up and then publicly says: “This is not there; this is not there”, it is a different thing.

What I am saying to you and to this honourable House is that recognizing the pattern of inflows, Government recognized the need for us to increase the capacity of our coastguard in this instance, to treat with the inflow of drugs and guns.

Mr. Maharaj SC: You talking for years. What are you doing?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: In the absence of the assets to treat effectively with this—as I said, we have to use what we have until we get what we want—we recognize that three offshore patrol vessels for which we are here with respect to the \$600-odd million, is an important element in the ability of the Government to protect our borders. The three offshore patrol vessels, the six fast patrol craft and also the six interceptors. We have decided that we are also going to purchase four helicopters so that, again, we will be in a position to stop or at least reduce the inflow of drugs and guns coming into the country. When we are able to do that, then we would reduce the extent to which those very drugs and guns engage criminal gangs and activities which translate also into unacceptable levels of homicides.

Hon. Member: When would that happen; what year?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: The naval assets are going to be in place, but in the meantime, we acquired two interim vessels that have now increased the capacity of the coastguard to interdict, and we have started to see the results of those activities taking place.

Mr. B. Panday: Would you kindly permit a question? When the UNC government was in office we had received—I mean, we did not buy them; we got them from the American government—we had two patrol boats. There were four or six high speed boats—I think they were painted blue, or something like that, and there were interceptors. Are they still in operation?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Of those four patrol boats provided by the United States government to us, two of them are operational. I think some also went to the customs. I think the problem with them is the question of the maintenance of the engines. So that answers the question.

The point I am making is that there is recognition on the part of the Government as to what is necessary in terms of providing the means to law enforcement to successfully deal with crime and violence in this country.

5.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, another example, during their time when Guiliani came to Trinidad to deal with the whole question—remember he was the guru and he came and talked about the problems at the time—the suggestion was that if you want law enforcement; if you want your police organization to be able effectively to deal with crime, it has to be given the responsibility and be accountable. He said that I could hire or fire a Commissioner of Police, but our system does not allow for that.

Mr. B. Panday: That is why we have to change the Constitution.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: But in the meantime someone would ask how long and my friend could say, “Do we have to wait until we change the Constitution to get that?” The answer is no. With your support we brought legislation and amended the Police Service Act and made the Commissioner of Police accountable and responsible for the operation of his police organization, a major change. *[Interruption]*

Let me follow the rules of the House and speak to the Speaker. The hon. Member for Couva North is a master at that. Let me talk to the Speaker as I am required to do.

What did we change? We changed the legislation. I want you to understand something. Sometimes we underestimate what we have been doing to bring about the results that we want. We changed the Constitution and allowed the Commissioner of Police now to be responsible and accountable for the operations of his police organization. It was something new and as a result it was necessary to support the office of the Commissioner of Police so that he could discharge the responsibilities.

Let us, Members, remember that in the past it was the Police Service Commission which was responsible for everything: disciplining from police officer all the way up. In other words, there was a Commissioner of Police, responsible for the operation of his organization, with absolutely no control, no authority to do what he would have liked to do. We changed that and now we have the Police Service Commission serving as an appellate body on the decisions of the commissioner and responsible for the hiring and the firing of the commissioner and deputy commissioner.

Mr. Ramnath: They hired a commissioner and you rejected him?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: At the end of the day, it comes to the Parliament.

So that, Mr. Speaker, you now have a situation—and again it is painful and I want to be careful because I do not want anybody to say—that is how we operate in this society—it is very easy to say, “Minister comes to the Parliament and blames the commissioner. He is passing the buck.” All we are saying is that this is a new development that has taken place so that the commissioner can be able to make sure that his police organization operates in a way in which we get results.

What are we required to do? We are required to make sure that the legislation is passed and that he is provided with the resources. It was unfortunate that I heard the Member for Couva North on a platform the other day saying that when you call a station, there still are no cars. [*Interruption*] It should not be, on the basis that over the last two years, 600 new police vehicles have been provided. [*Interruption*] You hear what he is saying? Management! Does he want the Minister of National Security to manage the police service?

Hon. Member: Why not?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: And somebody is saying why not. It is amazing! The next thing you know, they are accusing the Minister of National Security, who is a politician.

Mr. Ramnath: That is okay. He can defend himself.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: You see!

Mr. B. Panday: You bought 600 vehicles. Why does the problem still persist that when people call the station there is no vehicle? Something has got to be wrong.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Something has to be wrong with respect to the deployment. How can I be responsible for deployment? And the Member for Tabaquite is telling me I am responsible.

Mr. Speaker, we are required from time to time to determine the number of vehicles. They will say what is needed in order for them to respond.

Recently, in the Parliament—I would not call the person's name—a person came to me and said, “Minister, I am feeling sorry for you.” I said, “Why do you feel sorry for me?” The person said, “Can you do something about your vehicles I see parked at night in certain places?” I said, “Unfortunately, I have no control over the deployment of the vehicles. I will raise it with the commissioner as it relates to how his resources are being utilized.”

Where our responsibilities are concerned, we can boast with respect to—

Mr. Maharaj SC: Thank you very much, hon. Minister. Are you aware that under section 85 of the Constitution, the Minister, who is assigned responsibility for departments like the police service, exercises general direction and control over that department and you are responsible to the Parliament? If the Minister cannot control the management and exercise of the resources, then he ought to resign. That is the system that operates. You cannot come here and blame the Commissioner of Police or anybody else.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: I am not blaming anybody. As far as the Constitution is concerned, while I am not an expert or a lawyer, I know, as it relates to the operation of the police service and on the basis of the changes made to the legislation, the question of what the hon. Member for Tabaquite is saying is dated. He can raise that some other way.

On the question of resources and salaries, everything necessary to make sure that we can provide the police service with the ability to improve on its ability and capacity to do its job is being provided by this Government. There is a time lag between the implementation and the results we expect to get, but I assure you, in terms of the expectation of the Government on how the law enforcement entities treat with crime and violence, we will continue to monitor.

Specifically, I do not know whether or not issues were raised as far as the procurement of offshore vessels. I am not aware that anybody had any problems with the manner in which it has been procured. [*Interruption*] Fyzabad?

Hon. Member: Has not spoken.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: I cannot anticipate--

Dr. Gopeesingh: Thank you for giving way on that issue. There have been questions raised ad infinitum by the Opposition on the whole question of the procurement of the offshore vessels and so far this country has not been given a satisfactory account of the whole issue of transparency and accountability in the tendering process and how much it will cost. There was difficulty between the Italian company and the British company. There were three tenders originally which went down to two and then you settled for the British company. The country does not know on what basis you did that and the actual cost.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: On Friday, April 20, 2007 in this House, the hon. Prime Minister, who was also Minister of Finance, made a statement, which was circulated, outlining the very same issues raised. I will do even better: I will give you a copy of the document. [*Hands over the document*]

Mr. Speaker, in order to carry out the acquisition of the OPVs, a ministerial committee was established to oversee the process and to make recommendations to the full Cabinet. The committee appointed a contracting committee, also made up of a cross section of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago subject matter experts, to negotiate any contracts that may result. The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago released a request for proposals to selective governments, through the Ministry of Finance to configure, design, build, equip, test, certify and commission the OPVs. The RFP also included provision for training, maintenance and an interim facility by way of two vessels, and financing arrangements.

After due consideration of cost, quality and responsiveness to the requirements of the RFP, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago selected the proposal that was considered the most attractive. The respondents included the governments of Italy and the United Kingdom. Vessels are being built by VT Shipbuilding International of the United Kingdom, now known as BVT Surface Fleet.

On April 05, 2007, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago executed six documents. First, there is a head contract executed between the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (BVT). This head contract draws together three other contracts associated with the design, construction and supply of the three offshore patrol vessels for use by the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard.

Secondly, there was the execution of three subcontracts. One is a government contract between the Secretary of State for Defence with the government of the United States, of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Under that contract, the government of the United Kingdom will provide the Government of Trinidad and Tobago with independent professional advice on the progress and performance of the OPV project. To that end, the government of the United Kingdom will provide independent advice on the design and construction of the three offshore patrol vessels and would offer advice on the vessels' acceptance process. The cost of this contract is \$50 million and it is being implemented on a cost/recovery basis only.

The second is a shipbuilding contract which was executed between the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the shipbuilder identified by the United Kingdom to design and construct the three offshore patrol vessels BVT. This contract has two associated arrangements: a maintenance support programme and a crew training programme.

The price of the vessels is \$1,455 million. The training price is \$84 million and the maintenance support price is \$463 million.

There is an interim facility which was executed between the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and BVT for the supply of two interim vessels for the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard. The two vessels, as we all know, arrived in Trinidad and Tobago on July 03, and July 09, 2007 respectively. Since their arrival, the vessels have been modified to meet the requirements of the coast guard. The vessels have since been commissioned on April 23, 2008 and designated CG21, which is the *TTS Gaspar Grande* and the other the CG22, *TTS Chacachacare*.

The vessels have been fully operational since April 2008 and are used in all coast guard roles, including surveillance and interdiction, with other agencies around the coastline of Trinidad and Tobago.

6.00 p.m.

Just for the information of the Member for Couva South who has asked about the readiness and the delivery, the contract effective date for the three offshore patrol vessels is May 15, 2007. The contract delivery dates for the three offshore patrol vessels are as follows—these were the original dates: OPV 1, May 15, 2009; OPV 2, February 15, 2010; and OPV 3, October 15, 2010.

In June 2008, BVT Service Fleet informed the Government of Trinidad and Tobago that OPV 1 could only be delivered on September 15, 2009 and later on, September 18, 2008, BVT further advised the Government of Trinidad and Tobago of new delivery dates for the OPVs as follows: structural completion, April 02009; and load out completion, which means that the vessel will be placed in water for the first time, May 2009. The planned acceptance dates for the three vessels are now as follows: OPV 1, November 2009, a delay of six months; OPV 2, May 2010, a delay of three months; and OPV 3, November 2010, a delay of one month. That is the status as it relates to the OPVs.

With respect to the six fast patrol craft, my understanding is that the contract date is February 29, 2008 and the contract delivery date for the first two FPCs is October 2009 and the other four, February 2010. My understanding is that they are all on schedule and are likely to be delivered even before schedule.

That is where we are, as it relates to the vessels that are part of the Finance Bill today. With those few remarks, I thank you very much.

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): Mr. Speaker, today for the third time we have come to debate an issue of supplementary appropriation for fiscal

2007/2008. Every time this Government comes, they are asking for billions and billions more. What was supposed to have been a budget of \$40.4 billion for 2007/2008 has turned out to be a budget of \$53 billion. The sum of \$11 billion more has been asked for by this Government to satisfy the expenditure during fiscal 2007/2008; \$11 billion. The hon. Minister of Finance has come today to tell us that they have saved millions of dollars, \$9 billion or \$10 billion and that they were able to put a certain amount into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund.

You have received, by a gift of God, an increase in the price of oil, which peaked at US \$147 per barrel in July 2007/2008 and the price of gas went beyond \$8 per mmbtu. You received more money, but you could have received more money if you had predicated the price of oil not at US \$50. [*Interruption*] We have argued that on many occasions. If that had been predicated on a price less than US \$50, you would not have been spending that amount of money, because that would not have been in your budgetary allocation. Therefore, you would have saved more money. This year, again, you have gone on to predicate it at US \$70, when today the price of oil is US \$40. This is why you have had to review your budgetary allocation on two occasions. Originally you said that you would be reducing it by \$5.3 billion and now to \$7.9 billion, but pretty shortly you would have to reduce it by \$10 billion. What you had as your original expenditure for 2008/2009 would have to be curtailed by almost \$10 billion.

I want to refer to a statement made by President Obama. This is the context of what we are discussing today. President Obama said, I quote:

"Those of us who manage the public's dollars will be held to account...and do our business in the light of day—because only then can we restore the vital trust between a people and a government."

This is what the President of the United States is telling his people, his staff and his Cabinet Secretaries on the first day he took office. He gave this speech when he accepted the Presidency. I want to repeat it:

"Those of us who manage the public's dollars will be held to account...and do our business in the light of day...."

Mr. President—Mr. Speaker, I have bigger things for you—as the Leader of the Opposition mentioned, \$209 billion has been spent by this Government in six years. In 2007/2008, \$53 billion has been spent. Do you know what that is equivalent to? In the six years of the UNC government, when the price of oil was hovering between US \$9 and US \$18, our total expenditure was \$55 billion. This Government has spent \$53 billion in one year and the UNC, under Basdeo Panday,

spent \$55 billion for six years. Look at what we have been able to accomplish during those six years with only \$55 billion. What has this Government been able to achieve with \$53 billion?

Then comes the hon. Minister of Finance to talk about profit by state enterprises. I think the Minister needs to go back. I do not think the Minister was here. She has only been in Government for one year, but I want to remind the Minister of the state enterprises that she says are making a profit. I want to quote from the Auditor General on the public accounts of April 29, 2008. I want to refer the hon. Minister to some areas in this Auditor General's Report as at September 30, 2007; statements of letters of comfort issued by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, state enterprises and statutory boards contingent liability, \$5.380 billion. So where is the profit that the hon. Minister speaks about for these state enterprises, when the Government has had to stand for contingent liabilities the sum of \$5.380 billion?

In addition, with respect to these same state enterprises and statutory authorities, the Government stood guarantee for loans to the tune of \$13 billion as of September 2007. In other words, the Government stood loan guarantees and contingent liability for these same state enterprises of \$18 billion. Where is the profit that the hon. Minister of Finance is talking about? Today the Minister speaks about profits for these state enterprises.

In the context of today's financial supplementary appropriation, when the Minister speaks about savings by this Government, the Minister must also tell this country about how much this Government owes. This Government owes \$12 billion in foreign loans and foreign indebtedness. What they owe locally is \$8 billion. [*Interruption*] It is around \$20 billion, but I rounded it off. They have stood guarantees for \$13 billion; that makes \$34 billion and for contingent liabilities, another "\$5.something" billion. That makes nearly \$40 billion that this country owes in external loans, local loans, loan guarantees for state enterprises and statutory authorities and contingent liabilities. The GDP is about \$132 million. If we owe \$40 billion out of \$180 billion, that is approximately 20 to 25 per cent or 22 per cent.

Developed countries go around less than 20 per cent. I am not speaking about the United States. When this Government says that they have \$16 billion in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, and the country owes \$40 billion, the country must know that this Government says that they have money but they owe quite a lot of money. That is the first point I would like to make.

Last year this Government indicated that they had a number of projects under the Public Sector Investment projects for 2008/Vision 2020. This book did a review of what went on in 2007/2008. It is a review of the PSIP Projects for fiscal 2007. They spent \$7.769 billion for fiscal 2007. Drawn down under the Infrastructure Development Fund was \$3.843 billion and the Consolidated Fund, \$3.926 billion. In total, \$7.769 billion was allocated for fiscal 2007, totalling nearly \$7.769 billion. The sum of approximately \$8 billion was allocated for expenditure under the PSIP.

What has this Government been able to achieve when they had big, elaborate plans for 2007/2008? Today they are coming to ask for more money, but the projects that they have set about to fulfil—I want to quote from the 2009 budget memorandum of PricewaterhouseCoopers and indicate that from the 121 projects that this Government spoke about doing within 2007/2008, they were able to complete only 12. That is 10 per cent.

6.15 p.m.

The Government completed only 10 per cent of the projects which it undertook for 2007/2008. Out of the 121 projects, they have completed 12. Where did the money go? They had approximately \$8 billion under the PSIP for these projects, and only 10 per cent of the projects were completed from the \$8 billion. They come today to tell us that they want more money and that they have saved the money. Where did the money go that was allocated for the PSIP programmes?

Mr. Speaker, 23 of these projects have not yet started. Twelve projects have been completed and nearly 20 per cent of the projects have not started. Where did the money go? Why are they coming to ask us to satisfy the expenditure of the Government in this Finance (Supplementary Appropriation) Bill?

I want to go into a few of the sectors for a few minutes. In the Ministry of Health, 50 per cent of the projects identified were not started and none was completed. This is the PricewaterhouseCoopers bulletin. So, when the Minister comes today and tells us that they have saved so much more; they want more money and they did well; the fiscal programmes were good; and they have beautiful projects; are they not ashamed that only 10 per cent of the projects have been completed?

With respect to the Ministry of National Security, none out of the 11 projects that were supposed to have been implemented in fiscal 2007 has been completed.

With respect to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, six out of the 16 projects have not even started. Only two out of the 16 projects have been completed.

In the Ministry of Tourism, out of six projects, none was completed.

As far as the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries is concerned, out of the 10 projects, four projects have not yet started and none has been completed.

With respect to the Ministry of Works and Transport—

Mr. Ross: I want to thank the hon. Member for Caroni East for giving way. Could the Member give me an idea of the six projects that he is talking about and when they were scheduled to start?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I am going to refer the Minister to the 2009 budget memorandum. [*Interruption*] With respect to the Ministry of Works and Transport, they had 10 projects to be undertaken and implemented during the year. [*Interruption*] There is one project which was completed and that is the construction of a new bridge in Caroni. I do not even know whether that bridge has been completed.

The construction of the interchange at the intersection of the Uriah Butler and Churchill Roosevelt Highway, package A, has been completed but packages B and C have not been completed. So, out of these 10 projects in the Ministry of Works and Transport only one has been completed.

Mr. Imbert: I thank the Member for giving way and the question does not concern the Ministry of Works and Transport. When the Member reads out these documents, is the Member referring to projects that should have been continued, started or completed? You are giving the impression that all these projects should have been completed. I believe that it speaks about the continuation and commencement.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I am giving you empirical data to substantiate my statement that \$8 billion was allocated for these projects and out of all the projects that I have spoken about only 10 per cent of them have been completed and 20 per cent have not yet started. We are asking: Where did the \$7.9 billion go?

Mr. Speaker, I am not going to delay this House by giving any more information on this matter. I am sure that the Government has reviewed the PricewaterhouseCoopers document and it gives empirical data to substantiate what I have been saying here today. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, with respect to state enterprises, under the statement of the loans or credit guaranteed by the Government which amounts to approximately \$13 billion, when the Minister spoke about state enterprises being profitable—there

are over 35 state enterprises in Trinidad and Tobago and 15 special purposes companies. There are over 105 special state enterprises and statutory authorities. During 2001—2007, \$21 billion was spent on transfers and subsidies for these state enterprises.

Last year, \$7 billion was allocated for these state enterprises and hear what the Government had to stand guarantees for loans for—Taurus Services, \$1.617 billion. Do you know who is Taurus Services? Is that not the company that was formed to write off the debt for a senior Minister of the Government of \$22 million? That is Taurus Services! The Government is standing security for Taurus Services for \$1.6 billion. One of the present Ministers of the Government knows that. He is the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. He was with the National Commercial Bank when Taurus Services was formed to write off the debt of a senior Minister of the Government of almost \$22 million. They wrote off a debt of almost 20 cents to the dollar.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Call the name!

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Do not let me call the name. That would be dishonourable of me. You all know who it is. I do not need to call the name. Mr. Speaker, with respect to First Citizens Holding Limited, the Government stood a guarantee of \$515 million. First Citizens Holding Limited is supposed to be making a profit for the people of Trinidad and Tobago and the Government stood a guarantee of \$515 million for First Citizens Holding Limited, and it has been removed from the Freedom of Information Act. They are hiding this, but the Auditor General did not hide it. This is the Auditor General's statement of April 29, 2008. First Citizens Holding Limited is one of the 10 state enterprises and companies that have been removed from the Freedom of Information Act.

So, when I spoke about President Barack Obama making the statement that those of us who manage the public dollars would be held to account, the hon. Minister of Finance would be held to account. [*Desk thumping*] We must do our business in the light of the day. The next day, President Obama made all his staff and secretaries sign an oath of ethics. He said that there must be no lobbying and everything must be transparent, and they must take part in the Freedom of Information Act and give information to anybody who wants the information. He has informed a team that even if he says not to give information because of security, even he could be overruled and it has to go before a committee, and here we have a government hiding things. There are 10 companies under the Freedom of Information Act being hidden; Nidco, First Citizens Holding Limited. They gave \$41 million in scholarships.

With respect to MTS, they stood guarantee for \$179 million.

With respect to the Public Transport Service Corporation—somebody was the middleman with respect to the purchase of these buses. These are the same buses that came to Woodford Square to help the Prime Minister defend the Motion of no confidence in him— they have signed \$373 million as guarantee.

With respect to the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission (T&TEC) there is no limit. Mr. Speaker, this Government has stood guarantee for \$914 million for T&TEC. In today's newspaper, we see that T&TEC is losing \$30 million a month in revenue. That is \$360 million in a year. The rates have increased, but T&TEC is losing \$30 million or more per month because ArcelorMittal had to close down.

The Government is embarking on Trinidad Generation Unlimited. They want to generate more electricity and T&TEC has more electricity than people want—they are losing \$30 million—but this Government wants to come and set up Trinidad Generation Unlimited. How much electricity do you want to generate? One has an abundant supply, but they are bringing in another company. What is this Government doing? They do not seem to know what they are doing.

With respect to the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA)—the Minister of Public Utilities is here and I hope he would get up and defend WASA. The Government has stood guarantee for WASA for \$3.6 billion. Why did they stand guarantee for WASA? They must tell the country! The Minister of Public Utilities said today that the WASA board has found no confidence in some managers. Have they suddenly woken up? Six years later they have woke up and found no confidence in managers, and they have a guarantee of \$3.6 billion.

Hear what the Minister had to say. He said that the new board at WASA has found that there are some managers in whom they have no confidence. A few years ago, we told them that Errol Grimes came ninth on the list of persons who were interviewed for CEO and they put him as the CEO and gave him a salary of over \$100,000 a month without the approval of the board. They only want to put PNM people, square pegs in round holes. They want to put PNM party hacks inside there so they have to lose money.

WASA, under Mr. Basdeo Panday, had employed 3,300 workers, but when the PNM came into office WASA staff went to 4,800 persons. Hear what the Minister said. He said that the possibility of people being sent home was not excluded from the transformation of the current system. So, people are going home. I hope all the PNM party hacks know that they are going home. The PNM is sending them back home. He said that after careful reviews the new board found, in some cases, there

were some members in whom they did not have full confidence and they are taking steps to ensure that they put persons in place in whom the board has confidence and that process is ongoing.

6.30 p.m.

You took six years to wake up? Six years has gone. He added that the board did not specify why they found the lack of confidence in some members, but noted that the good work of the board will continue. He said now you must have a management and a system and organization structure in which you have confidence.

Suddenly they now realize that they have to have a management structure for WASA. Here is what the hon. Minister goes on to say about a company, which has not been able to account for almost \$2 billion—WASA—and which the Government has stood guarantee for another \$3.6 billion, and if I am not mistaken, contingent liability of \$768 million in addition to that. So, \$3.6 billion and \$800 million; he called \$4.4 million in a company that has been losing money. WASA!

Mr. Abdul-Hamid: What are you talking about? Explain that.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Here it is, the Auditor General's Report of the Public Accounts, April 29, 2008. Mr. Speaker, it seems as though the Minister does not even know what is happening in the state enterprises; he is asking me where it is, he wants to see that. Go to the Auditor General's Report of 2008. It is bold here on page 17 of the Auditor General's Report, WASA, \$3.6 billion; statement of the loans or credit guaranteed by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago as of September 30, 2007. Totally substantiated, incontrovertible evidence.

Mr. Speaker, you know what is worse today? [*Crosstalk*] Hon. Minister of Public Utilities, I feel sorry for you. He said in the *Guardian* newspaper, Friday, January 23. I feel sorry for you; you have work to do.

Mr. Abdul-Hamid: You are a skunk.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, I take offence to that, if you did not hear it, I think he should apologize.

Hon. Member: What he said?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: He said, I am a skunk. [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*] I would like him to withdraw that statement unambiguously. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: I must confess that I did not hear it, and perhaps it is a good thing that I did not, because honestly, if you did say that you know what you have to do.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: The smell that is emanating from the other side, I think he is trying to transfer it across to this side. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: All I can say is that it could have been worse. Carry on.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I will tell “Mr. Skunk” what he has in fact, said today. “More attention for waste-water”. I think if “Mr. Skunk” listens he would not be in the predicament that he is in at the moment. That is somebody I am speaking about outside, you know.

Mr. Abdul-Hamid: Okay, “Mr. Sasha”.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: It says:

“More attention for waste-water

Abdul Hamid said that sufficient emphasis was not placed on waste-water in the past.”

He said:

“The Solid Waste Management Company is to have that responsibility.

...that Government has taken a strategic decision to remove responsibility for waste-water from the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) so that it can receive the necessary attention.”

Hear his admission:

“Over the years waste-water has not developed in the way we would like it to develop. At present only about 30 per cent of our population has access to any central sewerage system. That's not a healthy arrangement.”

He has admitted his weakness and his failure and his Government's failure to deal with the waste-water system in Trinidad and Tobago over the last six years to seven years. [*Desk thumping*] He said:

“Out of the 4,000 persons in WASA we just have perhaps about 300 in waste-water. That particular statistic will tell you the kind of emphasis that would have been placed on waste-water over many years.”

He admitted that they only have 300 workers in waste-water in WASA, and he is saying that is the type of emphasis. He is admitting that was poor emphasis that was placed on the waste-water system. It goes on to say:

“The Minister said that several managers at WASA were recently replaced as part of a 'transformation' exercise at the authority.”

You know who they are giving it to? They are sending it across to SWMCOL. You know what SWMCOL is? SWMCOL is headed by a guy called Braithwaite. SWMCOL is audited by a private auditor. SWMCOL has one auditor, a "fella" called Ramnarine Ramdass. That is the same gentleman who has rented a building in Chaguanas to the PNM for the last year or two years for the Magistrates' Court in Chaguanas, and has received \$5 million so far, and nobody has occupied it, and he is on the board of Petrotrin.

So, if he is auditing SWMCOL and SWMCOL has one auditor and you are transferring this waste-water thing to SWMCOL. What are you doing? You are transferring the massive corruption, the hidden agenda of the PNM, the hidden expenditure and the massive corruption that go on from time to time.

They spoke about the Housing Development Corporation (HDC) doing very well over a period of time. The Government has stood guarantee for HDC of \$2.713 billion. So whose money is being spent in this housing business? The Government is taking our taxpayers money; standing guarantees for HDC, and HDC is doing whatever they want in the allocation of housing. There is widespread corruption in the award of contracts in the construction of homes for HDC, and of course, there are unequal opportunities for people obtaining homes from the Housing Development Corporation.

In fact, everybody knows that this Government started the whole question of the housing, not only for the people, which is important that the people benefit from the housing, but there must be equitable distribution of the homes so that all people of all affiliations, wherever they belong, must be given houses, but it is a deliberate plot by the PNM, to voter pad and to house pad for election purpose; \$2.7 billion.

The Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, \$640 million for guarantees for the port authority. The same port authority that does not seem to know what they are doing. The same port authority which said, the CEO sent a letter to the wider community saying that they are going to close the port for 14 days. Then the Minister of Works and Transport shamelessly comes to say that he is closing it down for three days. But the CEO sent out a bulletin, which I read into Parliament, that the port is going to be closed for 14 days, [*Desk thumping*] and he tried to make excuses after that and say that they are closing for three days. Up to now he does not even know what is going on in the port. He is the Minister of Works and Transport. What a shame and disgrace. You put empirical evidence and substantiate with a document here in Parliament, but you are coming to refute that. You could never refute the truth. [*Desk thumping*]

These are just a few of the state enterprises, which I have read out from the Auditor General's statement, which show that the Government has stood loans and guarantees for these state enterprises, and so it is ironic and morally wrong for the hon. Minister of Finance to come today to try to fool the population and to say that these state enterprises are making money.

Almost \$40 billion has been spent by these state enterprises over the six years, and there is no accountability and no transparency into the expenditure. We never know how they are tendering, and what is happening. What is even worse is, this Government has gone on to have another 15 special purpose companies to do their dirty work for them where there is massive corruption. The Government is supposed to have produced a procurement regime for governing all these 15 special purpose companies, and since 2004, five years now the Government has not produced this procurement regime. They have bypassed the Central Tenders Board, which was supposed to be the epitome of good transparency, and spending billions with these special purpose companies.

To satisfy the hon. Minister of Tourism, letters of comfort were signed for Tidco. He wants to defend Tidco; \$687 million. What are they doing with the money? Another is the public transport corporation; I have just read that they had guarantees of approximately \$300 million, another \$155 million. So, for PTSC, the Government has stood guarantees and letters of comfort for nearly \$500 million.

Nipdec—They have signed letters of comfort or contingent liabilities for Nipdec for \$615 million. I just read \$2.3 million for the Housing Development Corporation; another \$450 million for the Housing Development Corporation; BWIA West Indies Airways Limited, \$200 million; now Caribbean Airlines. Is this not the same airline that the Government spent almost \$1.5 billion to say that they are transforming it?

What have they transformed? The only transformation is to repaint the aircraft and put a number of colours or birds, balisier or something on to the wings. That is the transformation. That transformation process has cost the country \$1.5 billion, and where has it gone? They are supposed to be presenting to Parliament on a yearly basis, audited accounts. We have not seen any accounts of Caribbean Airlines for any period of time. They are spending people's money willy-nilly.

That is the same company and the same board of directors that wanted to assist the Prime Minister to buy his personal jet for approximately \$300 million. If the people and the Opposition did not speak very loudly, that would have been fait accompli. Urban Development Corporation (UDeCott), that is in the midst of

things that they cannot even produce their documents on time, and today Prof. Uff is asking where this money is being spent on UDeCott.

You know what is the guarantee for UDeCott under a letter of comfort? It is \$494 million. Is it surprising? And that is a company that is spending almost \$25 billion to \$30 billion of our money. Where do they get their money from? From this Government.

Taurus Services comes back again; \$188 million letter of comfort for Taurus Services. It is in this book. Trinidad and Tobago Airports Authority, \$310 million; Port Authority, another \$433 million. What a laughter, a shame and a national disgrace. The Auditor General is telling this Government, get real.

The Minister of Finance comes here to boast every day in Parliament that we are doing so well and our loans per GDP have improved considerably, but we owe \$40 billion in letters of comfort and guarantees for state enterprises to the tune of nearly \$20 billion. Twenty billion dollars for 35 state enterprises and 15 statutory authorities, and they cannot account for any expenditure at all to the people.

Mr. Speaker, on that alone this Government should resign. [*Desk thumping*] When President Obama speaks about that; he was telling his American people but we have been telling this Government that for years, that you have been spending the money wildly, recklessly; you have not been accounting to the population and there has been profligacy in the expenditure on a daily basis.

6.45 p.m.

This is what President Obama said—I took note of it because I wanted to give the analogy here today—in his opening speech:

"The success of our economy has always depended not just on the size of our Gross Domestic Product"—every day this Government boasts on their GDP, \$182 billion—"but on the reach of our prosperity; on our ability to extend opportunity to every willing heart—not out of charity, but because it is the surest route to our common good."

Not out of charity, not to CEPEP and the URP, not to boast about your GDP \$182 billion and not to boast about the per capita income of \$16,000 per person, but what about the 200,000 citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who earn less than \$3,000 per month? Sen. Danny Montano said so last year. What about the 95,000 persons above 65 years of age who cannot even afford to eke out a living now? What about the 77,000 persons who are receiving a pension, a meagre pension that they cannot live on?

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[DR. GOPEESINGH]

Friday, January 23, 2009

Mr. Speaker, what has this Government got to show for it?

Mr. Ramnath: What about the sugar workers they have—

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: The 10,000 sugar workers whose money has finished and over 100,000 persons have gone almost destitute as a result of you mashing up the sugar industry. Do you know what President Obama said?

"To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent..."

Are those not—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: He said that?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I am quoting from his—if you are Minister of Foreign Affairs and these are new words that you are hearing, I am sorry for you. You should have listened attentively [*Desk thumping*] as Minister of Foreign Affairs to what President Obama said and I quote: [*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: Parsanlal is Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh:

"Those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history..."

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you, Member for Caroni East for giving way. But since he—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Absolutely not.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: The Member for Caroni East quoted from President Obama and he was quick to say that the Minister of Foreign Affairs is unaware of the statements that he is making. I just want to continue on from the very same speech—because you are leaving—[*Interruption*]

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I will stop.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: No!

Mr. Speaker: No, no. One minute please, Minister. When you give way, you open yourself to—give her an opportunity. All I am saying is that having given way, you just cannot get up now and say—you cannot cancel it.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Member, I just want to continue from the very same speech and tell you that:

"What the cynics fail to understand is that the ground has shifted beneath them—that the stale political arguments that have consumed us for so long no longer apply." [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: The same political arguments. He is talking about the United States at this time. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, on that note, the speaking time of the honourable and distinguished Member for Caroni East has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am sure every time I stand to speak, they are afraid of the truth. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Come again.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I am sure that you remember he said:

"...those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history; but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist."

Are you willing to move away from your corruption, your deceit and your silence, your silence by not moving us away from the Freedom of Information Act, 10 companies; by your \$40 billion corruption which is not accountable for in the expenditure of these state enterprises? Are you willing to show the country where you have spent this money in your state enterprises?

Mr. Speaker, just some other points on this supplementary appropriation. I want to raise a few issues on "Advance from Contingencies Fund." The Caricom Development Fund: the sum of \$235 million was required to meet Trinidad and Tobago's contribution to the Caricom Development Fund according to the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, for the purpose of providing financial assistance or technical assistance to disadvantaged countries, regions and sectors.

My colleagues have indicated that we have had to pay almost 400 per cent more than Jamaica or Barbados under this Caricom Development Fund. We have no difficulty in giving money to our neighbours and giving assistance to our neighbours

but when we cannot even help ourselves and cannot help the people of Trinidad and Tobago, why are we engaging in something that we could have fought a battle to give less money. We will honour our commitment to the Treaty of Chaguaramas, but we do not need to give that amount of money—because who made that decision was, COFAP. C-O-F-A-P. Am I right or wrong? They made that decision and Trinidad was given that allocation of \$235 million for the Caricom Development Fund.

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to go back to last year, May 20, 2008, when this Government came to ask for more money under the Caricom Petroleum Fund of \$39 million. They said, in support of the well-planned infrastructure development programme of countries within the OECS, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago propose that a special window be opened for OECS countries in the Caricom Petroleum Fund, and this window was capitalized at \$6.4 million per month and you were asking us to give \$39 million. So I ask the question, here it is we are giving money under the Caricom Development Fund for financial and technology assistance to disadvantaged countries in the Caricom, and here it is another fund, the Caricom Petroleum Fund also giving money for the same thing. So it seems as though we are giving millions and millions of dollars to our neighbours in the Caricom through two separate funds. This Government has to explain why we have a Caricom Petroleum Fund, why we have a Caricom Development Fund and what is the nexus between one and the other. Because both seem to be giving grants to our Caricom neighbours and we do not know how much money has been contributed.

I have tried to do an estimation; it is more than \$400 million that has been given to our Caricom neighbours. This is why when the newspapers recently had that the St. Vincent Government was building an airport costing \$85 million with Trinidad and Tobago financing, we asked the question, is it a grant that we have given to the Government of St. Vincent for \$85 million to build their airport? Is it part of the pact that the hon. Prime Minister is speaking about, the federation of the four countries within Caricom? Is he giving a bribe to the St. Vincent Government of \$85 million and giving it to his partner, so that we can form a federation of these four countries?

Madam Deputy Speaker, there is another area I want to touch on, which is the question of Alutech. One hundred and nine million dollars was required to facilitate government's equity injection with respect to its 40 per cent shareholding in Alutech Limited. Alutech Limited is an integrated technical development centre, which will develop and pilot manufacturing processes at a

preindustrial scale for the production of aluminum downstream products, particularly like motor vehicles for the automotive industry.

We have Alutrint. This country does not know what percentage of shares the Trinidad and Tobago Government holds in Alutrint. I see under the PSIP of 2008, the Government owns 60 per cent of shares in Alutrint. Who are the other shareholders? We do not know. What is the total share capital of Alutrint? We do not know. Here it is now we are coming to talk about Alutech, another company that is manufacturing downstream products for motor vehicles, when the Ford Company of the United States has had to lay off thousands of workers because of the decreased demand for motor vehicles worldwide. A number of motor vehicle companies are losing money, and here it is Trinidad and Tobago is now deciding to go into a business venture to manufacture downstream products for motor vehicles. How ironic that could be. Has that been given any thought? But here it is you went into a company that you now have to spend \$109 million, and we do not know whether that represents the 40 per cent or this is just part of the 40 per cent.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am sorry the hon. Minister of National Security is not here, but I wanted him to explain and perhaps the Minister of Works and Transport might be able to explain this, the acquisition of six fast patrol craft. Am I to understand that the Australian and New Zealand bank for the acquisition of the six patrol craft, the company that is dealing which is called Austal? Information has come to us whether you all will want to clear it up. It is our understanding that there is a middleman person in Trinidad and Tobago, who is the brother of a former Minister of your Government, who is the link between the Austral company in the purchase of these six patrol craft.

Mr. Imbert: Will the Member give way? I thank the Member for giving way. I think I dealt with this before. There is no middleman; there is no agent; and there is no commission. Whatever you have been told, is untruth.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: We will bring the evidence to substantiate that. I am glad that you made a commitment that there is no middleman.

Mr. Imbert: No.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: You said that there is no middleman in the purchase of the offshore patrol vehicles (OPVs)—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Imbert: Yes.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—and you will say that there was no middleman in the purchase of the buses, and there was no middleman in the construction of all these street light programmes? That is why the chairman had to resign his position.

Hon. Member: Anything else?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: All right, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Dr. Moonilal: You cannot believe anything Imbert says, you know. Just cannot believe anything you say.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I want to come—I saw the area where I wanted to speak about the Caricom Petroleum Fund. On Friday, May 23, 2008—that is the minutes of a meeting—response to questions emanating from the Second Meeting of the Finance Committee of 2007/2008 Session of the House of Representatives:

Question to the hon. Minister of Finance by the Member for Caroni East:

How much money was spent under the Caricom Petroleum Fund? Response by the hon. Minister of Finance:

The total sums disbursed by way for warrants as of May 23, 2008, was \$416,386,906.

So you have to give an account to this nation. Caricom Petroleum Fund, you have spent \$416 million so far and then there is another \$39 million that you are asking for here.

So what is the real amount of money going to the Caricom Petroleum Fund, is it \$1 billion? How much money is going to the Caricom Development Fund? These are things that have to be answered by this Government.

7.00 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to go now to the Green Fund. This was set up as early as 2004, four years have elapsed since and this Government has not for one day indicated how it will spend this Green Fund money, whether it is going into the Consolidated Fund, what its value is and what is happening to that Green Fund.

We see that the balance of the Green Fund as at May 20 is \$1.3 billion and it is expected that it will be operationalized before the end of 2008. So you have \$1.3 billion in a Green Fund, you say it will be operationalized, but where is that money going? Is it in the separate account? Is it in the Consolidated Account? We do not know what you are doing with that money.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to come to another area; the cardiovascular and diabetic services which are to be undertaken in conjunction with the John Hopkins University are not yet operational, and with respect to the cardiovascular part of the project, the infrastructure has been put in place at the Eric Williams

Medical Sciences Complex which includes categorization laboratories and other associated works. Infrastructural works with respect to diabetic services are expected to start shortly.

Madam Deputy Speaker, \$355 million had been allocated under the 2007/2008 Supplementary Appropriation Fund which you all came to ask us to okay. This amount was for the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) which is managing the project. UTT has no medical skills because it is a technology university; in addition, you have gone on to give them \$20 million for a diabetic initiative programme, \$375 million to UTT and the project has not even started. So where has the \$375 million gone? To satisfy the ego of one man, the President of UTT. This is a national scam and a disgrace. To say that this Government has an arrangement with John Hopkins University which is supposed to be one of the premium medical institutions in the world, therefore Trinidad and Tobago is moving up the health sector because you are associated with premiere universities for medical science. But what are you doing with it?

You are training one doctor in angiography and a few technicians once per week for 48 weeks \$355 million; \$6 million per week because the training programme is a week while people are suffering for beds in the hospital; while mothers are delivering babies on benches and thousands of people are being infected with dengue and people are dying, and the Minister of Health says that there was no outbreak.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to quote from the *Newsday* under the editorial "Misleading report"

"A recent health ministry report confirms that Trinidad and Tobago did indeed have a dengue outbreak last year."

Do you remember the Minister of Health saying that there was no outbreak? But the recent health ministry report indicates.

"It is therefore clear, as citizens and this newspaper have been saying all along, that Health Minister Jerry Narace and Chief Medical Officer Dr. Anton Cumberbatch have misled the country about the disease."

There were over 5,000 cases of dengue in Trinidad and Tobago and for the Chief Medical Officer to tell this country that there were only six deaths in 2008, he should be ashamed and be fired immediately for misleading the population. That is why the Minister of Health could not answer the question.

In September we told you there were 11 deaths and people were dying regularly. They did not count those who died in the nursing homes, and the post

mortem reports do not have dengue as the cause of deaths, they have hemorrhagic fever, pneumonia, or viral illness. The Chief Medical Officer never thought about going to the nursing homes to do a surveillance, and my colleague, the Member for Diego Martin Central will understand what I am saying.

There are 10 major private institutions and people have died there and they have not taken that into consideration but trying to fool this country by saying there were only six deaths from dengue and there are thousands of cases.

Yesterday I called one of my colleagues from one of the laboratories and asked at an average how many people are tested for dengue at his laboratory which has international recognition. He said on a daily basis 50 persons are tested and about 10—15 of them are positive. So that means every day there are five positive cases; so for the month, 150 positives; and for the year 1,800 positives in one laboratory and he operates two laboratories. So that is 3,600 just for two laboratories in north Trinidad.

So thousands of people have been affected by dengue and scores have died and the Chief Medical Officer lies to this nation. I know him very well, he is one of my junior colleagues but he does not know anything about health care whatsoever. I had written to the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) because I brought this up in January last year and I mentioned to the DPP that by omission the Minister of Health is guilty and criminally liable for the death of all these people who have died from dengue. He failed to take it on and his comment was that is an easy thing to deal with. I cannot remember the words now—suck eye, those were the words the Minister of Health used.

He should have been working assiduously to ensure that the dengue outbreak should not have taken place in Trinidad and Tobago, and 11 months later he tries to show this country that he has an army of 1,100 people spraying. What help is that? Do you know what Costa Rica has done? There is an outbreak right now there and Costa Rica has deployed 20,000 soldiers to spray the country. But the Minister said we put \$6 million and there is a coordinating committee to look at it and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) today is telling him that their figures show that there were nine deaths already by September and there were over 3,000 cases when he was saying 2,000 cases.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we are spending \$350 million in what you call a cardiac initiative programme by UTT which has no role to play in medicine. The programme has not even started, where is the money going? Into whose pockets is the money going? Every day at the San Fernando General Hospital, there are 45—

50 persons waiting benches and I saw an article where a lady had to stay with dengue for three days on a stretcher. She was removed from a wheelchair and she thought she was going on a ward, but she was going from a wheelchair to a trolley.

Women are dying delivering babies. The perinatal mortality rate is skyrocketing, my God! What is happening to the health sector? This Government says it is doing something for diabetics. Do you know only those who are on insulin treatment receive kits for diabetes? There are nearly 100,000 persons in Trinidad and Tobago who are diabetic and need to have their blood sugar monitored and the number of persons who receive kits are about 5,000 and even they are finding it difficult to get.

You were supposed to build the Point Fortin Hospital, you have not done it; you were supposed to complete the Scarborough Hospital, you have not done it; you were supposed to build a Burns Unit and Intensive Care Unit at the San Fernando Hospital, you have not done it; you were supposed to build six district health facilities, you have not done it; not one. You were supposed to build an Oncology Centre, \$100 million was spent and grass is growing on the foundation; you were supposed to bring in a dialysis system in north and south, six years it has gone for tendering three times. There is massive corruption. You were supposed to be doing work at the Port of Spain General Hospital, St. Ann's Hospital and the St. James Radiotherapy Centre, nothing has happened to these institutions.

When your family and friends need medical treatment, do you feel comfortable that they can go into a hospital? Today I had a patient and the poor girl cannot afford to go for a private delivery and I said to her I will write a letter for her. She said, "Doctor I am afraid to go to the hospital, I do not want to go, one of my friends died in the hospital delivering."

Our maternal mortality rate in Trinidad and Tobago is 80 per 100,000 pregnancies; in developed countries it is less than 10 for 100,000, and for every death that takes place in a developed country there is a confidential enquiry into the cause. In Trinidad and Tobago people go in little sick but come out dead. Do we find out how why they died? A doctor went in recently and was crying. She called Dr. Rafeeq and asked him to help her because she needed to get out. Imagine that is happening to a doctor.

I think I have touched on a number of the issues that needed to be discussed, and when I raised the motion on the adjournment of urgent public importance on the yellow fever, we know that the yellow fever has been spreading from monkey to monkey by the common vector which is one of the strains of the *Aedes Aegypti*

mosquito and that same strain infects humans. But this Government has not embarked on anything to educate the population in any massive way about the potential issue of yellow fever. It should have massive programmes of education to have the population immunized.

This morning I made a call to a number of health centres throughout Trinidad and Tobago to see whether they had the vaccine for dengue. Barataria Health Centre ran out, check back on Monday; Biche, which is near to the forest where the monkeys were found dead, ran out, getting next week; Manzanilla, out of stock, should get next week; Maloney, out of stock, getting next week; and I could go on and on. Health centres which are supposed to be having the vaccine for yellow fever do not have it. Louis Homer wrote in the *Daily Express* today because he did work on it.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the last point I want to make is what the Prime Minister referred to this afternoon in terms of the \$500 million plus for hosting the Summit of the Americas and the Commonwealth Heads of Government. The Prime Minister spoke about almost every issue under it, the goals and what Trinidad and Tobago stands to benefit and said they are going to be ready.

7.15 p.m.

How is Trinidad and Tobago going to benefit? Let us talk about the costing. You are bringing in thousands of people here. Where are you going to house them? We understand that you are going to house them in some of the cruise ships. Have you tendered for these cruise ships? Which of the cruise ships are going to be coming in? How are the people of Trinidad and Tobago going to benefit when these cruise ships come in? Whose products are they going to be using? Has Trinidad and Tobago decided to form a joint venture with the cruise ship companies so that farmers, and so on, can sell some of their produce to the people on the cruise ships? What of the people who do the hotel tours and the tour operators? Have they become involved in it? Are they going to benefit from it?

What is the Tourism Development Authority doing about making sure that the sites for tourism are ready so that you can take these people at tourist sites when the tourists come? Are there any cultural events that are arranged for when these tourists come into Trinidad and Tobago? Are you in a state of readiness?

I asked about the ambassador for this. Who is dealing with the secretariat? We understand that he is having tremendous difficulties with the people around, or they are having tremendous difficulties with him. People are leaving the secretariat. We understand that one of the issues under the energy sector that this

secretariat has put forward to the Summit of the Americas, is not in keeping with what Venezuela wants and Venezuela is giving some difficulty in the whole issue about agreeing to the proposal on the energy sector.

You have lots of questions to answer. So even though the Prime Minister has come today to placate the country that everything is going well with the Summit of the Americas and the Commonwealth Heads of Government, we know for a fact that it is not so. The country is not ready; it is far from being ready and he cannot fool this population for any length of time.

I want to indicate in closing, that this Government must not be ungrateful to the trust that the people have bestowed upon you and you must not be unmindful of the sacrifices that yours and our ancestors have made. With your wild and reckless, unaccounted for, non-transparent and non-accountable spending, which complete lack of probity, you have a lot to account for to the population. Profligate spending of our people's hard-earned money from their sweat, toil and labour cannot continue. That is to be abhorred with the most serious condemnation. Gathering clouds are hovering over us and the prospect of raging poverty is like a storm. And as a government, you seem to lack the skill and vision to harbor the prosperity that the people of Trinidad and Tobago deserve.

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

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Deputy Speaker, I promise I will not take up all the time available to me. Every time I hear the Member for Caroni East speak, I recognize that our continuing education programmes are not working and I will have to urge the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education to redouble her efforts in the field of remedial education, particularly for adults and with special emphasis on adult literacy programmes. Because you see—and you could say what you want, you know. I am continuously reminded of this every time the Member for Caroni East speaks and I will now prove it.

In a previous sitting, the Member for Caroni East made heavy weather of a bulletin issued by Mr. Wieger Koornstra, chief executive officer of the Port of Port of Spain. I happen to have a copy of the bulletin in front of me. The Member for Caroni East ranted and raved about the alleged shutdown of the Port of Port of Spain for a two-week period for the Summit of the Americas, and made appropriate arrangements with friends of his in the media—he was reading from a prepared text and it is obvious that he had given it to them, because all of his fulminations and all of his inaccuracies, and all of his grandstanding, appeared on

the Sunday papers, front page: Set up! You can look at the names—Balroop and Mohammed—and draw the link.

But let me read the bulletin to show you why we have a need for adult education programmes in this country. This is Mr. Koornstra, and this is a bulletin sent to stakeholders; port users; importers, exporters, et cetera:

“From April 9-22 2009, the Port will have limited use of the quay since this space will be used to accommodate additional conference and hotel requirements via the berthing of two cruise ships.

It is important that Port users note, that we will be unable to handle any General Cargo, Paper or Car Vessels for the period April 09-22, 2009.”

Now, the Member for Caroni East purported to act on behalf of port users, as I said; businessmen, importers, exporters and so on, in bringing his inaccuracies into this Parliament, but this is where the adult literacy comes in. Firstly, Mr. Koornstra says “the port will have limited use of the quay”. Now, when I went to school, the word “limited” and the words “closure” and “shutdown” were not synonyms. But, clearly, in the vocabulary of the Member for Caroni East, when you say you will have limited use of something, in his world, it means you will have no use.

Secondly, it is well known and it would be known to anyone who has an inkling of knowledge of the Port of Port of Spain—a modicum of knowledge—that the cargo that is associated with general cargo: paper and car vessels, is less than 10 per cent of the throughput of the port. So when Mr. Koornstra said that during a particular period we would have limited use of our quay because there will be cruise ships there and as a result we would not be able to handle general cargo, paper and car vessels, the port users who got this bulletin and I am certain the Member for Caroni East, unless he does need adult education, would know this, that a general cargo vessel has one call at the port of Port of Spain every 12 days and there is one car vessel per week.

The cruise ships will actually be at the quayside during the period 13th to 20th of April. So they will be at the quayside for seven days. During that period there may not even be a visit of a general cargo vessel, because the general cargo vessels come every 12 days and 12 is more than seven, and a car vessel comes once a week and a week is seven days.

So, therefore, anybody who had an inkling of knowledge of port operations—and I am certain the Member for Caroni East has an inkling of knowledge of port operations—would know that for the seven-day period—and the bulletin makes

no reference whatsoever to containerized cargo. And for the benefit of the Member for Caroni East, the Port of Port of Spain became a containerized port about 35 years ago. Maybe the Member for Caroni East is stuck in the ancient past when all of the cargo at Port of Spain was bulk cargo and had to be handled using manual labour. There were no cranes; there was no portainer; there was no gantry equipment; there were no containerized operations whatsoever. Maybe he is living in the 1950s. But in 2009, we have something called containerized operations at the Port of Port of Spain. If you go down and look, it is the big thing that comes out and it comes down and it picks up a box. It is called a container. Anybody who has any association with the port whatsoever will know that more than 90 per cent of the cargo throughput at the port of Port of Spain is containerized cargo, as is the case in all modern ports all over the world.

I remember when I was studying in England in 1981, 27 years ago and one of the courses I had to do was port engineering and one of the papers I had to examine was the demise of bulk cargo and the growth of containerized cargo all over the world—27 years ago! The Member for Caroni East cannot convince me and cannot convince this Parliament, that he does not know that the Port of Port of Spain is a containerized port. Therefore, that is why I am concerned about the adult literacy programmes in this country. One cargo vessel; one vessel carrying cars in the seven-day period, representing maybe 20 per cent of the cargo that will go through the port during that seven-day period, but he has interpreted this bulletin to say a two-week shutdown of the Port of Port of Spain. Even my 16 year-old son would do a better job at comprehension of that bulletin.

I am ashamed for him; I am ashamed. Terrible! Awful! I do not know what they are doing in that United National Congress. What is going on over there? Infighting and back-stabbing, is all you could do? It is just awful!

But you see, I know what the Member for Caroni East's problem is, you know. He is extremely narcissistic. In Trinidadian terms, he is a "gallery man". So he does not care what the facts are; he does not care what the truth is; he does not care that the bulletin does not speak to containerized cargo and that no one spoke of a shutdown of the port. Even the words in it speak about limited use of the quay and indicate that no general cargo could be handled at the port during the period the cruise ships were there. He does not care about that; that the English meaning of the words in that bulletin are crystal clear. He wants to make papers! He operates on the basis that no press is bad press. It does not matter if you are not speaking the truth; it does not matter if what you are saying is nonsense. As long as you make the papers! That is all he is interested in. A gallery man! And

TV6; do not forget TV6! An unrepentant purveyor of scandal and untruths. That is the Member for Caroni East; unrepentant, gallery man! I am just ashamed.

So that puts paid to this bogus story that there is a bulletin saying that the port will be shut down for two weeks. Nothing could be further from the truth. It was never so; it is not so now and it will not be so in the future. The other things that bother me with the Member for Caroni East is his penchant [*Interruption*]; his tendency; his fondness—I am grateful to you, Member for Couva North; I know that you are a master of the English language.

Mr. B. Panday: You are too kind.

Hon. C. Imbert: You need to tutor the Member for Caroni East.

7.30 p.m.

The other thing that is worrisome about the Member for Caroni East is this tendency to “buss a mark” every Friday, just like his namesake in the other place; always saying things that bear no resemblance to the truth.

The Minister of National Security has come into this Parliament time and again and explained the procurement process for the offshore patrol vessels. Time and again it has been referred to in budget speeches and in statements, but “stick break in his ears”. Even today, the Minister of National Security had to give him, for yet another time—it must be the third time that I have seen the Minister give the Member a statement about the circumstances that surround the procurement of the offshore patrol vessels and he still wants to “buss a mark”. Hopefully, for the last time, let me state the facts.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago decided, in 2006, to organize the procurement of three offshore vessels through a government-to-government arrangement—not a strictly commercial arrangement—an agreement between this Government and the government of another country. Subsequently, the request for proposals was issued to a number of governments. Those that indicated interest were the governments of the United Kingdom, Italy, Sweden and Germany. One of the reasons we decided to go with a government-to-government arrangement was that we wanted a form of guarantee of the performance of the contractors from the host government.

In other words, not only will we be entering a commercial arrangement with the contractor for the supply of the vessels, but we wanted the government from the host country, where the shipyard was located, to guarantee the performance of that manufacturer. We felt that, in going that way, we would protect the interests of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

After an exhaustive process of evaluation of proposals, some governments dropped out. The government of Germany, for example, dropped out along the way because it indicated that it was not willing to give that level of guarantee for the manufacturer of the vessels. Eventually, it came down to two. The government of Sweden dropped out as well because it indicated that it was not capable of complying with the specifications contained with the request for proposals. It boiled down to two—the government of the UK and the government of Italy. All of this has been widely disseminated in the public domain. The Member for Caroni East knows it.

Nobody made a deal with anybody. It is an agreement between this Government and another sovereign government, at the highest level; between the Ministers in this Government and the counterparts in the other government. In fact, with the United Kingdom government, the Minister of Defence is the counterpart who has oversight responsibility for the process.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Will the Minister give way?

Hon. C. Imbert: No, I will not. After an exhaustive process—[*Interruption*] I will answer you in due course. Keep quiet!

Dr. Gopeesingh: I stand on a point of order.

Hon. C. Imbert: What is it?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Madam Deputy Speaker, the Minister is being extremely rude. He is telling me to shut up. Who is he? I have an equal right to be here and to speak as much as I want to speak. He dare not tell me shut up. If he goes outside, I would deal with him; but he is not outside.

Hon. C. Imbert: Are you threatening me?

Dr. Gopeesingh: I am threatening you.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, this is not the place for us to indicate we are threatening anybody. I also say to the Member for Diego Martin North/East, you have said to the Member, “Be quiet”. Let us use much more parliamentary language, please.

Hon. C. Imbert: Certainly, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I was not aware that “Be quiet” was unparliamentary.

Through you, Madam Deputy Speaker, Member for Caroni East, will you cease and desist from interrupting me; if “be quiet” is unparliamentary?

Madam Deputy Speaker, the fact is, after an exhaustive process where the evaluation committee examined the price of the vessels, the technical specifications, the training plan, the maintenance support, the level of guarantee and so on, the government of the United Kingdom emerged the winner; after consideration of all of the factors.

As a result, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago accepted the recommendations of the evaluation committee and proceeded to enter into a government-to-government arrangement with the government of the United Kingdom. The agreement with that government has a number of features. *[Interruption]* Madam Deputy Speaker, there is some sort of commentary.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, I suggest to those who would like to have a discussion that there is sufficient room outside the precincts of the Chamber to do so.

Mr. Ramnath: Is there any dinner?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Yes. I have been so advised. Please listen to the very important contribution of the Minister of Works and Transport.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Member for Caroni East can give, but he cannot take.

Let me just outline, for the umpteenth time, the contractual arrangements between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the government of the United Kingdom. There are six contractual documents. The first one is a head contract executed among the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the government of the United Kingdom and VT Shipbuilding International. This head contract draws together three other contracts associated with the design, construction and supply of the three offshore patrol vessels for use by Trinidad and Tobago.

The three subcontracts are as follows:

- a government contract executed between the Secretary of State for Defence of the government of the United Kingdom and the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago;

I know they do not want hear, but I will educate them.

- a shipbuilding contract between the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the shipbuilder VT International;
- an interim facility contract between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and VT Shipbuilding International;

and all this has been put into this Parliament time and again ad nauseam.

It is very difficult to deal with the Members opposite. The Member for Couva South does not want to hear and the Member for Caroni East is asking the same question over and over.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Can the Minister explain why the Italian government was removed from the tendering process and did Members of this Government only visit the British shipyards?

Hon. C. Imbert: It is tedious and tiresome having to listen to these inaccuracies. I said that there were four governments. Two could not provide the level of guarantees and two submitted tenders. Nobody dropped out. The Italians bid. I said that at least seven times. [*Interruption*]

For the last time, two tenderers submitted bids—the United Kingdom and the Italians—and after consideration of all the factors: price, technical specifications, maintenance support, training, level of government guarantee and so on, the United Kingdom government was deemed to be the best proposal.

Let me move on to the fast patrol craft because the Member for Caroni East continues to make these scandalous allegations about deals and agents. With respect to the fast patrol craft—again this has been ventilated in the public domain—the tenders committee comprised military experts, members of the coast guard and public servants from the Ministry of Finance; it was a broad-based evaluation committee. There was a foreign procurement expert and people in the maritime field. That is the way the fast patrol craft was done as well.

With respect to the fast patrol craft, the Member for Caroni East again made some spurious allegations—just wanted to make papers again; “gallery man” again—alleged falsely and mischievously that there is a middle man associated with the purchase of the fast patrol craft and connected to a former Minister. Did I get your innuendo right? Have I left out anything?

These are the facts as opposed to the rumour and “mauvais langue” from the Member for Caroni East. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago issued a request for proposals on March 09, 2007 and received proposals on April 20, 2007. A number of manufacturers of fast patrol craft bid from Australia, Israel and Europe and, once again, after consideration of all the factors, price, technical specifications, performance, maintenance support, training plan and contractual terms of guarantees, once again a broad-based evaluation committee, comprising a foreign military expert, local experts from the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard,

personnel from the Ministry of Finance and other public servants, a broad-based evaluation committee, examined all the tenders and the bid from Austal from Australia emerged as the best. *[Interruption]* They won the bid. Foolishness!

Once again, the Member for Caroni East is spreading rumours and mischief and talking about things of which he knows nothing. The negotiation team with Austal of Australia has the same composition: personnel from the Ministry of Finance, attorneys and military experts. The same team is negotiating with Austal PTY of Australia, one of the most prominent and well-known fast patrol manufacturers in the world.

7.45 p.m.

One of the problems of the Member for Caroni East is that he comes into this Parliament and he makes statements about matters of which he knows nothing. For example, one of the statements that he made is that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago should have a lower oil price in fiscal 2008 and then we would have saved more. Nonsense, we have saved over \$12 billion in 2008. Hon. Minister of Finance, how much did we save?

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: "\$11.something".

Hon. C. Imbert: We had a surplus of a further \$2 billion. If you count the surplus, in terms of income and expenditure, our expenditure was lower than our income by about \$14 billion. You want more than that? We have savings of \$14 billion in fiscal 2008. To tell you how the Member for Caroni East does not understand what he is talking about, when it comes to matters of economics, he is an infant. He is an intellectual infant. *[Interruption]*

Dr. Gopeesingh: He is imputing improper motives again.

Hon. C. Imbert: I am now on my feet, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am now on my feet. Member for Caroni East, I do not think that reference is imputing improper motives, but be sure if the hon. Member says anything I am listening very carefully.

Hon. C. Imbert: That is what I am talking about; the need for adult education. All I am saying is that that you lack intelligence. You are an intellectual infant. I am not imputing any improper motives. The Member for Caroni East has a problem with vocabulary and comprehension. As I said, a student doing SEA would understand. *[Interruption]* I am not saying anything about you. Calm yourself, I do not intend to.

The Member opposite has made the point that the Government spent \$52 billion in fiscal 2008. That is what they keep saying. The fact of the matter is that we have spent about \$40 billion and we have saved \$12 billion. When you add the surplus, it takes you to over \$14 billion. We have spent \$40 billion and we have saved \$12 billion. When you save money and put it into an account, it is not expenditure, but for the purpose of accounting we have to appropriate it. That is why I am saying that we need remedial education in this Parliament. In order to save the money, you have to appropriate. That is why we are coming to this Parliament to appropriate an additional \$1 billion in order to close the accounts. That additional \$12 billion had to be appropriated by an Appropriation Bill. If we use his argument that we should have put a lower oil price and we would have saved more, the total figure would have remained the same. If we had spent \$38 billion, we would have saved \$14 billion. It is the same \$52 billion. We have to appropriate all the income that we have earned. That deals with the point made by the Member for Couva North.

At the beginning of the year, there are projections of revenue and expenditure based on models. In our case, I think we used an 11-year moving average produced by the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, looking at oil prices to get a sense of what price we should peg our projected revenues at and you start off the year based on a projection. In 2008, oil prices peaked at values that were unprecedented. Therefore, we cannot throw away these revenues, we have to appropriate them. That is why we came to Parliament on more than one occasion in fiscal 2008 to appropriate the windfall that we were getting from high commodity prices, so that we could put it in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. If we did not come to the Parliament to appropriate that extra revenue and put it into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, then that money would have been lost and that would have been irresponsible. It would have gone to the Central Bank and then we would end up in the same problem; if you want to draw down on that money you would enter into deficit financing.

The Member for Caroni East just does not understand. You have to appropriate the income that you have earned and if, during the fiscal year, circumstances change—look at this year for example, we have pegged the—*[Interruption]*

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Deputy Speaker, I will interrupt my presentation to move a Procedural Motion in accordance with Standing Order 10, that we continue to meet until the end of the matter that we are discussing.

Question put and agreed to.

**FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT
(ADOPTION)**

Hon. C. Imbert: It is very tiresome. I know the Member for St. Augustine, welcome back by the way, is understanding what I am saying. As you earn more income during the year, because your revenues are higher than you expected, you have to appropriate the additional income, otherwise you cannot access it. He knows that. "Tell dem. Educate dem. Hole a school nah." Have some classes in the afternoon and explain to the Member for Caroni East why we have to come and do supplementary appropriation, because he does not understand. Talk to him in the caucus and educate him.

Also, I would appeal to the Member for St. Augustine to explain to the Member for Caroni East that our debt to GDP ratio is extremely healthy. I am amazed to hear the Member for Caroni East talk about the debt profile of Trinidad and Tobago, when time and again persons on this side have come to this House and explained the world scenario, as it relates to debt to GDP. Of all the countries of the world, Trinidad and Tobago has one of the best debt profiles in the world, whether it is developing or developed countries. There are a few developed countries in the world that have our debt to GDP ratio.

Look at our foreign debt. Our foreign debt is just about TT \$12 billion. We have \$18 billion in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. If we wanted to, in one fell swoop, we could pay off our entire foreign debt out of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and still have \$6 billion remaining. There are few countries in the world, probably none, that could pay off their entire foreign debt just like that. Trinidad and Tobago has probably got to be—there may be some Arab countries that could do it. There are a few countries in the world that could pay off its foreign debt from its savings in just one go, but we can do that. Our debt to GDP ratio/debt service ratio, which is the ratio of debt to export earnings—go and ask the Member for St. Augustine what debt service ratio means. Our debt service ratio and our debt to GDP ratio is one of the lowest in the world and, therefore, it is ludicrous for Members opposite to keep harping on issues of Trinidad and Tobago's debt. Go and find something else to talk about. You are just making a fool of yourself, because any first year economics student listening to you would come to the inevitable conclusion that you are in need of remedial education. *[Interruption]* Stick break in his ears. If you look at our total debt of \$40 billion and take our GDP, our debt to GDP ratio is about 25 per cent. There are few countries in the world that have a debt to GDP ratio of 25 per cent. It is nothing, compared to our GDP. "Go an do ah economics course nah."

Dr. Gopeesingh: I did two already.

Hon. C. Imbert: Well, you obviously did not do well. Somebody wrote the exams for you.

The other thing is when the Member cannot understand that the reason we have to have cruise ships for the Summit is because every single hotel room, every available room in a guest house and every available room for rental in a private home is going to be occupied during the Summit of the Americas. Can you not understand that? Because every single hotel, guest house and private home would be full of people and they would overflow, we have to have rental of cruise ships. Think about it, we would have 100 per cent capacity of every single hotel room and guest house in this country.

The Member for Caroni East is questioning the benefits to this country that the Summit will bring? Every single room in this country will be occupied. Every single taxi driver, every single tour operator; all of them will be focused on providing for the 4,000 to 5,000 visitors we expect to come into this country and yet the Member cannot do this simple Mathematics. He cannot understand that the reason we are renting the cruise ships is because the entire capacity of the country will be taken up with dealing with this unprecedented number of visitors coming in. He cannot understand that. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Ramnath: What is the price?

Hon. C. Imbert: I do not have the information. I know they are going to pay. It is not free.

Let me deal with the matter at hand, before I take my seat. We are here today to deal with supplementary appropriations for the Ministry of Finance, in terms of pensions and gratuities; the Ministry of National Security; the Ministry of Public Administration; and the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries. The Member for Couva North made heavy weather of write off of loans to students and write off of loans to vendors at Maracas Beach and a song and a dance about how this Government is incapable of managing, how we cannot collect the money and all that sort of thing. What are the facts?

Let us look at the write off of accountable advances. The notes of the Finance Committee are crystal clear. When you go to page 18 of the Finance Committee meeting document and you see write offs of amounts owed and accountable advances, \$2 million, you see that those accountable advances were issued to officers travelling abroad on government business to cover their official expenses.

These officers were required, within seven days of return, to provide the bills and proof of expenditure. If they could not do so, they were required to pay back the money that they had received. The system did not work. People came back but they lost their bills. And for one reason or another, they were unable to account for the money that they were given, so they ran up huge arrears. The UNC government, under whom these arrears were accumulated, not the PNM, introduced a new system of per diem allowances in April 1999. It was the government of the Member for Couva North that was tardy and incompetent, in terms of managing these accountable advances because this dates back to 1999. The PNM was not in government in 1999. The Member for Couva North was running the country in 1999. I cannot stand here and listen to this manipulation of the truth. This problem was caused by the administration of the UNC. It stands to us now to come and clean it up; this mess that was created in 1999.

When you go through everything—students cess loans, under the PNM, education was free. It was the government of the NAR, of which the Member for Couva North was a part, and a big part too, that introduced cess for university students. Students were so oppressed by the introduction of fees and a cess, they had to get loans. The oppressive government of the NAR introduced fees for university education and called it a cess and persons had to go and get a loan. It was so onerous, the whole system could not work. Arising from that decision of the NAR government in 1989, a number of students found themselves in arrears and it now falls to us to clean up the mess that was created by the Government of which the Member for Couva North was a part in 1989. That is what this is all about.

8.00 p.m.

It was your fault. If you did not join with them there would have been no NAR Government. The fact of the matter is that the mess in the accountable advances was created under the UNC; the mess in the students cess loans was created under the NAR.

When one goes through and one looks at the vendors at the Tent City Mall, et cetera, they date back to 1999, 2000 and 2001. These are the dates where all these bad debts were formed; these are the dates where the accounts were mismanaged. It was under the administration of the UNC that all these problems came into the public accounts, and I have to sit in this Parliament and listen to them tell us that their mess is our responsibility.

You see, I cannot stand this hypocrisy. I cannot stand it! The Member for Couva North presided over general incompetence and mismanagement, and we have come here today to clean up his mess and he is blaming us.

With these few words, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Kelvin Ramnath (*Couva South*): I would normally allow Members to return to their homes safely, having regard to the high level of crime in the country and the lack of proper security, but having listened to the Member for Diego Martin North/East, I could not allow the public to be deprived of another view and, particularly, his vitriolic and unwarranted attack on the Member for Caroni East, who demonstrated that he had excellent knowledge of the facts.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this indignance of righteous Member for Diego Martin North/East, who like his colleagues before him who have left the Front Benches, is destined either for the garbage heap of politics or for the Back Bench. The Back Bench here means the Back Bench behind the back benchers. I just want to advise him that he should show a lot more respect for his colleagues, but his colonial background does not permit him to have any respect for people who do not share his oppressive views. [*Desk thumping*] I know that my friends opposite recognize that.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Every turn and every opportunity available, the Member for Diego Martin North/East seeks to give the impression that he represents the Prime Minister. [*Laughter*] In fact, I am certain what Members opposite are being made to feel is that there should be only two speakers on the other side; the Prime Minister and the Member for Diego Martin North/East, and their only role is to vote for Bills and Motions that support the Government.

I think I am going to dismiss him at this stage and simply seek to advise him that when Members of the Opposition raise certain issues, we have a right to do so as Members of the House, and we have a right to represent our constituencies. Perhaps, it is going to do him well if he spends some time learning how to become polite. There are many things that could be said about his ability to mismanage.

There are many things that could be said about his ability to mismanage; there are many things that could be said about corruption in his ministry. I recall his ministry having given a contract to pave the runway at the Piarco Airport which turned out to be a scrubbing board and caused the Piarco Airport to be downgraded, and his ministry contracted the same contractor to tarmac the runway of the Piarco Airport. The list of his incompetence is so long that we would not spend time dealing with it.

At the moment, he is building a bridge from the Churchill Roosevelt Highway to the Princess Margaret Highway. He calls it an interchange, but it is a bridge

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that he is building. I am absolutely certain that a lot of money has gone into that project which will far exceed the original estimates. The Member has no history of success as a Minister.

The roads in this country are in a deplorable condition, and traffic jams are the order of the day. People who are coming from the South and East into Port of Spain have to spend two and three hours on the highways. He has the audacity to come here and behave as a political virgin. Such hypocrisy is unmatched and unknown in the history of parliamentary debates in this country.

There is a litany of woes but, most of all, the people of his constituency in Maraval have indicated very vociferously that they have no faith in him and that he has become incompetent. He does not represent his constituency, but spends his time being arrogant in the House of Representatives.

I want the people of Maraval to know that they wasted their votes when they voted for the Member for Diego Martin North/East. [*Desk thumping*] I have evidence. I looked at the national television and I saw the plight of the people who live in Maraval and other parts of his constituency. They have recognized that he is the worst representative that they ever had since they voted for the PNM in 1956.

So, the Member wants to lecture to an eminent former lecturer of the University of the West Indies (UWI)—a scholar and a man who is held in the highest esteem in the metropolitan countries as one of the most competent consultants in medicine—and describe him as illiterate and someone requiring remedial training. I do not want to tell the Member what his professors at UWI had to say about him including his father. I would not reduce myself to his level to get into that kind of discussion. [*Interruption*] The Member for Oropouche East is making a very valid comment which I shall not engage in at this time. I want to let the Member for Diego Martin North/East know that there are Ministers who are capable of defending themselves.

The hon. Minister of National Security came here and spent a long time responding to comments coming from the Opposition with respect to management of the police service and the management of national security. I am quite sure that he is capable of responding at any time; not that he will convince the country that he is doing a good job, but he is using parliamentary opportunity to explain his position.

I just want to tell the Minister of National Security that we know and we have participated in reaching the point where the Commissioner of Police is responsible for managing the police service. We were involved in discussions at a very high level with the Prime Minister and the Minister in seeking a solution.

There were no political benefits for the UNC, but it was a matter of working with the Government on a high-powered committee to try to resolve problems which were militating against the efficient performance of the duties of the police.

I recall that after we had done all of that and the Police Service Commission selected a candidate for the Commissioner of Police, the Government used its powers to appoint someone who was part of the problem, and had his tenure extended.

Do you know what is interesting? I have been working with the police in the Couva area. I have been meeting with them and trying to get the community to work with the police and so on. I want to confirm that one of the biggest drawbacks has been the issue of motor vehicles.

The assistant superintendent of police in the Couva area will tell you that he had to go to Freeport and Flanagin Town in order to get policemen, many of whom do not report for duty on a regular basis, and to get vehicles in order to patrol the areas. People were simply asking for patrols. They feel comfortable to know that a police vehicle is patrolling the area, and that has not been possible, even with the 600 vehicles. Perhaps you should find out—it is your duty to do so—and report to the House where these vehicles are parked most of the times, and why absenteeism is so high in the police service. That is a major deterrent to the efficacious delivery of the police service.

About four months ago, Assistant Superintendent Premchand Ramdath came to Couva. I met him and invited him to my office and asked him how we could help. Mr. Speaker, in a period of about five months, more than 500 arrests were made during the tenure of Mr. Ramdath, but he was transferred and sent to Port of Spain as a form of punishment. *[Interruption]* Mr. Ramdath was involved in activities arresting people who should not have been arrested in the eyes of certain senior police officials, and they sent him off. He lives at Tableland. They have to punish him so he has to drive now from Tableland to Belmont or Woodbrook. Do you know what his crime was? He told the communities at Basta Hall, Esperanza and Dow Village that we have a problem with transportation; we have a problem with discipline in the police service. These are the issues that people are raising. The constituents of Couva South were asking Assistant Superintendent Ramdath why police vehicles are parked in front of bars and rum shops and why they are in supermarkets when they should be on the road policing the communities, and because he was decent enough to say to them that they are trying to do something about it in the police service, because he knows what they are saying is the truth, the Commissioner of Police called him to his office and gave him a letter of transfer. I do not want to go into what I was told the discussions were all about.

8.15 p.m.

But clearly, if you are interested in dealing with this issue of security of the people and properties of Government and people, you cannot behave like that. I just want the Minister who spoke today and expressed his concerns for national security and so on, while he was talking about the fast boats, in his absence, you had the Member for Diego Martin North/East who had nothing to say; repeating exactly what the hon. Minister said, which is his normal way of doing things. He has nothing to contribute; he is now a dinosaur of politics, and clearly has to regurgitate and repeat what others are saying. At least the Senator had some support, not necessarily requested by himself, but the point is made that there are problems and that we have to do something about these problems.

I am not going to question whether or not these fast patrol boats are going to work, and so on. One thing I can tell you and I am sure the Government is aware, that we have to clean up the police and the security services in this country. Giuliani did not achieve what was achieved in New York City by talking. In fact, they introduced such measures as having on the subway, police with machine guns, in order to protect the citizens. They cleaned up the subway; they cleaned up public transportation; they went after the mafia elements in the society, so much so that New York is now a safe place, and I was told that their murder rate is lower than Trinidad; that a city with 15 million people has a lower murder rate than a country with 1.3 million people.

It would not help this country for Ministers to come here and boast about debt to GDP and debt to whatever it is and ratios, earnings. That is the prerogative of Lehman Brothers, Bear Sterns and AIG. They had the best expert in the world. One of them was President Bush's treasury secretary, and with all the vast knowledge available to them, the economy began to collapse. I hope that all of this regurgitation of what a person has been saying in the United States does not signal that this economy is about to collapse.

What is clear is that the Government is not taking responsibility; they are just talking; we saved so many billions of dollars. The truth is you could not have spent it. You do not even have the capacity to spend. [*Desk thumping*] What you are spending is what you are wasting. There are people in this country that do not have a meal to eat. Go to Tamarind Square and see the legacy of the PNM. The people who you brought from all over the Caribbean and who voted for you are now languishing next to the Cathedral of Immaculate Conception as vagrants, and if you could do that to your very own, God forbid what you would do to others who do not support you.

Mr. Imbert: That is a racist comment.

Mr. K. Ramnath: He said that is a racist comment. That is what his forefathers practiced when they were in charge of the colonies.

Let me turn to the oil industry for a minute. I listened here today; I really did not want to speak; I wanted to give an opportunity to my colleagues to speak before me, but I listened about the earnings of the petroleum industry; I listened to Alutech, and I listened to statements that they have not really studied and understood the implications of.

Petrotrin is offering for lease and/or sale its most prolific producing field called Trinmar. Trinmar produces 33,000 barrels of oil per day. It is perhaps the largest producing field in the island, having regard to the depletion of east coast reservoirs. Trinmar is capable of producing more than 50,000 barrels of oil a day. It has been neglected; it has been ignored, with a Government that has this great ratio of debt to GDP and debt to debt and so on. It is more debt to debt of Trinmar.

Member for Point Fortin, are you aware of that?

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: I am very much aware, but as far as I know it is not up for sale or lease or so. As far as I know the Government is looking for a partner. A statement was made in the press by the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries on this. You seem to have plenty information, you talk to people like Steve Baldeosingh and so on, you know the answer to this, you know the truth.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I facilitated you so that you would educate your colleagues. If you are looking for a partner you are either thinking about a joint venture arrangement, you are thinking about a sale or you are thinking about a lease. Whatever the reason, your Government is about to kill the goose that laid the golden egg.

Since you are not aware and since you are not known in Point Fortin, prior to your election as the Member for Point Fortin after you conspired to get rid of Mr. Achong, who got all his party groups to vote for him except one, I wanted to spend some time telling you a little about what is happening there.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: You want my address in Point Fortin?

Mr. K. Ramnath: It is all right, we have addresses all over the place. [*Laughter*] Mr. Speaker, the platforms and the producing fields were left to deteriorate to the extent that the auditors—the people who audit on behalf of those people who lend us money—came into Trinmar and their report was devastating. It had to do with the extent of neglect by the management that your Government appointed. The board that your Government appointed.

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This group of auditors, two years later, came back and discovered that nothing was done. In fact, the issue of safety of the plant and workers was raised as a major issue; the company failed to attend to these issues. As a result, platforms were closed down and a 30,000 barrel-a-day producing field, lost over 20,000 barrels one time, because your PNM administration at Petrotrin neglected what had to be done; what was identified. Since you do not know anything about the workers in Trinmar, you have no connection with them, I would not waste time looking in your direction.

It tells you something; that a Minister of Foreign Affairs and a senior Minister of the Government who represents Point Fortin does not know anything and wants to argue with me. I spent 34 years in the oil industry. I worked in every aspect of the oil industry. I could tell you that when they abandoned the producing fields, they did not believe that oil prices would have gone down from \$147 a barrel to \$40 as it exists today, because all they are concerned with is debt to GDP and debt to earnings, and a set of accounting relationships, which makes it look good to the unintuitive.

The reality that faces them today is that they would have to lay-off a substantial number of employees from Trinmar. Some of them, I am not too sympathetic with because they probably voted for the Member for Point Fortin, [Laughter] but I understand their plight. One of the most neglected constituencies in the whole of Trinidad and Tobago is Point Fortin. [Desk thumping]

I have no say as to how people vote; they will do it at their own peril or they will do it at their own benefit. But the Minister, the deputy to Sen. Mariano Browne, came here and gave us a long speech about the success and the moneys they gain from oil prices and she indicated the various—

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: Not she.

Mr. K. Ramnath: He then? "You is ah he?"

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member.

Mr. K. Ramnath: The hon. Member for D'Abadie/O'meara began to quote revenues with respect to various times that oil prices were increasing. You know, Mr. Speaker, when they had the opportunity to rehabilitate the producing fields, they were busy counting money, and they were not thinking that one day we were going to have problems in those fields.

They have to find a partner otherwise they would have to shut down Trinmar. They need about \$10 billion of capital injection.

Mr. Dumas: Not they, we.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I am not part of you all. They! When we get into the government on this side I would say "we". [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Dumas: Is it that you take no responsibility for management?

Mr. K. Ramnath: I have plenty respect for you, but having lost the Tobago election [*Laughter*] I will see you in the back bench very soon. If I had put you in charge of campaigning that election and an opposition, as you described as totally useless, got four seats, I would have sent you in the back bench; you would have gone to Siberia. [*Interruption*] I live in hope. I am not lucky like some of you who get there without having to work for it, but we will discuss that on another occasion.

The company needs US \$10 billion injection. You know why we are looking for a partner? Could you imagine we are looking for a partner when oil prices have been the best they have ever been, and we are producing 33,000 barrels a day in offshore Trinmar, and we have the potential to take that production up to 50,000 barrels a day? Because there have been platforms that have been closing; there are wells that have been closing and we have not been able to develop our heavy oil reserves in Trinmar, which are abundant, but the Minister talks about how much money we saved; put in Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, and so on.

You have no choice if you cannot spend money wisely, you must put it in the bank. Their strategy is a combination; they put part in the bank, which is the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and the other half they waste it in UDeCott and in all kinds of projects that have no value to the people of this country.

Can you imagine spending \$800 million on a stadium and across the highway there is a stadium, which is underutilized? A first-class stadium, and you are spending \$800 million or you spent \$800 million, wasted it on a stadium, which brings no value to this country while people are starving; where public transportation is at its worse, in spite of a few buses that have come into the country. You need \$10 capital injection, but you know why they did not put money into that? They had a dream that we are going to become the refining centre of the Caribbean.

8.30 p.m.

So they were advised by the dreamers in Petrotrin that if we invest in an isomerization plant, in an alkyl acid plant and in a gas to diesel plant, we will produce high quality fuels and we will make a great deal of money. What they do not understand—they should really go through remedial education—is that when crude oil prices fall, gasoline and other fuel prices fall in relation to crude oil

prices. So the Americans are buying gasoline now at US \$1.60 a gallon and we are paying here \$3 a litre or US \$2 a gallon for gasoline in Trinidad.

So they went about this set of upgrades and they felt that the price would have remained high forever. It turned out that the cost overruns in these projects as of today is \$3.4 billion, and a commission of enquiry should investigate why the cost overruns on plants that have not been commissioned, that have not been completed is now \$3.4 billion. And if you want to know the source of that information, look at the document which was laid in Parliament by the Minister of Finance.

Petrotrin budgeted on US \$100 a barrel for oil, the Government budgeted on \$70 and a company owned by the Government budgeted at \$100 a barrel. They require more than \$600 million in loans at this time, which the Government will have to guarantee if these projects are to be completed. So we have to go and borrow money now in order to complete the projects in the refinery.

I would not want to talk any more because I am simply stating the facts, and I draw no conclusions on those facts because I have just retired from the company, but I was not at a level where any confidential information was passed on to me. Being UNC, you were not allowed those opportunities. The first thing the PNM did when they came into office was to have me demoted. *[Interruption]*

Mr. B. Panday: Was to demote you? Victimization.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Yes. And I still have the decency not to call anybody's names here, in spite of what they have done to me. But I am saying as a Member of this Parliament, I have a duty to tell you that as far as the— *[Interruption]*

Mr. Imbert: *[Inaudible]*

Dr. Moonilal: Seventy-five minutes.

Mr. Maharaj SC: *[Inaudible]*

Mr. K. Ramnath: You finished your discussion?

Mr. Imbert: *[Inaudible]*

Mr. K. Ramnath: No, I cannot speak while you are speaking. You have no training. *[Laughter]*

Dr. Gopeesingh: Let me tell you something, learn some decency.

Mr. K. Ramnath: The point I am making, Mr. Speaker, is that this Government must investigate why there is a \$3.4 billion cost overrun at this stage. The Government must investigate why we needed to build a gas to liquids plant to

produce 2,000 barrels a day of high quality diesel, when we were spending a fortune—in fact these projects were estimated to cost \$11 billion—on gasoline optimization. The principle that was established is that if we were to take advantage of high prices, international prices, and we were to conclude the construction of these plants, Petrotrin and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the people would have benefited enormously. They blundered, they stumbled and they fell because the operations have been characterized by PNM politics. [*Desk thumping*]

They took the labour force from 3,300 in 2001 to 5,800 at this time I am speaking. It is a CEPEP for Pleasantville and Cocoyea, unfortunately not for the people of Battoo Avenue who have to put up with the last 100 years of flares puking and noises and so on. That has been the case where all the money spent by the Rural Development Corporation was in Cocoyea, so was the employment practices in Petrotrin. They took up the labour force and these are not technical people, these are people who are given preferential treatment, and the practices carried on and the practice carried on up to today is based on party in power and on race. [*Desk thumping*] On race! You all do not like to face the truth. The employment practice in Petrotrin is based on the party in power and race. I do not have anything to hide. If you have anything to hide; you want to apologize for not looking like what the PNM expect you to look like, that is your problem. It is your problem.

I have a duty to ensure that every citizen of this country has equal rights [*Desk thumping*] and I am not going to sit here and appear to be some gentleman because you described what a gentleman ought to be.

Mr. B. Panday: Colonialist. Colonials they are; most of them, mentally.

Mr. K. Ramnath: And people like me have had to tolerate a lot of things in my 34 years working there, but I will have to speak a little more at another time because Indians are now becoming an endangered specie in Petrotrin. [*Desk thumping*] Yes.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Was it not "Petrosingh" at one time?

Mr. K. Ramnath: And it has been transformed from their "Petrosingh" to "Petrojones" or "Petro-PNM" or something. It was the Prime Minister who said such nonsense. When you had 3,300 employees and you had the best professionals in the company, he made—he is the one who started the race talk in case you do not know, Member for Point Fortin. You just walked in here yesterday; I have been here for 23 years. He is the one who started that, "Petrosingh". What do you think he meant by that? Through you, Mr. Speaker, you want to rise again? You do not want to face the

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truth. It is like how you discriminate against the people of Coromandel and Cedros. Total discrimination. They would not fix the roads, they would not do anything for them and they continue that practice.

So they come here and they regurgitate a lot of facts about debt to equity and debt to earnings, and how well the economy is doing. The economy is doing so well that the unemployment is climbing in spite of their denial. The unemployment rate is going to rise. You think, Mr. Speaker, that the Minister of National Security has a difficult time now? In the very near future, he will have about ten times the problem that he has today, because you have a nation that has been built on criminal profligacy. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Waste on expenditure.

Mr. K. Ramnath: No, this is a nation that has a high number of thieves, rogues and vagabonds engendered by the policy of the PNM, of your CEPEP. People in URP do not get any kind of money, so you do not have to worry about them too much, they get a little minimum wage and so on. But your CEPEP contractors— And you have the administrator of CEPEP saying that he got a vision at 2 o'clock in the morning to plant trees because the Prime Minister, I think, had a successful operation and so on. He got his vision and he knew everything was all right—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: And the next day they pulled it out.

Mr. K. Ramnath:—and the next day I think he got a promotion for having this vision. They know that they are wasting the money of this country. All this set of nonsense about Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and so on; all that money is going to be wiped out.

I was in this Parliament during the last boom and I recall several speeches including one made by the former Chief Justice, who was a Senator, Michael de La Bastide. The Government of the day had developed something called the "Long-term Development Fund", and in no time at all they were wiped out. So your \$14 billion in the fund, savings and so on will be wiped out. Right now—I do not hope for that, I wish the country the best, but I hope that you disappear as the funds disappear— [*Laughter*]

Hon. Member: Before the funds.

Mr. K. Ramnath:—because you have to be held responsible for wasting the taxpayers' money. I am saying to you, that the oil prices have not reached their lowest. It is going to go lower and you are going to have a set of losses in your refining and producing sector.

Somebody in the debate spoke about gas prices. Gas prices rose to almost US \$9 per 1,000 mcf or 1 million British thermal units and it is down under \$4 as we speak. In fact, the Government recognizing the volatility of the Petrotrin market said that they were revising their estimates to \$3.42 per million Bts. What tells you that the price is not going to drop any further? And this is a time when you do not boast about how much you save, this is a time when you spend wisely.

The commission of enquiry that is taking place at this time has been a blessing for the country, because what is happening there is a family quarrel. We are now seeing after a long time, Members of the same family having a major quarrel with an Englishman, former colonial master.

Mr. B. Panday: As the referee.

Mr. K. Ramnath: He is the referee as they fight each other. I want to know what plans the Government has in order to rescue the petroleum industry at this time. Do not come here and tell us about how much we are getting for oil and gas, and what price it was and what price it is going down to. What plan do you have to rescue the petroleum industry? In fact, you need a rescue package—we have to start using American terminology—because the industry is on the verge of collapse.

Mr. Imbert: That is your wish?

Mr. K. Ramnath: That is not my wish, that is the reality. The reality is that they are looking for a partner because a decision was taken and a presentation made to the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries with respect to the dim future of the producing fields, particularly the Trinmar field.

I thought that the Minister would have educated herself—the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara who has become very loquacious in recent times—with respect to how money is generated and to learn a little more about the industry, instead of coming here to give the impression that we have done so well. Do you know what is interesting? Is that she will make a headline again, some headline which stated—*[Interruption]*

Mr. B. Panday: In good hands.

Mr. K. Ramnath: We are in good hands, but there is another one—we made a mistake. We made mistakes. You cannot be making mistakes at times like these. If you cannot do the job, then you should give up the portfolio and let somebody like my friend—the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West might make a good Minister of Finance. At least, he will try.

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But I am saying, Mr. Speaker, we now hear about Alutech. Alutech had an office on the Priority Bus Route at one time. Alutech is a project of the son of Prof. Ken Julian.

Hon. Member: What?

Mr. K. Ramnath: He is the driver behind the project—[*Interruption*]

Mr. B. Panday: Oh my gosh!

Mr. K. Ramnath: Yes—and they entered into some arrangement with some Venezuelan company—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Sural.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Sural—to set up this company to manufacture motor car wheels and other aluminium products and so on, with the hope, of course, that Alutrint would have been a success. And I do hope it is a success myself.

Because La Brea produced the most oil; in fact, it is the cycle of the first well that was drilled in the world. Do not worry about the Drake Pennsylvania Well; the first well was drilled in La Brea, Brighton. Then we had Helena I which was drilled in 1858, one year after the Drake find in Pennsylvania in 1857, but the well in La Brea was drilled before that.

8.45 p.m.

We have been producing oil in this country for more than 100 years. Some of you must go to La Brea and see what my hon. friend has to face, to see the depression, not only of the roads. So when the industrial estate was established there was hope for the people, and Alutrint better become a success and Alutech better become a success if—

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I wish to thank my hon. friend, the Member for Tabaquite and the indulgence of the House. Mr. Speaker, I assure you I will not take the full 30 minutes although I am not hearing comments from that side; they are either asleep or listening attentively.

Mr. Speaker: They are baffled by the fact that you are in that seat. [*Laughter*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: I have no intention of moving from Couva South, unless, of course, I am ejected.

We should be told how much money we are putting into Alutrint and Alutech. I was at the sod turning ceremony of the Iscott State Land. I only look young and feel young. I was there when Dr. Eric Williams made the famous speech that sugar shall give way to steel, and when I hear the current Prime Minister, who was never appointed in the Cabinet under Dr. Williams talk about the PNM policy and his policy of industrialization, I get a little worried. Dr. Williams was a very smart man to not put him in the Cabinet.

The understanding was that we had natural gas which was flared. You would have cried if you went to the East Coast and saw all the gas we are liquefying today burning there, and he came up with the plan with his advisers that we should have a programme of industrialization. Iscott then went to Ispat, and the NAR, without consulting the taxpayers sold it to Ispat and then Ispat became Mittal Arcelor Steel.

The point is, when you are engaging the Government in these enterprises and spending the money, you have to make sure you understand the implications of the world economic situations. All this talk about Aluteh has come from bars and rum shops. The reality is that commodity prices have dropped and will continue to drop for a while. We have no guarantee—[*Interruption*] You will not understand, you do not have the level of understanding on these matters, so I will not waste my time with you. Go and do some reading and you will find out, or you can pay me for that in my private capacity, I will be willing to do some consulting for you now that I am retired. [*Crosstalk*] I do not have to know that, all I have to do is listen to the experts who are predicting a lengthy recession—

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: You hear that, listen to the experts.

Mr. K. Ramnath: You are not one of them. When you are in this situation, you have to weigh the possibility that commodity prices will continue to drop, that industrialized countries are going to curtail their production and limit their imports of these commodities which are manufactured—whether they are steel or aluminium products—against the possibility that you can have an early end to the recession and the markets will begin to climb once again.

Hon. Member: What recession?

Mr. K. Ramnath: Yes, you have no recession; you are immune from everything. Britain announced a recession this morning; the United States of

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America is in recession; Japan is in recession; Trinidad and Tobago is immune because the PNM is in office. Once the PNM is in office, nothing can happen.

In 1986, the PNM left the country in the worst state ever, and the comment of the defeated Prime Minister, who got back into Parliament by the grace of the NAR because Merle Stephens was asked not to contest a recount—he won the seat by 50 votes, by the magnanimous Member for Couva North.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what his comment was? The Treasury is not a biscuit pan. That is the level of economic knowledge our Prime Minister demonstrated. I heard last week in another debate that the United States of America and Europe suffered from a credit crunch and they have a liquidity problem, so they have to inject \$750 billion into the banks and insurance companies, and we are floating on money. I love to hear that coming from the Government because I know like everything else, it would be proven wrong.

Now we are asked what recession. Certainly, we have no recession if it is going to buy 200 BMW motor cars and hire two—

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Not BMWs', Toyotas.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Because BMW probably realized that a little island state in the Caribbean could not afford them in recessionary times. So they are going to buy Toyotas. Can you imagine they are going to buy 200 Toyota Crown motor cars which perhaps sell for the same price as a BMW to impress their former colonial masters? Is that what you are going to do?

The Member for Point Fortin is not even allowed to respond to the hon. Member for Caroni East on the summit, and more so the Prime Minister has taken over the portfolio. When he delivers a statement to the nation through the House of Representatives about the Senate, and this Minister is not even consulted.

Dr. Moonilal: She is a clerical assistant.

Mr. K. Ramnath: There is room on the Back Bench for you.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Mr. Speaker, I just want to let the Member know that it is the Prime Minister who will be hosting the Heads of State and Government in Trinidad for the Fifth Summit of the Americas. It is the Government, but it is the Prime Minister who will be hosting his fellow Heads of State and Governments from the hemisphere and it begins with him. There are strategies in place and the time will come for me to speak. I do not know what your concern is.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I thank my hon. friend for the elucidation. If she would have listened to the teachings of her Prime Minister, she is merely a messenger and if he chooses not to allow her to inform the country as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, it is clearly that he has no confidence in her. *[Interruption]*

I will tell you something, when your leader and my leader then sought to tell me what I should do that I did not want to, I told him where to get off and he fired me. *[Interruption]* And I was quite happy, I am not like most of you, I do not need to be in politics to live. I can sell bara and channa at the side of the road, I come from that background. I am not like you urban, knife and fork people, I am a proletariat.

My friend from Tobago did not have the guts to stand up to Prime Minister Robinson, ANR Robinson, he slipped out and went to the PNM.

Hon. Joseph: What you did?

Mr. K. Ramnath: I went to Aranguez, my dear fellow where I addressed a crowd of 20,000 persons which formed the basis of a new political party, the UNC.

Hon. Member: Are you the founder?

Mr. K. Ramnath: No, I was there; the founder is sitting on my right.

Hon. Joseph: That was Club 88.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Yes, but I could give you a lecture in private if you want. *[Interruption]* There is no point in pursuing the discussion.

When you are in these difficult times and making fundamental decisions such as steel mills, aluminium and manufacturing plants, you have to consider the implications. I refer you to today's *Business Guardian* in which there is a very interesting article that is weighing the benefits of continuing industrialization because the cost associated with the construction of these estates is extremely high, the infrastructural cost associated with providing gas to these companies is very high and you could end up spending a considerable amount of money in preparation for these industries.

9.00 p.m.

You have to understand that Essar Steel does not have US \$1.5 billion or US \$2 billion to come and build a plant. It has to go on the market to raise the money. All of these companies have to go on the market to raise money. Where are you going to get a market to lend you that kind of money in these difficult times? So it was raised on this side that one should look carefully at the decisions you are

making when the world economy is in recession and when your economy is likely to go into recession.

I want to say that that Alutrint and Alutech project are highly suspicious. They are going to set up a power generating plant as part of that facility.

Dr. Gopeesingh: TGU.

Mr. K. Ramnath: TGU it is called?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Trinidad Generation Unlimited.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Yes, a generating plant. That would be for the taxpayer. The cost of that would be for the taxpayer and the cost of the infrastructure is for the taxpayer. It would be interesting to know how much money has already been spent on that estate. The polypropylene plant, the polyethylene plant and the Essar Steel plant will also be on an industrial estate opposite the Point Lisas Estate at this time and the Government is required to put in a substantial amount of money in preparing these estates.

But it appears as if the Government and its Ministers are not being briefed about some of these things and they are not being allowed to consider whether these plants should be constructed or they not be constructed. In fact, you know, it is easy to make every elected Member a Minister and give them a portfolio to keep them busy and vote for the legislation that comes from the Parliament, than to have fewer Ministers with greater responsibilities who are very educated on these issues and who can make informed decisions, having the proper advisers working with them. So what you really have is a Government outside the Government and that has been known to be happening in this country for a very long time.

I thought that the Minister of Finance would have spent today—instead of trying to justify whether student loans are being written off today because those loans were given by the NAR government from 1986 and whether this matter before the House is to write off the cost of foreign travel which might have occurred five or six years ago, and whether UNC and NAR mismanaged and as a result you have to write off those things. I do not want to get into those discussions, but what I can tell you is that the move to creating opportunities for higher education was started by the UNC when we introduced the dollar-for-dollar programme.

It was a time when people could not afford to pay fees and it was a time when free secondary education was introduced. What is disgusting is to hear even the current Minister talk about UNC made a mistake by allowing all to proceed. You know, this Minister reminds me of those who feel that people in Laventille should

remain living in squalor, because they do not have the IQ to proceed. And these are the same people they expect to vote for them. We tried and the experiment succeeded. The problem with the education system is that you have a Minister who has no mercy, who has no interest in the development of these schools and children.

They are involved in an effort to nationalize the church schools and they are giving them an ultimatum: it is either you hand over these schools to us or we are not going to give you money. Mr. Partap, the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla was the chairman of the Presbyterian school board. You, Mr. Speaker, myself and Mr. Partap are proud Presbyterians and we have been educated through the school system, including my friend and Leader from Couva North. Today the Presbyterian church is facing a barrage of attacks from an uninformed Minister, one who was never heard of in the field of education in this country, by trying to cancel the Concordat and virtually nationalizing the schools of the country.

But to get back to the point, it was the UNC that introduced measures, such as the dollar-for-dollar and free secondary school education; standardization of textbooks and so on, and all they can do is to criticize. You should come here and you should praise the UNC for initiating these and developing the platform on which you have expanded. You know, people would have more respect for you if you admit the truth.

I want to say I am extremely disappointed that the Minister of Finance would come here—*[Interruption]* I can speak for a long time. You, with your illiteracy, are not able to make a five-minute speech. *[Crosstalk]* So when you want to heckle, be careful who you are heckling.

In conclusion, let me say that I find that the Minister of Finance was irresponsible in not providing more information, rather than coming to the House to simply read out something that was written for her by some public servant. Talk to the Parliament in this country about the situation we find ourselves in and what we should do to get out of it; what is likely to happen in the next few months or the next year; what steps the Government is taking to prevent a crisis developing as a result of the world situation. Instead, the others have followed and everyone is in denial with respect to what is likely to be the impact and implication of the international situation on Trinidad and Tobago. We are not here to wish you and wish the country ill-feeling. We want to see this country as a productive, prosperous nation. We want to participate in ensuring that it continues to enjoy prosperity, and so forth, but we are very worried that your spending and your economic and fiscal policies are going to threaten the stability of the nation. *[Desk thumping]*

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Mustapha Abdul-Hamid): Mr. Speaker, I really want to express my appreciation for the opportunity to be able to make what I hope will be a short contribution to the debate this evening. The main reason I am on my legs at this point in time is to respond to some of the comments that would have been made earlier by the hon. Member for Caroni East, and I also hope to make a few comments in response to what the hon. Member for Oropouche East would have said. I am putting him on notice so that he would make sure that he is here, because I do have some very pleasant comments to make to him as we move along.

I do want to begin by acknowledging the contribution by the hon. Member for Couva South. More than acknowledging his contribution, I also want to acknowledge his presence, because normally at nine minutes past nine o'clock, we do not expect to see the hon. Member for Couva South here. It is obvious that the return of the hon. Member for Couva North is already beginning to bring results. [*Desk thumping*]

The irony is that in his contribution he did boast of being youthful and virile and as soon as he had finished making comments about his youth, he lost his memory, because he said that as far as he knew, the hon. Prime Minister never served as a Minister in the Cabinet under our former Prime Minister and father of the nation, Dr. Eric Williams. As far as I know, the hon. Patrick Manning became a minister of government, I think it was in 1977 and I also know that Dr. Eric Williams remained prime minister until 1981.

Mr. Partap: He was a junior minister.

Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: So he was a cabinet minister in 1977, as far as I recall, Sir, and you can check the records.

The effect of the presence of the Member for Couva North is also being felt because we can also see that the hon. Member for Tabaquite is, indeed, on a very short leash, having been relegated today only to extending the speaking times of the hon. Members opposite. Normally he would be in full flight, but the leash has been shortened and that is something of which we must take note.

The main point I would like to make in this contribution as I begin, is to draw attention to the hypocrisy that comes out from the hon. Members opposite. They were severely critical of the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East and the Minister of Works and Transport, but I want to draw their attention to a particular matter that was in the public domain perhaps about four or five months ago. The Member for Caroni Central was leading a campaign for the construction of a walkover in Carlsen Field; a very emotional campaign he led, pleading on the basis that lives were being threatened;

the residents of Carlsen Field, their lives were being threatened by having to cross the highway. I am making a point here of hypocrisy on their part.

You see, not too far north of where the walkover now stands, when they were in government for six years and they could easily have constructed that walkover, they elected instead to construct, what they call a lay-by, which was in fact a lay-by or a particular business operation that takes place there, and they decorated it and presented it to the public as though it were a market. It was not a market; it was disguised as a market. What, in fact, it was, was an access off the highway to a particular business, one of their friends. So at that point in time they spent money that could have built three walkovers, but they spent it, not in the interest of the people of Carlsen Field, but in the interest of their business partners.

More than that, further north, outside another business contributor on the other side of the highway, they were able to construct a similar kind of infrastructure. So two within a couple miles of each other and no walkover for the people of Carlsen Field. And the minute you come into office, you start to cry blood that the PNM has not constructed a walkover for the people of Carlsen Field. But today they have come and criticized the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East and the Minister of Works and Transport.

I am happy to say that after six years of their being in government, it was this same Minister of Works and Transport and Member of Parliament for Diego Martin North/East who was the one who constructed that particular walkover and today the people of Carlsen Field enjoy a more comfortable and safer pass from one side of the highway to the other side. [*Desk thumping*]

The hon. Member for Couva South—and I saw that he migrated to be close to the Member for Couva North. I imagine he wanted the Member for Couva North to be sure that he was the one, indeed, speaking and to feel the energy, perhaps. But he has said that there is racism in the hiring practices at Petrotrin. But you cannot have it both ways, because, you see, they often boast that East Indians in Trinidad and Tobago are the ones who are doing extraordinarily well. That is true; Indians do very well in Trinidad and Tobago. Trinidad and Tobago has been a brilliant and wonderful experience for all of us who today are fortunate to be born in this land called Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

9.15 p.m.

I thank Almighty God every day that I was born in this country. Had I been born elsewhere, had I been born in India, my fortunes, I am quite sure, would have been different and the same can be said of all those hon. Members opposite.

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As I have said to them before, the hon. Member for Siparia, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, had a good PNM education. The hon. Member for Caroni East had a good PNM education. Mustapha Abdul-Hamid has had a good PNM education. We were the beneficiaries of the investment in education that the PNM made several decades ago and continues to make, and it is largely because of that that we and many thousands more are in a position to live the quality of life that we live.

I always make the point that my grandmother could spell two words; B-A-T, bat and C-A-T, cat. My mother got an O level education because Dr. Eric Williams and the PNM built a school called Diego Martin Government Secondary and, by the grace of Almighty God and the intervention of the PNM, I have been able to get a tertiary level education. And there are hundreds of thousands of our citizens who have been able to access educational opportunities on the basis of the foundation and the interventions made by the PNM.

Today, Indians do in fact do very well. So when one says that there are racist practices in the public service and wherever else there might be—there were studies of those in the past by Prof. John Le Guerre, who has concluded that there were for sociological, historical and cultural factors responsible for where people ended up—whether they ended up in the police service, business or the teaching service. There are cultural, sociological and historical factors, more than any other factor, and that the race factor was not significant. You can check the studies. I think that it was in 1991 that the results might have been published. They may have been commissioned in the early 1990s. Prof. Le Guerre spearheaded that particular exercise.

East Indians do very well. If you look at the universities, there are large numbers—well over 50 per cent of the UWI population is East Indian. The Member for Couva South must remember that unemployment was and is in the vicinity of 4.5 per cent. That means that all of Trinidad and Tobago, virtually, is employed and the unemployment figure for tertiary graduates is 1.3 or 1.4 per cent.

If you argue that East Indians do very well and that they are graduates of the university, then the unemployment rate among East Indians in Trinidad and Tobago is perhaps less than 4.5 per cent and closer to 1.4 per cent. You cannot have it both ways. You cannot, in some circumstances, make certain kinds of boasts and declare certain kinds of supremacy and in other circumstances plead victim. It cannot be done. That is what we call hypocrisy—something that is a common characteristic among those on the other side.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Oropouche East spoke about a disconnect between supply and demand. The point I think he was trying to make, however

poorly, was that the universities were not offering programmes that took cognisance of the national development goals. This means that universities were producing graduates who had little relevance to the economic activity taking place in the particular country.

I am reminded of a meeting, a UWI Council meeting, that I attended in Jamaica. The Deputy Principal of the Mona Campus expressed the view that too many of UWI's graduates could not find jobs. I made an intervention that the University of the West Indies, the same institution at which the hon. Member is employed, produces large numbers of persons with degrees in sociology and other disciplines when the region was in need of engineers, doctors and so on.

The hon. Member himself lectures in a particular discipline producing graduates and I am not sure what the direct relevance of his programmes is to the economic needs of the country. However, the University of the West Indies, the institution of which he is a part, is perhaps the biggest culprit in that matter. It is for that reason that we had to establish the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT).

UTT is the same institution about which the Member for Caroni East finds it fit to express the harshest comments. That university was precisely established to cater to the specific national development objectives of Trinidad and Tobago.

Irony. The University of Trinidad and Tobago has turned out to be the best thing that has happened to the University of the West Indies. Now we see UWI, which the hon. Member for Caroni East constantly criticizes for its relationships with foreign universities, writing a letter to me as Minister of Public Utilities saying that they are developing a relationship with a university in Germany in the design of a programme, the same UTT model. The public understands that hypocrisy is their trademark, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would not describe the hon. Member for Caroni East as a skunk, but there is a striking similarity. Whenever he speaks, Mr. Speaker, he leaves a pungent odor. He always has something foul to say. I do not know what takes place in his mind; it is inexplicable. I do not know if it is an illness, a chemical reaction, an explosion, but it always produces a pungent odor.

Perhaps it might be, and I know that that scent as foul as it is to us, may be sweet to others. I know that same scent gets him prominent exposure on some of our newscasts.

Mr. Speaker: Just be careful where you are going.

Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Sir, I thank you for your guidance, but I have very carefully selected my words. The hon. Member for Caroni East has made some

very unfortunate statements. These foul things he says continuously, years we have been listening to them. He has built his career on that which is foul.

He came to this honourable House earlier and said that Mr. Errol Grimes, the CEO of WASA, was being paid \$200,000 per month. I have responded to that in the past; he knows better. Mr. Grimes, in 2003, was given a contract to be paid \$50,000 a month. At the time, that \$50,000 was not properly approved by the Public Sector Negotiating Committee. The committee intervened and downgraded the salary from \$50,000 to \$36,000. Mr. Grimes was very accommodating and accepted the salary of \$36,000, a great credit to him. For years, Mr. Grimes worked for \$36,000 and some months ago I think the salary was increased to \$43,000. The Member constantly comes and says that Mr. Grimes worked for \$100,000, \$1.2 million per year and so on, and he knows it is not true.

Do you know what is painful? I was able to check what took place when they were in office. I can read from a *Newsday* online bulletin, their newspaper, posted on August 13, 2002 at 12.23 p.m. It is an online bulletin. It spoke about the salary paid to the CEO of Tidco. Now, if you are comparing Tidco with WASA, it is a relatively small company in terms of the mandate, the size and so on. Here is what the *Newsday* online bulletin had to say:

“Vishnu Ramlogan, when he was President of the Tourism Industrial Company Limited (TIDCO) was paid over \$3 million in salary for a period of two years and 10 months.”

Do you understand what I am saying? When they were in office in 2002, they found it fit to pay one of their appointees \$3 million for a period of two years, more than \$1 million a year, and he has the audacity to come here and make inaccurate statements about decisions that we have taken, knowing the correct thing because we have gone through this before.

Mr. Speaker, the Member made reference to the report of the Auditor General and he said that WASA had a debt and that the Government had guaranteed over \$3 billion. There is legislation that allows that kind of activity to take place, but I want to put it in some context.

The actual debt of WASA today is \$4.2 billion, but I want to tell him how he came to that. What he did not say was the period of time, given the history of the debt. That could have been accumulated over the last two, five or 20 years. He did not say that and that is the detail I will offer to the honourable House and to the national public.

As I said, the debt of WASA is just over \$4 billion today. Do you know, Mr. Speaker, that in 1995, in the administration of the hon. Patrick Manning, they entered discussions with Severn Trent for a management contract with WASA? On the eve of the election, a number of things were done and one of the things that was done was the clearing of the books of WASA. All of the debts of WASA were paid off and the books were laid clean because that was part of the conditions for the signing of a contract with Severn Trent. As at 1995, the debt of WASA was zero.

Do you know what else happened in 1995, Mr. Speaker? Into Government came the United National Congress. There was a particular Bill that was drawn to my attention—I think T&TEC was owed \$85 million which WASA had to pay as well. Immediately upon coming into government, the UNC took a loan of \$450 million for operating expenses. They followed that up with another loan of \$600 million for what was called the South Water Project because they said there was no water in south; their people needed water. In addition to the \$450 million I spoke about earlier, they took a loan for \$660 million, followed by another \$600 million for the North Water Project as they approached the election and another \$200 million for operating cost. By the time they were finished, the total debt of WASA in 2001 was \$4.5 billion.

9.30 p.m.

That is just one mess that can be added to the list that the Minister of Works and Transport would have spoken about earlier, \$4.5 billion. We are the ones who have been paying down that debt. I said at the start that the debt is now \$4.2 billion. When we came into office, it was \$4.5 billion. Do you understand that they stand and make comments and declarations and they think that the population does not understand what they do and what they say? The population knows them very well. It is precisely because the population is acquainted with their ways that they are sitting on that side and we are sitting on this side. *[Interruption]*

Dr. Gopeesingh: Would the Minister give way?

Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: No! The annual revenue of T&TEC—He spoke about waste water. I said here and I have it said in the public space, we have a lot of work to do in the development of waste water. Only 30 per cent of the population is connected to a central sewer system and that is an issue. That has been our history, because we must understand that WASA has spent the majority of its efforts and time developing the water sector. We have made tremendous progress over the years. One ought not to underestimate, understate and undervalue the progress that has been made by WASA over the years. We have 26 per cent of the population receiving water 24 hours a day and seven days a week. They have a perfect water supply.

There is another 30 per cent that would get water five to seven days and another 20 per cent, three to five days. There is a significant percentage of the population who gets what one might call a reasonable supply. Then there is approximately 25—30 per cent of the population whose supply is really below what we would call an acceptable standard. We know that and those are the people we are proposed to target as we move forward with our water development exercise. I know, with respect to that portion of the population, difficult as their circumstances are, we cannot ever feel comfortable unless and until we are in a position to address their needs. We cannot stop, but progress has been made over the years.

WASA has emphasized the development of the water sector, true to the detriment of the waste water sector, because adequate emphasis within the single organization has not been placed on waste water. We recognize that and it is precisely for that reason we have taken a decision to migrate waste water out of WASA because we are proceeding with a major expansion in the water sector with the construction and doubling of our water production.

There is more responsibility in water coming to WASA. In those circumstances, because we are proposing metering, a desalination plant, new transmission mains and a new distribution network, there is a lot of work to be done in the water sector. We felt it was prudent and strategic to move waste water, so that waste water can be established as priority number one in a different company, because, within waste water we have a lot of major projects to undertake as well. We felt that we would ask one company to concentrate on waste water and another to concentrate on the development of the water sector. That is good planning and good thinking, in our view.

Do you know that of 30 per cent that now enjoy access to a central sewer system, none of that was done during their six-year term? They did absolutely nothing with the waste water sector. Six years in our history they were in government and they did nothing with waste water. They have come now cry as to what are the achievements in waste water. I know, even if we are in a position to say 30 per cent, none of that 30 per cent is yours. Mr. Speaker, they contributed nothing to the waste water sector development.

They are talking about people going—adjustments have been made to the management of WASA. Every and any company worth its salt, on an ongoing basis, has to evaluate the performance of its leadership. We are doing that and at the same time, we are attempting to preserve and make sure. We have said that we will not take any decision that impacts on workers without consulting and working with the union. We have made that public statement many times. They

simply want to create panic and make workers feel that they are threatened. Workers are not threatened, because we are working in close collaboration with all the duly elected representative unions. We have been working with them and we propose to continue to work with them.

T&TEC's annual income is approximately \$2.4 billion. That is the kind of business T&TEC does. We said T&TEC is not collecting approximately \$30 million. That would be the normal bill to Mittal. You must note that it is Mittal and others, because there are a few other companies. It is not just Mittal alone. Mittal is a big customer. You must understand that the net effect is not \$30 million, because it cost T&TEC approximately \$10 million to provide the power, in terms of the purchase of gas, but it bills for \$30 million. In addition, there is a demand charge. Because of the size of the customer they still, on an ongoing basis, have to make payments to T&TEC. The net effect is approximately \$15 million and the net loss is approximately \$15 million. In a \$2.4 billion a year company, it is significant. It is nothing to scuff at, but it will not threaten the operations of T&TEC. It does not threaten the quality of service of T&TEC. All our customers and our country can be assured that their quality of service is not threatened in any way and it does not threaten the infrastructure development in the electricity sector, simply because the Government has commitments to T&TEC, as it relates to the expansion of the electricity infrastructure.

What the Member for Caroni East does not understand as well is that from time to time Mittal and others will shut down for maintenance. T&TEC, to some extent, is accustomed to turning down one furnace and Mittal operating on the basis of one furnace out of the two. There have been times when they would shut down both furnaces for general maintenance, as the case might be for a two-week period or even for a one-month period on occasions.

The immediate situation of one month has not been done for some time, but the people who are involved in the business of steel also understand that the development of the world has to continue. Mittal sells steel to the world. The world will continue to have needs to build bridges, construct buildings and so on. They expect the demand to pick up in the not too distant future. They did not expect, for example, that this situation will be prolonged even for over one year. The annual loss that the hon. Member mentioned is not being contemplated at this point in time. Again, it is a case of the hon. Member trying to inflame in the minds of our citizens a particular situation for his own personal, political benefit. I do not know what chemical might have exploded in his head to have caused him to make those kinds of comments.

I only want to respond to the hon. Member. There are quite a few more things they said; irresponsible comments as is their tradition. Sometimes they speak

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about the lack of facilities. I do not recall who spoke about the lack of facilities. At the same time they criticize the fact that we have a construction programme. Can you imagine that? They criticize the conditions in which our public officers work and then they criticize, at the same time, the fact that we are building offices to accommodate our public officers. Hypocrisy!

They spoke about the Cabinet being overstaffed, but it clearly demonstrates their unsuitability to govern. The fact that they have made that point alone demonstrates that they are not fit for government and I ask the population to take that into account. They do not understand where we are in our development and the role that Ministers must play. I know that they were in the habit of having mega ministries, where all and sundry was heaped into one Ministry such as Community Development, Sport, Youth and Energy or all kinds of miscellaneous responsibilities looped and heaped into one and somebody would say: "You take dat." All the Ministries and their structures would have been very carefully thought of by the hon. Prime Minister. He would have configured his Ministries on the basis of his experience, insight and wisdom. We are quite confident and sure that the configuration and size of the Cabinet is what is required to move this country towards Vision 2020.

The structure and composition of the Cabinet fall into the context of a vision. It is with Vision 2020 in mind that the Cabinet is configured. Their problem is that they do not have a vision, so they do not have a context within which to structure a Cabinet. They have no idea whatsoever of what it takes to establish and operate a Cabinet. What is ironic is that the ones from that side who speak most about the composition of Cabinet have never seen the inside of a Cabinet room.

The hon. Member for Caroni East also said that he hates nepotism. Could you imagine that? He was the one, I think, as Chairman of the NWRHA, who hired the hon. Member for Oropouche East as an industrial consultant. The same Member for Oropouche East, at the same time I believe, if I am not wrong, worked elsewhere as a full time staff member in the Office of the Prime Minister. He hates nepotism. He is sitting next to a gentleman who has been the beneficiary of nepotism and he hates nepotism. When he said so, the Member for Oropouche East smiled and approved with him. Could you understand that bold, brass face?

Mr. Speaker, it really was a pleasure for me to stand and say these few words and to remind our population that when in 2007, they elected the Members on this side to government, they indeed did the right thing.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Chandresh Sharma (*Fyzabad*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One of the traits of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, in particular the sons, fathers and brothers of Trinidad and Tobago, is often known to be strong and to stand up for principle. What we just heard from the Member for Chaguanas East is really singing for his supper. Like me, he is also of East Indian origin. Since he introduced that into the debate, it must be attended to. He spoke about Indian people or people of East Indian origin doing very well under the PNM. What he did not tell the national community and what they must be told is that people of East Indian origin, under this PNM rule and governance, are not doing too well. For instance, earlier today we saw a listing of the CEPEP contractors. East Indians do not do well there at all.

9.45 p.m.

In fact, less than 10 per cent of the contractors are persons of East Indian origin. Since the Member for Chaguanas East introduced it, I would be failing in my duties if I did not respond to some of the matters raised by the Member. The workers in CEPEP do not represent the pot-pourri mix of Trinidad and Tobago. When one looks at URP, it is the same thing.

The Member also identified an ex-CEO at WASA. One must remember that the CEO who obtained that position under the Panday administration was interviewed by an independent panel—I think it was PricewaterhouseCoopers. I cannot remember correctly—and he came first. He was a Commonwealth scholarship winner. For the record, his name is Kanhai. He was removed as soon as the PNM came into office and replaced by the person who came ninth in the interview.

More than that, what the Member for Chaguanas East did not say is that Kanhai received less money than the present CEO. He did not talk about the perks and so on that the CEO is getting which amount to \$100,000. So, when the Member for Caroni East said that it was a package of \$100,000, what a total shame.

In Petrotrin, the East Indian workers were removed, lock, stock and barrel. In fact, you would remember a contractor was given a contract to do work at Petrotrin—I think it was Cudjoe. It started at \$9 million, it went to \$20 million and it concluded at \$100 million—and persons of East Indian origin were fired—Dr. Gordon Narinesingh's brother and a constituent from Fyzabad. After they were fired, the person made an application for extra money, and he was given an extra \$9 million. East Indians did not do well under the PNM at all. The level of racism and discrimination continue to be at its highest.

Now, the Member for Chaguanas East is singing for his supper. They are using the Member for Chaguanas East to say those things. The Member for Diego

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Martin North/East did not say it nor did the other speakers, so they are using him. He is singing for his supper and for a jacket and tie. Is that what you have reduced yourself to? Shame on you!

Under the Panday administration, 80 per cent of the population was receiving pipe borne water. When one looks at the dollar value, what we connected homes for was 100 per cent less than what the PNM is doing it for today. So, the Member cannot come with that foolishness. When they entered into an agreement with Severn Trent, where did the money come from to pay them? It was the Panday administration that had to find the money. When they signed that agreement, where did they get the money from? Was it from mummy's purse? The money had to come from somewhere, and it came from the next government which was the Panday government.

Tobago got a 100 per cent water supply, and where did that come from? It was under the Panday administration. I am going to produce the information in a few minutes. The Member spoke about the waste water plant, but the most modern waste water plant in this country was built at the Beetham Estate under the Panday administration. It was built by us; whether he was wearing long pants or short pants.

Mr. Speaker, the PNM has a way of dividing the country and they would use a Member on that side when they want to do it, so they have used the Member for Chaguanas East. When one looks at the country and what the PNM has reduced it to—murders, rapes, kidnapping, persons cannot go out at nights, high food prices and there is total failure with respect to infrastructure in this country. I am going to come to those details, but I want to deal with a matter raised by the Member for Diego Martin North/East when he spoke about what obtained under the Member for Couva North when he referred to that period. I want to present some statistics.

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

All we heard from the Member today is a lot of mess. Let me tell you what obtained under the UNC administration—economic performance amongst the strongest in the Caribbean and Latin America. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Who said that?

Mr. C. Sharma: The 2001 IMF Staff Report. It says robust growth, more job creation, low inflation, balanced fiscal and external trade account as well as poverty reduction. Who said this? It is in the IMF 2001 Staff Report. In Caricom, it is one of the most successful small states in the world; 6.4 per cent growth in 2000 which was higher than the United States of America, Europe and Japan.

[*Interruption*] This foolish gentleman is saying that is not true. These are the figures that were produced in the international arena. What was our reserve then? It was US \$2.4 billion and at today's rate that is US \$15 billion.

One of the five developing countries in the world that was most successful in overcoming severe poverty was under the Panday administration. Look what you have reduced this country to! [*Desk thumping*] Today, poverty is about 25 per cent. What a shame!

Madam Deputy Speaker: What is the page of that IMF report?

Mr. C. Sharma: The document is in the library.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, you have just indicated that you are reading from a 2001 IMF Staff Report, and I would like you to refer me to the page.

Mr. C. Sharma: Madam Deputy Speaker, one of the persons that I have the highest regard for in this Parliament is you. I hope I do not lose it this evening. I did not say that I am quoting or reading from anything. This is the IMF report, and if Members want to see it they could send a staff member for the report in the library.

The IMF reported six straight years of strong economic growth—that is what the Panday administration offered this country—and six years of growing foreign investments outside Brazil and Canada—we were attacking the highest investments in this country; a 40 per cent drop in the unemployment rate; and inflation at that point in time was 2.5 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] What is it today? Panday gave six years of no taxes.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I heard you refer to the Member for Couva North as “Panday”. Could you please refer to the hon. Member appropriately? [*Interruption*]

Mr. C. Sharma: The whole of Trinidad and Tobago benefited. There was also free universal secondary education. That was a commitment made by the then Prime Minister, Mr. Panday to the first Prime Minister's daughter, Mrs. Erica Williams-Connell. That is why today you have an educated workforce. This did not come by guess.

When oil was \$9 a barrel we built 52 primary schools and 35 secondary schools. We were building a secondary school for \$5 million and \$7 million and, today, the PNM is building it for \$100 million. At that time, we wanted to encourage people to get an education, and we introduced the Dollar for Dollar Programme. We made sure that people were able to access it. In terms of new social programmes, again, it was under the Panday administration.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to look at some matters that were raised. In fact, today when I listened to the Government, they did not say anything about providing any service to enhance or maintain the well-being of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Absolutely nothing!

When one looks at the failure across Trinidad and Tobago—could any Minister who is present in this House today indicate which ministry is performing and delivering goods and services within budget? Not a single one! It is not the Ministry of Education. In fact, the only ministry which performed was when the hon. Member for Arima was the Minister of Public Utilities. It was the only ministry that showed some performance. You know, under the UNC, we say that performance beats ole' talk and that was the only time. Other than that there was absolutely nothing.

When one looks at what obtains under this Government—all the speakers on that side started off saying what their Government did and what was introduced by the Government, but the truth is most important. The truth is, and what obtains on the record is that during 1995—2000 the economy expanded by an average of 5.2 per cent per annum.

In 1999, the economy grew by 6.9 per cent. At that point, the world economy was growing at less than 6 per cent, so we were exceeding the world economy, at that point in time, under the Panday administration. So, when you have oil at the price that it is today, you have to go back and see what obtains in the record. You do not have to go outside of Trinidad and Tobago. We had it right here under the Panday administration. That is what the national community is calling for. They want goods and services and you are failing to deliver them because, in the first instance, you are deep rooted in corruption; you are deep rooted in discrimination; and you do not treat the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago equally. The entire national community knows this.

Do you have constituents? Do they not tell you the truth? They cannot be fooled all the time. You must know that people are not happy in this country. Do you know that there is sadness in this country? There is no joy in doing anything. You cannot go anywhere; you cannot host your daughter's wedding in this country anymore without engaging the services of the security forces. You have to buy water for the farewell. This is what you have reduced this country to. Do you know what has increased under your watch? The rental of bank boxes for people to hide their jewelry.

Who brought down inflation in this country? The Caribbean countries were looking at the Panday administration. The UNC government brought down

inflation to its lowest point in decades. That is the record. You all are working in different ministries, so you all must know that. [*Interruption*] It was the Panday administration which introduced the minimum wage in this country. It started at seven dollars. We made sure that all the workers in this country were able to obtain a minimum wage and provide for their families. At that time, we made foodstuff more available by removing VAT on many basic items, and oil was \$9 dollars a barrel. We created 80,000 jobs; not makeshift jobs what we have today.

What is very rampant during the PNM administration—do not shoot the messenger for it, let us pray about it—is that the country is flooded with hate, evil, murders, rapes, high prices, broken homes, teenaged pregnancy and flooded highways when rain falls. When the UNC took office, crime was rampant in Trinidad and Tobago—shooting and murders were on the rise and the drug lords ruled our streets. Too many persons were living in fear.

10.00 p.m.

In 1995, the Panday administration gave a commitment that we would get tough on crime and clean up the country, and so we did, until the PNM came back. You should feel very ashamed, Member for Tobago West. You just lost an election in Tobago, they rejected you.

The UNC fought hard to take our streets back from criminals. The murder rate decreased every year, up to 24 per cent, and shooting of a witness reduced by 33 per cent. So, the murders were the lowest under the UNC. Let us talk about it; as low as 94, under the Panday administration; under the Manning administration, 550. That is what you are going to be known for.

It was under the Panday administration that we put close to 2,000 police officers on the streets; we built 22 new police stations. What do you have to show for it? You cannot go on fooling the country. You cannot be pretending everything is right. It is not. Think of it, take a silent moment and pray; believe in something bigger; ask God for some kind of guidance. What is going on? Look what you have reduced this country to.

We were here since 1.30 p.m.; you said nothing in this Parliament that has added any value to anybody's life today; absolutely nothing. You have not told the national community how food prices would drop. The Panday administration was able to show that. You have not told the mother in Point Fortin whose son disappeared two or three days ago; no word on her son. Another young man disappeared, running PH, because he is trying to make a living.

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You give no hope; you are messengers of bad news. You have nothing good to say. You do not excite this population anymore. What are you doing? We are all colleagues. You boast, we are here and you are there. What difference does it make, you are there but you are useless. [*Desk thumping*] You are only serving yourselves.

At the end of the day what can you boast of, that you can publish in your office, a URP list? That is your claim to fame; that you can employ 30, 40 people in URP and you can get the CEPEP contractors to come and clean up all your friends and families buildings? Is that what you have reduced yourselves to? Or I can get a carnival grant? Is that what you are holding office for? No Member of this side will want office for that purpose.

We purchased 241 vehicles for the police, not 200 Prados, or what have you, to impress our foreign visitors. Two hundred and forty-one police vehicles, because when you call a station it is an obligation of a police officer to respond and they can only respond if they have motor cars and if they have enough police officers. Under the Panday administration, we made sure that was available.

The E999, another good work from the UNC administration. So you can look at the track record. Why do you not sit and revisit what obtained in this country? Go back and look under Eric Williams; look under George Chambers; look under Patrick Manning; look under Basdeo Panday; look under ANR Robinson. You have enough information there. We must not repeat the mistakes of the PNM. Why do you keep repeating their mistakes? Think, think, think. Just as you want the best for your loved ones, so do we, and we want the best for all the children in this country. We do not want one set of children to benefit more.

When you look at your programmes across the board, we are trying to develop a society where everyone can feel equal. The Minister, in moving this earlier today, spoke about the provisions of the Constitution. Part of what it says in section 4:

"It is hereby recognized and declared that in Trinidad and Tobago there has existed and shall be:

The right of the individual to life, liberty, security of the person and enjoyment of property and the right not to be deprived thereof except by due process of law;"

Under the PNM, this does not obtain at all; we have no rights in this country anymore; no right of liberty; no right of freedom; no right of security. "The right of equality before the law and the protection of the law". I remember the story with Marlene Coudray, Devant Maharaj, the Maha Sabha radio licence, Ganga Bissoon. Look at it; look at the number of cases. "The right of the individual to respect

for his private and family life". Recently we read where a citizen of this country, who happens to be a media practitioner, house was raided by the police without a warrant. The Member for Tunapuna, whose constituent it happened to, did not have the courtesy to inquire, to lend some support. What are you doing in this country?

"The right of the individual to equality of treatment from any public authority in the exercise of any function." This does not obtain. No citizen in this country can go to a health centre and get what is rightfully his, and that was highlighted by the Member for Caroni East today. You cannot have a choice of school. Your children go to school, school is out of teachers. We do not have basic things. "The right of a parent or guardian to provide a school of his own choice for the education of his child or ward". That does not obtain under the PNM, and when, under the Panday administration, we said, "education for all", you protested, because it is in your interest to keep the children away from the education system, because you want to make them depend on you.

So, when my friend from Chaguana East talked about East Indians doing well under the PNM, under the NHA they do not do so well. The Member for Couva South produced information to this House of 1,007 homes constructed in the Couva constituency, less than 10 homes went to families of East Indian origin. When you look at the distribution today, it has not changed.

So, in spite of you discriminating against persons of East Indian origin, they are fighting their own battle; they do not depend on you the least bit. This cannot continue by the way. We must not allow it to continue. Imagine this is Trinidad and Tobago with a small population. President Barack Obama in his speech on Tuesday spoke about Christians, Jews, Muslims and Hindus in the United States of America. In Tobago, the Hindus cannot get a temple up to today. They cannot get a cremation site up to today.

You could be cremated in the United States, you cannot be cremated in Tobago under this PNM. What a shame. And you call yourself a Government of the people. You are not a Government of the people at all. I would be ashamed to be a Member like the Member for Tobago West. He delivers absolutely nothing; enjoying the perks of office for no services; absolutely zero. He does not raise a matter in this House; does not represent anybody. What do you do at the end of the day? Put you to campaign, you lose. [*Laughter*] Total waste of time. We said that all our children, East Indian, African, "Douglas", Chinese, whatever they are; children of Trinidad and Tobago deserve bright future—a future that should begin with the best possible education for each child. We started the kindergarten schools in this country. We built about 25 schools at that point in time.

Hon. Member: Where are they?

Mr. C. Sharma: Where are they? Shame on you! Member for Arouca/Maloney again; dressing in the Parliament; you know nothing and you are learning very little; find out where they are. We were building them for less than \$300,000. Ask the Member for Tunapuna today; they are building those same schools for \$11 million. The highest cost in the world to cater for 40 children or 50 children at \$11 million.

You know what they are delivering that square foot at? Do you have any idea, Member for Tunapuna? You must work the figures out; at \$11 million for 4,000 square feet or 5,000 square feet. It is very, very frightening. I mean look what happens in this country.

So, your answer is to spend plenty money, waste plenty money and deliver very little. This is a rich country. Under the UNC, \$60 billion went; under the Manning administration, \$210 billion. Can you tell anybody that? Do you have friends in Canada? Do you tell them, listen, I belong to a government that spent \$210 billion in six or seven years and we have nothing to show for it, and you are happy and excited about that? Speak intelligently. Look at it; you have absolutely nothing to contribute.

We gave children a head start with pre-school places. We reduced class sizes—very important—from 35 to 31; hired more than 1,600 new teachers. Under the Panday administration, no school was without teachers; today under the PNM administration, many schools are without teachers. We built 29 new secondary schools. What have you built and at what value? We renovated hospitals and built health care centres in rural communities, and I renew the information given on the last day.

It was under the Panday administration that in every health centre in Trinidad and Tobago, a pharmacy was installed; a full-time doctor was assigned, and a pharmacist was made available. So, Monday to Friday, you could have gone to any health centre under the Panday administration and see a doctor, and if he wrote a prescription, it was delivered on spot. Today that does not obtain; basic medications are not available.

We have said the importance of infrastructure. Let us look at what we did in infrastructure. Roads across this country were paved, including rural areas. So, you did not have the traffic congestion you have today, simply because many of the roads today are not usable. We have built bridges across this country at a fraction of the cost that you are now delivering it for.

Madam Deputy Speaker, today, under the housing policies of this Government, the low-cost housing claimed by the Government, when you look at the industry standard prices, it is among the highest costing in this part of the world. I want to repeat that. The low-cost housing is now among the highest in this part of the Caribbean. What does the Government deliver a home for? Well, the Government answered a question over here, and it was costing in excess of \$100,000 to develop a lot of land. Under the UNC administration, we delivered that same lot of land between \$18,000 and \$22,000 per lot fully serviceable: roads, lights, water, sewer, drainage. Today, you are delivering that lot for \$100,000 your cost. Wastage, corruption!

In fact, one reason why the Government had to introduce this 2 per cent for mortgage for only HDC homes was that the commercial banks were refusing to make mortgages available, because the shelf life of those homes was less than 10 years. The home in Torouba is a good example; the homes in Mayaro, built under the PNM; in excess of \$400,000 they are already collapsing. So, to get buyers now you have to give loans at 2 per cent. Why are those loans not available across the board for all home buyers who wish to buy homes up to \$450,000 as the case may be.

10.15 p.m.

So you see the Government again delivers very little at extremely high prices. Under the UNC administration, more homes got water for the first time, compared to the PNM in the last six or seven years. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, what are some of the challenges this country faces today? Inflation! But where is the track record for inflation? Where was inflation low? When was it kept under 5 per cent? Under the UNC administration. Today the cry in this country is about crime and the inability of the police to respond. Under the UNC administration, 3,000 police officers and close circuit television was introduced.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I recall in the speech delivered by the then Prime Minister, Mr. Basdeo Panday, he said that:

"We will make sure all young people leaving school are able to read and write."

So said, so done, and today because of that introduction of secondary education for all, we are able to have a society that can read and write. Very important. We spoke about reducing the cost of living and creating better jobs and we delivered, so the PNM has to simply go back and see what the UNC did. We talked about making the nation safer and we did with less money because there was a stronger commitment. There was no alliance with criminal gangs. We do not use political, physical force and guns to win elections. We do not use muscle power, you did that.

In fact, the United States condemned you for doing it. We understood the importance of education and we made sure that more schools were built and the quality of education was developed further. We introduced computers in all the schools. When you look at the food prices, we made sure that infrastructure for the farmers was treated with. Today, you do see that. There is a hate relationship with this Government and farmers, so the farming community gets very little.

When you look at the PNM's track record of agricultural access roads—we were told that a road was built leading to lands owned by Ministers of Government. We were told roads were built leading to friends of the Member for St. Ann's East, as indicated by the Member for Nariva. So those are evidence in this Parliament. You do not treat with the needs of the farming community.

When you look at flooding, under the UNC administration the least amount of flooding took place, and then under the PNM, two things happen. Flooding increased because up to today the reservoirs that were promised, that were designed under the UNC to start with, were not implemented by the PNM to this very day. Every other month was a new start date. The Minister of Works and Transport has reported in the Parliament about five or six start dates, but when the flooding goes to the agricultural community, what does the PNM respond with? PR, they go with cheques for \$41, and \$100.

When the flooding came recently, the Member for Diego Martin Central was able to go out there and say, "You will get relief of \$3,500 in appliances; you will get \$10,000 where homes were damaged", because that is PNM muscle power. The PNM has that power, but you could not do that across the— We made sure that more homes were able to obtain a regular supply of water and affordable electricity. We went further. We made sure that we reduced the pensioner's cost by 25 per cent—70,000 pensioners.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the important thing is that the Government must be caring. The Government must use the resources of the State. The PNM gives the impression, we own this money. When you look at Ministers handing out the resources of the State, for instance the Minister of Sport, he only goes to PNM areas. He uses the taxpayers' moneys to buy football equipment and so on. In fact, it is very interesting to note something. When you look—and the Member for Diego Martin North/East advises him not to waste resources in the UNC controlled constituencies, and that is why we talk about the discrimination and racism. It is very clear. Very, very clear.

Recently, the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs indicated they had spent between \$12 million and \$15 million in purchasing sports equipment and so on.

None was delivered in Fyzabad, Oropouche West, Princes Town North and St. Augustine. These are Opposition held constituencies, but all it was delivered in PNM constituencies.

In fact, even if they go into a UNC controlled constituency, what they often do is to look for a PNM party group and convert them into some NGO group to receive those gifts. Under the Panday administration, we said that we will reduce the pension age from 65 to 60 and further, we will increase the pension to \$3,000 a month. Today, the pensioners are crying because the moneys they are obtaining—and Government has now come and changed it to a grant as if they are doing them a favour. We said as a right, you have worked in this country, you are a citizen of this country and you must be able to take care of yourselves with addition to the State assisting, pension should be \$3,000. Again, we want to renew the call that pensioners need a minimum pension of \$3,000.

It was the Panday administration that started to make sure our Embassies abroad started to look for investments in this country, and we were able to win the most investments in this part of the world. In fact, during the Panday administration, we had more than 100 international companies coming to do business or making enquiries into doing business here, including Tobago.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, today the Government has indicated absolutely nothing in terms of adding value. They have not addressed any section of the national community, they have not addressed the school children and said, "Listen, we are going to make sure that the school buses come for you. We are going to make sure teachers are going to be available." A simple thing, under the UNC administration, we started giving out computers to make sure that all the schools could access computer information. Under the PNM, that has been reduced significantly. Many schools are without a simple telephone connection to obtain Internet access, even though there is wireless today. Again, that high level is either incompetence—it is a straight case of not wanting the children to grow and develop. It is happening all the time.

A stronger economy really means getting more people involved in working for us in Trinidad and Tobago, and under UNC we made sure of doing that. What we did was to make sure that under the Small Business Development Company, loans were available. What the PNM came and did, they changed it to NEDCO and it became a secret organization almost like a lodge, where only PNM members can get because nobody knows who gets these loans, what are the qualifications. It is secret evidence; nobody knows the repayments on it. This is how the PNM operates, everything is buy, buy. Buy the support.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Free for PNM.

Mr. C. Sharma: When you look at small business failures under this PNM, it keeps increasing. Earlier today, the Member for Oropouche read from a document produced by a consultant, paid for with taxpayers' money of course, a large sum of money. Look how the PNM uses anything. I am so ashamed of PNM, so ashamed. Look how the PNM operates.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the average monthly estimated expenditure for a CEPEP contractor—now the CEPEP contractors are largely PNM sub-offices as well. Water pipe, not bottle, pipe, \$656; electricity, \$569; phones, listen to this, landlines \$959, what are they using these landlines for? To do PNM propaganda work, because at 25 cents a call in your community, \$956 is a lot of calls. That is almost 4,000 calls. Cellphones, \$788; Internet, \$377; stationery—pens, paper, ink, \$646; gas for whacker, \$1,946. That is like gas for a Mercedes Benz. String for whacker, \$1,657; garbage bags, \$795; other costs, \$4,300. The average amount of money spent on recurring monthly expenses was estimated to be \$12,763. Do you know who that means? An MP's office funded by the State is costing less than what you are funding the CEPEP office for, and seeing about 40,000 people in a constituency and nobody is being trained under this programme.

So these offices are largely used to promote PNM propaganda. Somebody made the point about the chairman I think of Solid Waste, Mr. Ray Braithwaite. I want the Minister to say that Mr. Ray Braithwaite was in Tobago, paid for by SWMCOL, campaigning in the Tobago election.

Mr. Callender: Campaigning for whom?

Mr. C. Sharma: Campaigning for the PNM and the Member for Tobago West has just confirmed it. So here is how you use state resources. I want the Government to answer to this House, how many state bodies sent officers to Tobago under the pretext of doing some business with the company, only during the period of the Tobago House of Assembly election.

Mr. Callender: All.

Mr. C. Sharma: And that happens all the time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The speaking time of the hon. Member for Fyzabad has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

10.30 p.m.

Mr. C. Sharma: Madam Deputy Speaker, you will recall under the Panday administration, we indicated that we would promote and develop CEPEP and URP to include a training component making sure that those persons can be better prepared for work outside.

Success of business as it relates to CEPEP was very unsuccessful, 18 per cent; it means to say under CEPEP which is funded 100 per cent by the Government with all the support agencies, there is a 25 per cent failure. They cannot even run a business where they have all the money and resources. What a shame! This is your account for which taxpayers are paying money; you should be so ashamed.

Dr. Browne: I am ashamed of you.

Mr. C. Sharma: I do not understand what you have delivered in this country.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the PNM claims that it established CEPEP to create employment, but according to their report for which the taxpayers paid, previously employed females, 88 per cent. So they took 88 per cent of females who were working and put them into CEPEP; males were 89 per cent. So CEPEP was not created for employment. I will tell you what it was created for.

Madam Deputy Speaker, they want to claim they have improved the lives of persons working in CEPEP but the statistics are here. Before CEPEP there was 67 per cent working and during CEPEP period there was 77 per cent, an increase of 10 per cent. I will tell you what happened with this 10 per cent; during election they put water in all the PNM supporters' homes, no bills were produced and there were no applications for WASA. That is how they got an increase of 10 per cent.

Under the Panday administration 80 per cent had electricity, when you put them in CEPEP it went up to 88 per cent, an increase of 8 per cent. Election time came and the people were connected to vote PNM.

Landline telephones, 44 per cent; when they joined CEPEP there was an increase of 5 per cent. One thing you could claim for is indoor toilets which increased by 13 per cent, so when the Member talks about mess this is where they have to go. Do you see the connection? At the end of the day they have delivered absolutely nothing for a large sum of money.

Madam Deputy Speaker, before they were in CEPEP workers, 53 per cent, had refrigerators, when they joined CEPEP they bought a second one and it went to 84 per cent, an increase of 26 per cent.

Hon. Member: What is wrong with that?

Mr. C. Sharma: What is wrong with it is that you are causing people to buy on hire purchase rather than save, and to duplicate what they have. This is what the report says.

Madam Deputy Speaker, what I found very interesting and I would have to get some legal opinion on it, so I hope the Member for Tabaquite is listening carefully. They say one of the reasons CEPEP was created was for employment and I have just demonstrated that 88 per cent of the female employees were already working and 89 per cent males, but the same report says there was a political connection, it was for political reasons. Which political? PNM political. This is misuse of State funds. You cannot be allowed to continue this way, this is not your mother's or father's money this is the money of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and they must have equal access to the goods and resources that the State must provide. You cannot be allowed to continue this way.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member for Chaguanas East was talking about the availability of water in this country and what it costs. I indicated that when we left office, 80 per cent of the population was receiving pipe-borne water. We were aiming towards all homes getting water and during that short period 700 communities which did not have water under the PNM received water. We increased total water production by more than 100,000,000 litres per day, a 50 per cent increase in the production of water, that is what the UNC administration did and these figures are available to you.

More than 22,000 citizens benefited from discounted water cost through a Hardship Relief Programme. So the duty of Government is to make sure that all citizens, and in particular those who are poor, receive essential services. It was the Cabinet of the Panday administration that said that no citizen in this country must be without basic utilities: lights and water.

Today under the PNM, many families cannot get water or electricity connection for all kinds of reasons. We made sure that postal services reach every nook and cranny of this country including Tobago.

When the Member for Caroni East raised the question of the port by way of a motion the last day, it was based on a concern expressed by the management of the Port Authority; he did not manufacture the letter. They said the port was going to be closed for two weeks and they told the business community, they did not tell the Member for Caroni East. The business community contacted the loyal Opposition which represents all the people of Trinidad and Tobago asking us to raise it in the Parliament because they were concerned and we did our duty.

The Minister of Works and Transport quarrelled with them and then had it changed to three days. They are talking about the two cruise lines which will be coming to accommodate the visitors. The port was dredged by 12 metres, close to 40 feet by the UNC government, that is how these two cruise ships can come in. We also upgraded the handling services because before one had to wait three to five months for their containers which were brought in for Christmas or Carnival.

Major refurbishment took place both at the Port of Spain Port and the Point Lisas Port and in fact, one of the best ports in the world is Singapore and our improvements were very close to that of Singapore. In fact, many of the Caribbean countries were beginning to access their goods and services through our ports. Transshipment services to Trinidad continued to increase; we were becoming the sea port hub of the Caribbean under the UNC administration.

The water taxi was a UNC idea, and we had indicated that we would start it from Cedros into Point Fortin, into San Fernando, Claxton Bay, coming up the road. When one looks at the money spent by the PNM administration for those water taxis today, it is extremely costly, in fact the industry standards are complaining you should not go that way.

The Piarco International Airport records are in this Parliament and the international airports of the world. It was among the least costly in the world, dollar per square foot. When Heathrow did its renovations four years ago, it cost \$55 billion. Today, all the great people who are coming are coming to the Piarco International Airport built by the Panday administration.

You started calling it a “Shed of shame”, today you have made the Brian Lara the “tall shed of shame” courtesy the PNM, and the Member for Diego Martin Central said there is corruption and we all know that because it started off at \$300 million and has reached \$900 million today. The Member for Diego Martin Central reminded me to remind the national community that this PNM administration of today, yesteryear and the years before have not delivered a single project within budget.

Let us shop around Port of Spain for two minutes; the Twin Towers, 200 per cent increase; Hall of Justice, 200 per cent increase; the Mount Hope Medical Sciences Complex, 1000 per cent increase. In fact, during the Finance Committee meeting I asked the Minister of Finance and she has hidden that information. That is what the Government does. The Minister told us that when they give us answers, it is a courtesy, they are not obligated, they have no responsibility to anyone, this is PNM country, we control the purse so we are not going to give you information.

We asked what is the cost of the land per square foot rented out where the Hyatt, the First Tower and the Third Tower are. It is \$3.4 billion, so this is why there is no money to provide simple goods and services in the country and people are getting fed up and rightfully so. I wish you can get up and say my Government has delivered these 10 projects within budget and within the time frame.

The UDeCott enquiry is showing the amount of corruption that is taking place. It is showing that the rules were not maintained, it is a friend-friend situation; that is how the PNM operates and wins. It gives out all these fancy contracts. In fact, it indicated that the funding came from many of these contractors. It cannot be doing that all the time, it is wrong. We all have to fight election and raise funds. How can the Member for Arouca/Maloney spend more than \$1 million or \$2 million in a campaign? From where does the money come? How does the Member for Diego Martin Central—it is true he is a doctor and he has a few dollars but where does he get \$2—\$3million to fight Ken Valley?

It is kickback from CEPEP contractors and from all these contractors. So when the Member for Chaguanas East sings for his supper and says East Indians are doing good here in spite of PNM's discrimination and racism, this country needs to be rescued, this must be the mantra now, and the UNC is committed to it.

We go every Monday night to every part of this country and report to the national community; we raise their concerns; we fight their battles Monday night after Monday night. Just look at what PNM has brought this country to. There is absolutely no economic performance. We must return this country to what obtained under the UNC administration. Do you know how nice it is for families to go to the beach together?

I am so disappointed with the Member for Barataria/San Juan when a matter raised by the Leader of the Opposition indicated that he removed more than \$3.6 million from lifeguard services and the Member said it was used to advertise and promote.

10.45 p.m.

Do you know what is advertisement and promotion for this PNM administration? Hold a party for their friends and family; eat, drink and tote as much as you could; hundreds of thousands of dollars. So that when the tourists come there are no lifeguards, because they advertise for the tourists to come. That is like offering someone to get married and saying: "Well, we go build the house after." When you build the house, they will say: "Well, listen, you know what? We will buy a stereo before we buy the TV so we will see advertisements. This is the PNM way of ruling this country.

We need to make sure that the foreign exchange demonstrates our earning ability. If with \$9 a barrel we could have left US \$2.4 billion, when oil was \$134, what should it be? So this foolishness about “we have saved \$12 billion”; you have saved absolutely nothing in comparison.

I want to make a few recommendations. I want to recommend that the national community, all the NGOs, all the CBOs, all the business organizations, all the faith-based organizations, get involved in the governance of this country by becoming aware of what is happening. We are in a crisis. All over the world there is financial crisis and the PNM says there is none in Trinidad and Tobago. They are strangers to the truth. They feel they could hoodwink, because while all of this is happening they have not cut their advertising budget; they continue to spend in excess of \$300 million to hoodwink the national community with all kinds of concerns.

We have to make sure we get involved and we have to make sure and tell this Government that it cannot continue cultivating relationships with gang leaders by giving them the title of community leaders, and persons who use muscle power and violence in the elections and the threat of violence. They cannot use the police to arrest innocent people and put them through the courts and then they win their cases because there is no evidence, as they did with the voter padding. In fact, the one that was convicted, if I recall, was somebody from a PNM constituency moving to another constituency under the instructions of the PNM campaign team to register to vote.

A further recommendation I want to make is that the Government take into consideration fairness and equality, that is, stop this practice of discrimination. I want to raise the question of the constituency fund. It cannot be and must not continue when a house is lost by fire in any part of this country, that the PNM members can pick up the phone and call the persons at the different ministries or at Self-help and get \$10,000 as the case might be, or \$15,000, and when a similar fire takes place in a UNC-controlled constituency, it is a runaround; people have to wait six, seven or 10 months. It must not be so.

The social welfare department must respond in the same light. Let me tell you what obtains, and I want to give you a good example. The Member for Diego Martin Central is also the Minister of Social Development. Within one week of the floods he was able to get for his constituents, \$3,500 worth in appliances delivered. There was a house fire in his constituency and there was a house that collapsed. In both instances, through his intervention, the families got \$10,000 under the National Commission for Self-help. The same thing has not happened in the constituency of Fyzabad.

When you look at Ministers making visits for which they are paid in excess of \$60,000 a month—no favours. I do not want any Minister to grant me a favour and I do not think any Member on this side wants a favour granted. But when you see the response, in the PNM areas you get the Government officers to respond almost immediately.

I raised on a previous occasion that there are communities which have applied for eye glasses, for instance—a provision for persons under the social welfare; taxpayers' money; no gift from the PNM—and they are waiting for those glasses in excess of one year. It was drawn to the Minister's attention. So the glasses are delivered one year later, by which time the strength of the glasses has changed, so the glasses are useless.

Persons under that same ministry are waiting on wheelchairs. We must thank the Mayor of Chaguanas. Through an outfit that he does community and social work, he was able to bring a container of wheelchairs that were delivered across this country, in PNM constituencies and in UNC constituencies. Why does it take so long for a simple thing as a wheelchair? Why do you think everything that the Government has to make available is a gift? You see, "we in the PNM, we have power. You wait until we say you get it."

Why is there discrimination in the funeral grant? Why are you discriminating against the dead? When certain persons go, you have to ask them how many children they have; how many grandchildren they have; if they have any family in America or Canada and why they do not send money for you for the funeral, but when it is in other areas, \$3,550 approved immediately. Why? I want to see a change to that.

All that I have said is really the cry of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. They want this country to return to good governance which obtained only under the UNC administration. The citizens of Trinidad and Tobago across the board, whether they are from Diego Martin Central, Tunapuna, Fyzabad or Barrackpore, want to live a normal, comfortable life. They want to make sure that when the State uses the taxpayers' moneys, that they are treated equally; that the playgrounds in their areas are done as the playgrounds in Diego Martin Central.

Do you not find it passing strange that all the playgrounds in the PNM-controlled constituencies have electric lights? All! In La Brea they went back and lit three grounds that were already lighted. They improved the lighting, they claimed. That does not happen in the UNC constituencies. Why is that so? What do you want the children in Fyzabad to do? Why do you want them to beg? Why is that so?

When you look at the grants from the National Commission for Self-help, as I speak here today, 80 per cent of the total number goes to PNM-controlled constituencies. It goes further. The dollar value of the grant, more than 85 per cent is going to PNM-controlled constituencies. So it means to say, when an NGO or a community-based group in Fyzabad applies for a grant to do a water project, they have to put out 50 per cent of the funding, or 50 per cent of the resources required. It might be labour; it might be the use of a back hoe. In the PNM constituencies they put out not a cent.

It goes further. Where that project is not funded by the National Commission for Self-help, the PNM does it under NSDP, the National Social Development Programme. I cannot understand why you discriminate so much. Does it pain you? Do you not have a conscience? Do you not go to church? Do you not go to the mandir or the masjid? Do you not pray? Do you not have children? Do your kids not ask you: Mom or Dad or uncle, or aunt, or in your case, stepfather, how is it that these projects are done this way? How are these projects done differently in the UNC-controlled constituencies? I do not understand. So on behalf of the citizens we are saying, let fair play return.

Mr. Abdul-Hamid: What is wrong with a stepfather?

Mr. C. Sharma: What is wrong with you being a stepfather? You are unfit.

So this debate in this Parliament is not about personalities and it is not about who could drop more thunder here. The Mighty Duke—may his soul rest in peace—was the man of thunder; not you. You are not even a light, a dim light. You cannot use your office to promote yourself.

Mr. Imbert: Is seven years you are saying that now.

Mr. C. Sharma: The Member for Diego Martin Central, for years we have come and produced the evidence; for years we have come and produced the documentation and they do not change. So the people are going to change them. This next election is about what is right for Trinidad and Tobago and what is right is a UNC Alliance government come next election. It must happen for the people of Trinidad and Tobago; not for office holders!

I remain very committed to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and I look forward to returning this country to UNC administration. One must never forget the good work done by the UNC administration in terms of across the board, which was critical, when people across the board were happy with a government. Today, more than 75 per cent of the people of Trinidad and Tobago are not happy with the PNM government.

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[MR. SHARMA]

Friday, January 23, 2009

The people of Tobago will tell you, their best period in terms of the availability of equality of resources—[*Interruption*—you cannot speak for the people of Tobago West—was under the UNC administration. They will tell you that. Sister Pam Nicholson will say that; Morgan Job will say that and the people of Tobago will say that. [*Interruption*] You do not talk to the people of Tobago West. You just collect money under false pretences; you deliver absolutely nothing.

In terms of oil and gas—

Mr. Abdul-Hamid: What about your “dougla” child?

Mr. C. Sharma: You are talking about “dougla”? What is your question? Ask the question.

Mr. Abdul-Hamid: Talk your talk “nah man”.

Mr. C. Sharma: Ask the question.

Mr. Abdul-Hamid: Your “swell face gone down?”

Mr. C. Sharma: Ask the question.

Mr. Abdul-Hamid: The swelling on your face “gone down”.

Mr. C. Sharma: You cannot hide behind foolishness, you know. I want to advise the Member for Chaguanas East, you cannot be personal. If you want to bring your wife’s business here, that is your business; if you want to bring your mother’s business here, that is your business. Here, I come to do the business of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and I am not interested in what your wife does; I am not interested in how she earns an income. I have no interest in those things. [*Interruption*]

The Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West and the Member for St. Joseph, you are previous ministers of the church and you must advise. If I do something wrong here, I expect my Leader to pull me over the coals and you are doing wrong. You cannot get personal. The wife, the friend, the mother, the sister of any Member does not exist in this House. What exists here is the Member for Fyzabad, duly elected on six occasions by the people of Fyzabad. [*Desk thumping*] The Member for Caroni East was elected—

Mr. Abdul-Hamid: How many times you get cuff?

Mr. C. Sharma: You are asking “how many times you get cuff? This Member came begging the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Basdeo Panday, for a job.

Mr. S. Panday: Really?

Mr. C. Sharma: He was involved in an attempt to overthrow the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and hid in a ravine somewhere. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: Madam Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 36(5). He will have to withdraw that, you know.

Mr. S. Panday: When they giving, you “doh” get up though!

Dr. Gopeesingh: He is a terrorist; he should be in jail—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Fyzabad, that last statement that you made, could you please withdraw it?

Mr. C. Sharma: Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to withdraw that statement from the record of Trinidad and Tobago. I am saddened when my friends and my God-children call me from New York and London and say: “Who is this Mustapha Abdul-Hamid; the same guy who was involved in that incident?” I say, no. I protect him. I sent out e-mails when thousands of people—I am the chief operating officer of the United National Congress—

Madam Deputy Speaker: I allowed you extra time just to withdraw the statement because your time has expired. Have you withdrawn the statement?

Mr. C. Sharma: Withdrawn fully, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

11.00 p.m.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs (Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon): Madam Deputy Speaker, it is very late and my contribution will, therefore, be limited to the edification of the Member for Caroni East and, for his benefit and that of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, to bring clarification on the difference between the Caricom Petroleum Fund and the Caribbean Development Fund. I will only be 10 minutes. [*Interruption*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, could we allow the hon. Member for Point Fortin to have your undivided attention, please?

Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: The Petroleum Fund started in 2004. It is completely different to the Caricom Development Fund. It is now called the Caricom Petroleum Fund, disbursing grant facilities. There is no expected repayment. The government of St. Vincent benefited on the basis that it was a grant for a particular purpose, which I will identify in a few minutes.

It was set up to give relief to those States that were experiencing economic hardship because of persistently high prices—the price of oil and petroleum products on the international market. These countries were generally net importers of petroleum products affected by the obvious high energy cost, therefore requests were limited to specific purposes, that of poverty alleviation, disaster prevention, mitigation measures and disaster recovery in emergency cases.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago, at a time when revenues were high from high oil prices, contributed to the fund. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has no control over who benefits. In fact, applications are made to the Bureau of Council of Finance Ministers, which approves the funds. It is not our Government.

In 2006, a special window was created for the improvement of national security measures and, later, in 2008, another special window was created for infrastructural development. I believe that it is under this particular window that the Government of St. Vincent was able to benefit.

Dr. Gopeesingh: So we have given them \$86 million.

Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: We have not given them; we do not make those decisions. We contribute to the fund, but the decision is made by the Bureau of Council of Finance Ministers.

When oil prices are low, we make no contribution to the fund, so at this time the Government makes no contribution to the fund.

Dr. Gopeesingh: How much have you given already?

Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: I cannot tell you, but there is a balance in the fund now of \$429 million and at this time we are making no contribution.

Dr. Gopeesingh: What is the threshold?

Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: I am not sure what the figure is, but the important thing is that we are making no contribution, and the balance is \$429 million.

The Caricom Development Fund, which is new and which was established in 2006, was established early last year and the decision was taken; in fact, the Fund was launched in 2008 and operations only commenced at the end of 2008.

All Caricom member states are required to be contributors to the fund. There is, therefore, a two-tiered system for how much each country should contribute based on whether a country is an MDC or an LDC. Obviously, we fell into the category of an MDC and it was required that we contribute US \$37.7 million, which amounts to approximately \$235 million.

The Government, in 2008, made a full contribution to the fund. [*Interruption*] It is a one-off payment, but the first amount to be capitalized was about \$100 million. What will happen next is that the board will seek donations from the international community based on that first tranche of \$100 million, then international countries will be invited to give contributions to the fund. It was set up for distinctly different purposes.

This one was set up to help disadvantaged countries, regions and sectors which felt the effect of the implementation of CSME. Obviously, the implementation of CSME requires countries to put certain systems in place—trade related systems, labour market systems and national accreditation bodies, but many of the member states in Caricom are unable to do so without some funding and this is why it was set up.

I want you to think, Member, that, all toll, this is a contribution of TT \$237 million and that we have \$429 million in the Caricom Petroleum Development Fund; and of the benefit that Trinidad and Tobago has, simply on the basis of the level of trade with Caricom countries. I want to draw on the *Review of the Economy 2008, Shaping our Future Together: Vision 2020*, and inform you of some of the statistics.

In 2005, Trinidad and Tobago exported to Caricom countries \$13 billion; in 2006, it was \$15 billion; in 2007, \$11 billion; between April 2006 and March 2007, it was \$14.8 billion; and between April 2007 and March 2008, it was \$9.6 billion. If we compare that with our imports from Caricom countries—I do not really have to list those, paltry—we hardly import, so that the Balance of Trade is in our favour and tremendously so.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

I will call the net expore figures from 2005 annually—\$12.4 billion, \$14.9 billion, \$10.6 billion, \$14.2 billion and \$8.9 billion. Member, I would like you to compare this with \$235 million, the contribution we have made to the Caricom Development Fund and the \$429 million, which we have in the Caricom Petroleum Fund. I do not think that I now need to justify why this is not really a drain on the resources of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. It cannot be justified just comparing with the trade figures.

In the interest of time, I merely wanted to make that clarification.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Why was St Vincent chosen?

Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: I cannot tell you that because we do not make those decisions. There are guidelines and there is a Bureau of Finance Ministers. They make the decisions. All we do is provide the funds.

That ends my contribution.

Mr. Subhas Panday (*Princes Town North*): Mr. Speaker, I had no intention of entering the debate, but having heard the contribution of the Minister of National Security, I could not let that pass without comment.

The hon. Minister of National Security has come to this Parliament and, on every occasion, given the same speech. He is like a recurring decimal in this Parliament. He adds nothing new when he comes and they intend to deal with crime.

There was a press conference yesterday and they said that this year would not be like last year. Last year, they caused 550 persons to be killed, but we are going to put an end to it. Lo and behold, today is the 23rd and 38 persons have been killed. One would have thought that he would have come here today and told the Parliament what steps would be taken to reduce crime; a holistic approach to crime. He came here and added nothing to the debate. The Member for Oropouche East did him a favour when he wrote his resignation and handed it to him. He came back today and did the same thing. Had the Member for Chaguanas West been here, he would have had two red cards.

What a disgrace! What a lack of vision by this Government! What a lack of will power to deal with crime! This Government had so much money and it passed through them like a dose of salts. We ask the people today to pass judgment on the PNM. Whether you are a child, adult or whatever, pass judgment on the PNM today.

We ask the people: Do you feel safer today than before the PNM came? Are your mothers and sisters crying for those who have been murdered more today than ever before? The answer is yes. Would you all say that this Government is in good hands? A most incompetent people! A moribund Government!

Mr. Speaker, ask people today: Do you feel safer to go to the bank than before the PNM came into government? The answer is no. Do you feel safer in your homes today? People of Trinidad and Tobago, do you feel safer in your homes today under this incompetent PNM Government? And the answer is no.

So what do you do? People of Tobago, we congratulate you for taking that small step forward to kick the PNM out of power. We call on all the forces in Trinidad and Tobago, all the parties in Trinidad and Tobago, all NGOs in Trinidad and Tobago who cannot stand the incompetence of the PNM in dealing with crime to come together and give them what Tobago intends to give them.

They are fooling Tobago with money. The Prime Minister came to the Parliament and said: "What Tobago wants Tobago gets", trying to fool the people of Tobago. Before election, they said "clean sweep"; we taking all this time. They

spent all the money, but the people of Tobago are smart. They are seeing their incompetence and lethargy. The rest of Trinidad and Tobago, let us join together and get rid of this Government. This Government is presiding over the murder of over 2,000, more than a whole electoral district in Tobago.

11.15 p.m.

Since the PNM came into power they have presided over the deaths of young persons who are not involved in any crime. When those persons are killed, do you know what the Prime Minister says? He says: “Collateral damage. You had no right to be passing there.” You have no right to be walking the road as law-abiding citizens. Do not pass there. That is collateral damage. Imagine a PNM government is sitting there and people are being killed. Hear how they care for you; collateral damage. No value for life; that is what the PNM is about. They come here and make all kinds of funny and silly jokes. Look at the level of the contribution of the Member for Chaguanas East. It was painful to the ear. People outside are suffering.

The Minister of National Security came here today. What did he say? He said: “We have the radar system in place. How do you say we are not working? It is up and running.” Hear how stupid, shortsighted and incompetent this Government is. We have seen a pattern of how the drugs are coming in. Do you know what they do? They sit and watch the pattern. They sit on their hides. Every one of you is guilty of the murdering people of Trinidad and Tobago because every one of you sits on your hide. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Dumas: Mr. Speaker—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: No, I would let it pass. If he was to identify somebody—He is making a general statement.

Mr. Dumas: Mr. Speaker—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Are you on a point of order?

Mr. Dumas: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Which is it?

Mr. Dumas: I am suggesting that when a Member of this Parliament—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: No, you must—Take your seat please. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Dumas: Thirty-six.

Mr. Speaker: Now, you need to sit. He is making a general statement. It is a general statement. I have seen that permissible. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Dumas: So, I am guilty of murder?

Mr. Speaker: No. It is a general statement which, I have seen in *May's*, would allow something like that. Please continue.

Mr. S. Panday: I really feel sorry for my friend for saying that he is guilty for that. I would never say that about him. I really feel sorry and I do not know if your conscience is acting up on you. I apologize if I hurt you in any way.

The point I was making was how long has this radar system been working? It has been put up over three years ago. Therefore, the PNM knows. They have seen a pattern as to how the drugs are coming in. They have seen the pattern of how the guns are coming in, because the radar is picking it up. The Prime Minister and the Minister of National Security have come before this House and said: "We know the pattern." They have known the pattern for the past three years. Members of the PNM, why did you not take action against it? Why did you allow guns to come in for three years and do nothing about it? You knew it was coming. You saw a pattern and that would not only be the spots or areas where the guns and arms are landing, but you also see the pattern of the time when the guns and drugs come in. What does pattern mean? There are patterns in terms of time, space and location. Why did the PNM not take action? "All yuh like tuh heckle? Heckle now. All yuh like tuh ask questions, ask questions now." I am asking every single one of you on the other side: Why did the PNM not take action, having seen a pattern as to how the drugs have been coming into the country? Is it that the PNM is in cahoots with the drug people? It is that the drug people support the PNM for elections? "De big drug barons, yuh fraid tuh touch dem? Because yuh in cahoots with dem?" These are the questions you must ask.

If the Government, with a surveillance system, knows how the drugs are coming in and it is not giving directions or information to the relevant police or department, how do they expect the police to work? Why are you hiding the information from the police? You have 555 Crime Watch. You are asking the people outside if they know that a crime is being committed to call Crime Watch. Members of the PNM, why do you not call the police and tell them that you know the pattern of drugs? Why is the PNM hiding information from the police? Why is the PNM preventing the police from implementing the law? Why is the PNM so wicked and heartless? That is why I said that the PNM has presided over the murder of so many people. This is the reason.

When the UNC was in government, we told the people that the UNC tried to deal with crime and drugs. They said that we threw our hands up in the air. We went, without spending \$1 billion. The United National Congress, under the Panday administration, without spending \$1 billion, went to the United States because the United States and the metropolitan countries think as the Minister said today, that Trinidad is a transshipment port and, therefore, drugs coming here will affect them. They will give you assistance. They gave Trinidad and Tobago assistance. They gave them two fast interceptor boats. Do you know what they did? Every one of you should be ashamed of yourself. The Minister of National Security came here today, and said that they refused or they cannot fix the engine of the boat. That is what he said today. He said that they are spending \$1 billion to buy boats. You refuse to fix the engines of the boats and you refuse to deal with crime. You know about the pattern.

Tell me something, Minister of Foreign Affairs, you can be in contact with the United States Government, can you not contact the US Embassy and tell them: "Look give us boats. The engines are giving us trouble." They probably cannot source parts here. Ask for international assistance to deal with crime. Why did you not do it? Help is available. You do not have to wait and spend money. You have the pattern. The American Government, the British Government or any government which feels that its people will be affected by the narcotics trade will be given assistance. Why did this lazy, incompetent, indolent PNM Government not call upon international governments to assist them? They know the pattern. What conclusions could somebody derive from this? The reasonable and inescapable conclusion that could be drawn is that either the PNM is in cahoots with the criminals or they do not care.

People of Trinidad and Tobago, we are bringing this to your notice. The crime rate—the Keith Noel 136. You marched up and down and tried to motivate the people, but you never analyzed how the PNM government is causing and fuelling the crime. They left those two fast interceptor boats in the dockyard, while they knew the crime is coming. Nobody believes you. You have no creditability in dealing with crime.

He came here today and quoted all kinds of highfalutin figures. I think it came up to "\$1.something" billion. That is money we could have used to create employment in the country, in order to stave off a recession. Instead of that, you have taken over \$1 billion and sent it as foreign exchange to a foreign country. This is what you are doing. This is the Government that cares? Answer now. "Yuh cyah answer!" Is this the Government that cares?

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Could they not have rented some boats? Why could they not have asked the US Government or any friendly government that is interested in dealing with crime to assist them? They could have said: “Yuh see you all, we figure all yuh in drugs too. We feel yuh really doh want to deal in drugs. We eh giving yuh nothing free.” That could have been a possibility. Why did they not rent the boats? Why did they not rent some fast vessels? Why did you not do that? You have so much money. “Money falling out all yuh ears. When the economy was going good, money was falling out yuh ears. PNM, money was falling out yuh ears.” Why did you not take some money and find out about somewhere and buy some speed boats? As a matter of fact, they probably could have gotten Mr. Solo for free. That is doing 100 miles per hour on the sea. In the last boat race, Mr. Solo did it in one hour and five minutes. There are fast boats here. There were fast boats in the great race. We have developed a culture of fast boats. You have the resources here, why did you not use it? [*Interruption*] What did the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre say?

The midnight hour is coming, search your consciences and ask yourself if you really made a genuine effort to deal with crime. Search your consciences at the midnight hour tonight and ask yourselves if you have ever tried to deal with crime. The answer is no. Do you know what they did, Mr. Speaker? They announced to the Parliament that they intend to buy the billion dollar boats. This Government is so foolish; do you know what they did? They came to this Parliament and announced to the nation that the first piece of steel would be cut to start building the boat today. The hon. Minister came here today and said that there are many things that you cannot speak in public, for national security purposes. But the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Security came to this House and told the people that they are bringing the OPVs.

They told us when they would start to build them and that we would be getting them by “so and so time”. If yuh tell de tief: Hear wha happen, I going tuh put surveillance. My house does not have any locks, the doors are open and ah have all meh goods in de house. Hear what happen, I going tuh deal wit all yuh. Yuh see next two years ah go buy locks for meh house.” What do you want them to do in the meantime, not run rampage? That is why the drug trade is flourishing under the PNM. You are telling the people: The Prime Minister said at one time that in order to become competitive, they had to retool the manufacturing sector. Is it that you would tell the drug people: “Boy, fix up yuhself and retool to meet what we bringing fuh yuh”? Are you warning them? Are you putting them on guard? Members, heckle now. What happen?

Hon. Member: “We tired.”

Mr. S. Panday: Tired! Lazy! That is the PNM. Incompetence is what the PNM is all about. Tired? You have the people's work to do. You have a duty to do to serve the people. Since this new Government came into Parliament, the crime rate has increased. "Yuh tired." I am also tired. I am tired more than you are. I am tired of the number of young persons who have been killed. That is what I am tired about and that is what you should be tired about. You should not say that you are tired and that you want to go home and sleep. You should be tired about the number of persons who have been killed, raped and robbed. That is what you should be tired about; not tired to go home.

Mr. Speaker, if this was not national security, then what is? The Minister came and told the bandits: "Yuh have tuh make deliveries and ah giving all yuh a little chance again." He came today and informed the country that this is a matter of national security. Is that the way you all are running national security in this country? "Ah was going to buy de lock to lock meh house, but ah cyah get de lock. Take two months more nah boy." He came to the Parliament and told us that those vessels would be delivered late. Is this the way you intend to deal with crime?

11.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, if this is not a national security secret then, what is it? Do you know what the hon. Minister did today? He came and told the bandits, late delivery, we are going to give you all a chance again. He said that today. This is a matter of national security. Is that the way the Government runs national security in this country? You see, I was going to purchase the lock for my house, and I cannot get the lock so take two more months. The Minister came to the Parliament today and told them that the vessels are going to be delivered late. Is this the way you intend to deal with crime? Is this the way you intend to reduce the crime rate? These are questions that we have to ask. We are dealing with this matter today in the Parliament, because of what was said.

Mr. Speaker, they bought the blimp and millions of dollars was spent to repair it. Has the blimp reduced the crime rate? Has the blimp reduced the murder rate? Answer! We will not get any answer from the PNM, do you know why? The answer is no. They said that the blimp is not the panacea for dealing with crime, but it is part of a strategic plan. What strategic plan? The blimp has been operating for a long time, so what strategic plan do you have? There is no strategic plan whatsoever except using it as a tool for SAUTT to harass people who are opposed to the PNM. [*Desk thumping*] That is what it is! Instead of going down in the gutter and dealing with crime, they are using all the facilities and resources in the country in the wrong direction. They are misleading people and

telling them that the blimp is a part of that set-up. Has the blimp made any dent in anything? The answer is, indeed, no.

Mr. Speaker, do we have any guarantee that these vessels are going to do anything? One would have thought that the Minister would have given hope to the nation and say that they are not going to have the figures like last year, and we have a plan A, a plan B and a plan C in place. Is it that the Minister feels that it is a matter of national security and he does not want to say? Yet, he told them that the vessels are not going to be on time. One would have thought that he would have given the people hope. The hon. Minister came here on several occasions and said the same thing. On every occasion, he attempted to give the people hope. There is no credibility at all.

We call upon the Government to tell the people that they cannot deal with crime and they do not have the will to deal with crime. They had operation anaconda, operation desert storm and all kinds of other operations and they cannot deal with crime.

They asked us to help them pass legislation. At the beginning of the last session they said that UNC was the cause of crime because the UNC was not cooperating, but they are responsible for the escalation of crime in the country. We gave them the parliamentary support and the laws were passed. Why has the crime rate continued after we have passed legislation? Did you all not ask that question? Are you all sleeping? Did you ask why this is happening? It seems to me that the PNM wants to make sure that the situation is not solved. On this occasion, they cannot get away.

The Minister came hear today, incompetent as he is, and do you know what he tried to do? They have been in Government for seven years and they are saying that what they are reaping now is what the UNC sow. Blame game! That is what the PNM is about. Assuming, but not conceding what the Minister said had some truth in it, after seven years and with \$200 billion passing through his hands, could he not deal with crime? Now, we have to ask the question, with the economy going down, do you think that you could do it now? If you cannot do it now, what are you going to do? Nothing! What you should do is, pack up and go. That is what you should do. They have joined the blame game and now they are saying that the UNC is the cause of it. Mr. Speaker, this Government does not intend to deal with crime.

As I said, the UNC gave them the support to pass the legislation—I wonder if the PNM has any grey matter up here. Today, the Minister came and said thanks for supporting the legislation for the appointment of a Commissioner of Police. The Minister said that Guiliani said—this is good advice—that if you are giving

him responsibility, you must give him power and authority. That is what the legislation did. The legislation gave the Commissioner of Police the power to hire, fire and discipline. The UNC gave them that support. We actually carried them on our backs in an effort to help them deal with crime. What did they do? They took the ride on the UNC's back and jumped off and trampled the poor people in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, we gave them the authority to give the Commissioner of Police powers. He said that the former Commissioner of Police said that he was a toothless bulldog, which was not really true. I have read every one of the Police Service Commission report since the PNM came into office. Do you know what they did? I do not know if they do not read or when they read they do not understand. They come to this Parliament and talk a lot of nonsense.

The report said that even before the Act was passed the Police Service Commission had delegated powers to the Commissioner of Police to discipline and promote. We took them for what we thought they were and said to them, do you want it in writing or do you want it to be a part of the legislation and they said, yes. We said that we want to deal with crime; we wanted to participate and assist in dealing with crime, so we gave it to them. Mr. Speaker, what has the PNM done with the opportunity that we have given them? They wasted the opportunity we have given them. We gave them everything that we could have given them and they wasted it. That is in terms of the power of the Commissioner of Police

Mr. Speaker, there is another aspect of the legislation. We thought that section 70 of the Constitution which gives the Prime Minister the veto power for the appointment of the Commissioner of Police was a recipe for the continuation of the wickedness that the PNM was doing in the appointment of a commissioner and thereby denying the country the opportunity of having an effective police service. So, the law was changed. The law was not changed only in terms of giving the Commissioner of Police powers, but in the appointment of a Commissioner of police. We gave them the authority to do it.

Mr. Speaker, the PNM Government took almost a year to deal with this matter. I am going to read from the Police Service Commission Annual Report, 2007 at page 9 which says:

“The criteria and procedure for appointment to offices of Commissioner of Police and Deputy Commissioner of Police are contained in two Orders...The Orders were laid in the House of Representatives on July 29, 2007 and in the Senate on August 23, 2007 and were published after approval by Parliament

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on 27th August, 2007 as Legal Notices No. 165 and No. 166 of 2007...are attached as Appendices IV and V.”

It continues:

“In the context of the security needs of the country the Commission gave top priority to this question. The procedures for the selection process however are very protracted and comprise twelve (12) stages which in some cases had to be conducted sequentially. As at December, 31, 2007...”

This is what we passed in this Parliament. We gave the Police Service Commission this to work with. They completed the three stages; advertising, short listing and so on. They wanted to ensure that the law was implemented in a proper and meaningful way. It continues:

“The new Constitutional mandate of the Commission necessitated the preparation of revised regulations...in August 2007 a Consultant was contracted...”

This was no PNM Moko Jumbie person, but a consultant. This Government gave the Police Service Commission money to hire a consultant. After that, they got the reports and they decided then to go through the selection process—a long drawn out methodical process—and they presented the person for the Commissioner of Police to the President and it came to this House.

Mr. Speaker, one would have thought that in the face of a rising murder rate at an astronomical pace, the Government would have grabbed that opportunity to have that person appointed as Commissioner of Police. They were given the opportunity to choose a competent Commissioner of Police to implement the law. Do you know what this Government which talks about crime did—\$900 million for this and \$900 million for that in the Ministry of National Security? They used all kinds of frivolous excuses to shoot down the appointment. Instead of dealing with crime, this Government shut down the appointment. What a shame! What is clear from the report is that they thought the person was too independent and he would have “lock up” some of them or their friends. So, they shut it down because they did not want him. Do you know what the Member for Diego Martin North/East said?

11.45 p.m.

You know what he said, Mr. Speaker? He said, we are not attacking the person, Stephen Williams at all, we are attacking the process, but you created the process. You did something wrong, and then you attack your own process. If that

is the case, why did you not look at the regulations before? If even after it was passed in the House, you looked at it and you saw the defects, why did you not withdraw and come back with proper regulations?

Instead, they allowed the regulations to run for the appointment of the Commissioner of Police, and when they did not get who they wanted, then they scuttle the process, and lo and behold, you know what they did. This Government accepted, or I do not know if the Police Service Commission took a cue from the Government; they did not give the person because the PNM did not want the nominee, instead they put a person who did not qualify to be the commissioner; they slap every one of us in our faces. The person admitted that he lied in the interview, and you make him acting commissioner.

You know, Mr. Speaker, if they had any sort of shame, what they would have done was, say look, hear what happened, the process was flawed, we argued the process, we will take somebody else who did not go to the interview, who did not go to the Police Service Commission and lied at the commission, take somebody else and put him as acting commissioner for the time being.

Why, Mr. Speaker? PNM, why did you do that? Who are you trying to fool? You cannot fool anybody because the smallest child on the street is saying, PNM does not want to deal with crime; what they want to do is to be in charge and in control of the police service, and they do not care what happen to anybody in this country. Once they get who they want there it is okay.

The pattern goes on; it is expanding. The people of Trinidad and Tobago, we want to show you how the PNM does not want to deal with crime. In July, they struck down the nomination. They said, "We are going to bring proper regulations." With all the money in this world, you tell me, Mr. Speaker, Legal Notice 165 and Legal Notice 166, we drafted it, and we asked them, look, we have made some corrections; take it and bring it back as quickly as you could. They said, no, no, we sent it back to the commissioners. Why could you not hire experts from abroad? Or maybe you did not have to invent the wheel; try and see any country which was using this type of method of appointment for commissioner, put it in place, call us to help.

The United National Congress is willing to assist the PNM in drafting the regulations but, at this time, you do not want our help. You wanted our help to pass the legislation, now we are giving you help. You know why he said that? You thought we would not have given you the assistance to pass the legislation. We gave you the assistance to pass the legislation; we are willing to give you assistance to draft the regulations, but you do not want the assistance now.

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You know why? They do not want a police commissioner, who is firm, to be appointed. They do not want a police commissioner who will implement the law. According to what Guiliani said, you do not want a commissioner of police like that. I do not know what kind you want, but I just want to ask you a question. You want one who you could control? You want one who will harass UNC people? Is that what you want? I do not know. Tell the population, because you have a duty to explain to the population.

Since July last year the regulations were shut down, we are now at the end of January 2009, seven months. Why have you not redrafted the regulations and bring it to Parliament? Why? Mr. Speaker, you are a lawyer, you know this is subsidiary legislation, and subsidiary legislation really is legislation, which you do not have to dig deep but merely legislation to give effect to the primary legislation. So you have the primary legislation and they do not want to bring subsidiary legislation to the Parliament. We asked them why?

The country was crying because when they saw the acting commissioner, who they brought in here, under his watch, from August to December, they had approximately 360 murders. The murders increased under him. When the people of Laventille, Morvant, Diego Martin, Trou Macaque were crying; when those mothers were crying for the deaths of their sons, you know what we did, as a sensitive and a sensible United National Congress, a party when in power dealt with crime, we decided from this side of the floor we are going to push them into dealing with crime.

So, I brought a motion asking the Parliament to condemn the PNM for not bringing legislation for the permanent appointment of a commissioner of police. They came to the Parliament, no answer, no reason why you could not bring subsidiary legislation, but what they tried to do was make an excuse, and hear the excuse, "We want to get it right; we want to make sure we do not make mistakes, and when we do it we will pass it on to you". That was some time in October last year. October, November, December, up to now they have not brought the regulations. What you did? You went and caused the police service commissioner to extend the life by a further six months. What they did and what makes the population suspicious, they had this poor acting commissioner going on television so often and trying to solve crime by public relations; "Things would be better this year". Giving false hope to the people, but they are not taking steps to have a proper commissioner of police appointed.

The hon. Minister came to the Parliament today and gave that explanation. All I could say, the PNM has no intention whatsoever of dealing with crime. Is it

because you all do not care, because you all have bodyguards? Is it because you have protection you do not care about the poor people of Trinidad and Tobago? These are the questions we are asking. Tell us what is happening.

I want to tell you how the PNM is spreading the crime. Read today's or yesterday newspapers, the crime rate in South rose by 200 per cent. You are right; you are shocked; you knew; you do not know what you found yourself in with the PNM. Imagine, in South, the crime rate has gone up by 200 per cent. Today, I asked the police, how is it the crime rate could shoot up by 200 per cent, and the Government in its budget passed so much money? They said the Government is exporting the criminals to South, in all those housing areas, and I would not call the housing areas. They said nearly every other house in a certain housing development in San Fernando, has a convicted criminal.

When you talk about mixed communities, this is what you are doing, you are not only dealing with crime, but this PNM is exporting the crime to all parts of the country. What is the reason? Poor, honest, humble, rural people, who sleep with their doors open, now lock and chain on the gate, and they are jumping over the gate and robbing them, "tiefing" their duck and everything and going.

UNPARLIAMENTARY LANGUAGE

Mr. Speaker: Before I move the Motion for the extension of time, I would like to clarify and correct an earlier ruling that I gave when the hon. Member for Tobago East raised a point of order; he raised 36(5). Actually, the correct Standing Order is 43(3)(b), under the rubric of unparliamentary language. When a Member alleges that another Member used unparliamentary language, the Speaker has to look at the context. I was told that the words uttered by the hon. Member for Princes Town North was that, all of you—meaning all the Members on the Government bench—were guilty of murder, or words to that effect. I said to him, in reference to the ruling, that if it were to an individual it would have been different, had it been to a party.

Now, the learning does say this, a footnote, I will read it for the benefit of Members, and this comes under expressions which are unparliamentary and call for prompt interference by the Speaker; abusive and insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder. The Speaker has said in this connection that whether a word should be regarded as unparliamentary depends on the context in which it is used.

“Expressions that are unparliamentary when applied to individuals are not always so considered when applied to a whole party.”

Unparliamentary Language
[MR. SPEAKER]

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So, I misread basically what the hon. Member for Princes Town had said. I was under the impression he was referring to the Government Bench as a party. However, I was corrected in that the hon. Member did say, "All of you opposite", or words to that effect were guilty of murder. That really and truly, would qualify as being unparliamentary.

I note the fact that the hon. Member did apologize to the hon. Member for Tobago East, and I am taking it, hon. Member for Princes Town North, that that apology, in fact, was extended to each Member present on the Government bench when you made that statement. Do I have that assurance from you?

Mr. S. Panday: Mr. Speaker, unreservedly, but all PNM are bandits, as a party.

Mr. Speaker: I expect better from you but I want to clarify that ruling.

**FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT
(ADOPTION)**

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. S. Panday: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much, and if indeed, the Speaker feels so strongly, I really want to unreservedly apologize, but this PNM Government is lethargic, incompetent and does not want to deal with crime. [*Desk thumping*] That is the point I was making, when I said they were murderers, I really did not mean directly. What I really thought about, because they were part of a policy, that was it, but I did not mean personally, like the Member for Diego Martin North-/East, he was brutalizing Tobago recently, but I do not want to go there.

Hon. Member: He was a victim.

Mr. S. Panday: Yes, he was a victim.

What the hon. Minister came here today and said? The hon. Minister spoke about the offshore vessels as if that is all, when everybody knows that that is not so. We need to have the police service in order; we need to make the police service comfortable. When one looks on page 36, head 22, Ministry of National Security; Goods and Services; General Administration, rent and lease vehicles—that is transferring within the Ministry—and equipment, \$21 million.

12.00 midnight

What the hon. Minister of Finance said—Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, you could sleep now, it is 12 o'clock—that it was moneys which were given to the ministry in the year before and it was an accounting mistake that caused it here, so they shifted it. I want to tell the hon. Minister of Finance that I do not know if she was sleeping when she read this, like she is now, but the question is that we have information that on many occasions during the last fiscal year, there were cases where people made reports to the station and the police said they had no vehicles.

Mr. Speaker, for example, last year a gentleman in my village by the name of Rory Singh was murdered in broad daylight by two gunmen. They came into his house, shot him and his blood was spattered on the wall. An hour and the police did not come. We walked to the station and they had no vehicles. So I do not know if the public servants outsmart you, but as far as we are aware, during the duration of this period when you were saying that you had already used the moneys to acquire vehicles, there was no need to acquire more vehicles, the question we ask you is, why then they were not responding? Why were you not responding? You are telling the country and the people, no vehicles to come to the murder or crime scene, and then you come here to the Parliament and say, "You know, we had enough. This came here by mistake and we shifted it across." Something is wrong. You are not in sync with the police service. Is there no communication with the police service and the Minister of National Security? The Member for Tabaquite read section 80 of the Constitution today, when he said that the Minister has control over his ministry. "Like you sleeping here".

So, Mr. Speaker, the question is, the hon. Minister came here today and he said it is a question of management. They have vehicles, but it is a question of management.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Who is responsible?

Mr. S. Panday: Who is responsible? Me? Members on this side? Because Mr. Speaker, the 2007 report says—and the police receive commission is saying exactly what we are saying—and I quote from page 14 of the Police Service Commission Report:

"The Commission visited five (5) police stations and held meetings with the Executive of the Police Service, a cross-section of the Women Police Officers and a representative group of the Police Corporals and Constables.

The issues raised...

- the urgent need to refurbish police stations which are cramped and unsanitary;

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- the stations are not provided with sufficient vehicles and in many cases the vehicles are in need of repairs and/or replacement"

This is what the Police Service Commission is saying. The Police Service Commission is saying this. The Police Service Commission is not saying it willy-nilly, they said after they held meetings. They went on to say:

- "• much of the equipment, including communication/wireless equipment in use in the service is outdated."

Offshore patrol vehicles (opv). Two offshore vehicles could solve crime, when much of the equipment including communication/wireless equipment in the service is outdated?

- insufficiency of staff in some situations;
- lack of effective communication between the"—police service; and most of all;
- "• low morale within the Second Division."

So when the Minister of Finance comes here today, to take part in a debate like this and comes with that kind of argument, one would have thought at least that the Minister responsible would have at least have read the Police Service Commission Report of 2007. You mean to say that you did not even read it. That is why we are forced to call them criminals, but I would not do it. Never will I do that!

Mr. Speaker, having said that, it seems to me—I do not want to cast aspersions on the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara at this early hour of Saturday morning.

Hon. Member: She would not hear you anyway.

Mr. S. Panday: But I want to indicate to her that at least she was misled. I feel you were misled because the Police Service Commission Report of 2007 flies in the face of this. I want to ask—I thought that when the Minister came here today, he would have looked at the document. He would not have burdened us with irrelevancies as he did. He would have tried to be relevant and tried to look at the document and come and tell us, "Look, we were misled, or we were informed, or we were guided that the \$21 million"— It is not \$21 or 21 cents—"that we shifted the money from goods and services, general administration, rent/lease vehicles and equipment into a development programme: social programme, public order and safety." Come and explain to the Parliament. Tell us what those programmes were. This is the opportunity. We are the representatives of the people.

When you talk in the Parliament, the people will hear.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: They are hearing you.

Mr. S. Panday: I will wake you up by force. They came here and they said improvement works in police stations. One would have thought that the Government would have come here today and account to the people in the Parliament. You cannot come like this willy-nilly and give us a generalized statement. Tell us which police station you repaired and improvement works in which station. Tell us. We are beseeching and begging the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara that when she is winding up, the public wants to know which station was repaired. Tell us, because I want to tell the hon. Member that there are trees growing on the San Fernando Police Station. You remember a tree grew from the window of the police station and went over the roof [*Laughter*] and the Mayor of San Fernando had to hire a HIAB. People had to cut it and take down the tree from the roof of the police station.

Mr. Speaker, this is San Fernando, that glorious city from which all of us come. In the same part of that police station, there was a police dormitory, pigeons and rats are living now. Where did the \$21 million go? Officers work all day and night and when they come on mornings, there is no place for them to bathe. There is no place for them to change their clothes so that they can come to court. The purpose of that wing of the San Fernando Police Headquarters long ago they had beds, it was a dormitory for the officers. So when they say morale is low, these are things that we should deal with in crime and that is why we ask you, tell us which police station.

This Government has police operating out of a toilet in San Fernando as a police station.

Hon. Member: Shame!

Mr. S. Panday: Mr. Speaker, you are from San Fernando, on the corner of Harris and Lord Streets there was a public convenience there, just next to Mr. Pooran's place. A public convenience; I am certain all of us have used that in our time, ask the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what this Government did? They merely blocked up the door and they have police operating out of a toilet, a public convenience. Not only that, the toilets are not working there. They do not have a police station. The magistrates' cars are driven from the road to under the building. Every time before the cars come in, they have to move the table and after the cars pass they put it back to use as a station diary.

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This is the state that the PNM has the police service in. Ask the hon. Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara. Does the Member know that last year, the police administration building had to close down for a month? They had to send people home for a month because the toilet was not working. Where did you spend the \$21 million?

Mr. Speaker, if you go to every single police station, the dirtiest and nastiest place in Trinidad is in a police station, especially in the cell area. People defecate there on the ground, on gazette paper. There are no toilet facilities and there is a small hole where they stuff the paper and that stays there for days. When they arrest somebody, let us say on a Thursday and they have to stay over the weekend, that is the condition they keep them in, that inhumane condition. They have to eat in there; they have to drink their water in there and they keep them there until Monday or Tuesday if it is a long weekend, and at the end of the day, that person might be innocent.

Mr. Speaker, I am calling on the Public Health Department to visit every police station in Trinidad and Tobago, check the condition and report back to the people.

Dr. Moonilal: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. S. Panday: As the Member for Oropouche East is saying, the police should take this up as an OSHA issue. OSHA is a law which the UNC had passed. [*Desk thumping*] When the Member for Point Fortin came to this House, he said:

"The OSHA law is not my law, that is the working of the UNC."

When you are casting aspersions and the blame game against the UNC, you must also come before the Parliament and the goods things that the UNC did, you must tell us. [*Desk thumping*] Tell the country that UNC is the party that developed OSHA, and the Member for Point Fortin said:

"I am just presenting it."

Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on because I know you are paining to hear the condition of the police station, having regard to the fact that you said \$21 million was spent and we would like to ask the hon. Member to tell the nation where that \$21million has been spent. I could go to the judiciary and the other section; I could go on to the Family Court. [*Interruption*] Okay, leave that for a "next" time. I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I really have to thank the Member for Princes Town North for agreeing to end. I have to thank him; words cannot express my gratitude at this point in time.

Mr. Speaker, for one moment I forgot the reason we were here. For one moment I forgot that we were here to close off the accounts for the 2007/2008 fiscal year, and in doing so, I just want to make—because it is late and I do not want to extend the pain, so to speak, that we have had to be subjected to for the last few hours—yes it was painful—so I want to really look at a few points.

In the contribution from the esteemed Member for Couva North and I think he was supported by the Member for Caroni East, we heard a lot about how this Government had mismanaged the people's affairs. Since this is a debate on the revenues and expenditure, I would want to speak to that issue. One of things that I found rather strange, was the protestation from the Member for Couva North about how we had made somewhat a mess so to speak, of not being able to determine what our expenditure needs would be, and as a consequence of having to return on more than one occasion to this honourable House to appropriate further expenditure.

12.15 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Member forgets that a budget is merely a projection, and unless he is able to do something, even with our Vision 2020, hindsight, of course, is always Vision 2020. But unless one has a capacity to look into the future and forecast, what you are doing is a projection.

You are doing a projection, and I heard the Member for Couva South saying we must listen to the experts to guide us in how we make that projection. What we do every year is project the revenues and expenditure and we have done it for the year we are closing off. In doing that, we certainly took a conservative approach in determining what the price of oil would be for the 2007/2008 budget, and that was \$50.

Mr. Speaker, in listening to the contributions on the other side, again the Member for Couva North made a comment about the fact that we were coming for a mid-year review, and coming to the House as if we could not get it right. I am sure the Members on the other side would note that the Exchequer and Audit Act contemplates that very fact that we would have to, most likely, return to the House for further appropriation should your revenue projections be better than you had projected at the beginning of the fiscal year.

I want to remind the other side that they are no stranger to coming back to the House for supplementary appropriation. In fact, that is the objective, to give you an opportunity to come back to the House when your projected revenue increases allow you to incur further expenditure.

In fact, I have record of when the UNC was in office the number of times it sought parliamentary approval and went for supplementary appropriation. In 1995, three times; 1996, three times; 1997, three times; 1998, twice; 1999, three times; 2000, three times; 2001, three times.

So to hear the other side speak as though coming to the House for supplementary appropriation is something strange and untoward, it is rather curious given the fact that they had done it on several occasions when they were in office.

Mr. Speaker, what I really want to focus on, and which is the reason we are here this morning, is the stellar performance of this Government in managing the affairs of this country. In fact, one of the things the other side is known to say and repeat, and if it is repeated enough times one would believe it. I do not know if that is the thinking that goes into it when accusing this Government of wastage in spending the people's money in a very irresponsible manner, but the facts do not support that allegation.

As we have ended the fiscal year for 2008, we note that the revenue collected for the year was approximately \$56 billion, but the savings for this year was approximately \$12 billion. Mr. Speaker, by anybody's standard, that is an excellent and more than prudent management of the people's business.

Mr. Speaker, that \$12 billion that we speak about has gone into two major funds. We had spoken in some detail on the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund which to date has over \$18 billion, and as the Member for Diego Martin North/East has said in his contribution—but it bears repeating—the percentage of GDP that the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund represents is approximately 12 to 13 per cent, and when we look at our external debt it only represents 6 per cent. So, as the Member has said, we can pay up all our external debt and still have a substantial amount of savings in the Fund.

The Infrastructural Development Fund is another which was set up by the UNC when it was in office and during the time I do know that it had put into the fund—I do not have the exact figures with me, but I believe it may have been in the vicinity of—either \$300 million or \$400 million, but by the time it demitted office, there was \$35 million in that fund. In other words, there was no replacement into that fund for capital expenditure which was the intent behind it.

Mr. Speaker, we look therefore at the stellar contribution and performance of this Government in managing the people's business and one of the things the Member for Couva South pointed out was a comment which was attributed to me

saying that we were wrong. He said, we must listen to the experts. So we are going to listen to the experts because you may say that we are blowing our own trumpet, and perhaps you should listen to those to whom the international community listens.

I just want to read a few excerpts from those persons, the experts whom we listen to and whom the international community listens to and what they think about the way in which this Government has managed the people's public funds.

We look quickly at Moody's Report which came out a few weeks ago, so it is very timely and recent and the Summary and Outlook ratings supported by a vibrant energy sector, a low public debt burden and strong policy consensus. The Member for Caroni East made heavy weather about our public debt and I am reading from Moody's which says. "...a low public debt burden and strong policy consensus."

It goes on in the body of the report to say:

"Trinidad and Tobago's Baa1 government bond ratings in both local and foreign currency are supported by a vibrant and well diversified energy sector, a relatively low public debt burden and strong consensus on macroeconomic policies."

It goes on to say that the institutional strength is high on a global scale—not regional.

"...Trinidad and Tobago's institutional strength is ranked 'high' under Moody's sovereign ratings methodology. This is due to the country's long history of policy consensus with respect to macroeconomic policies..."

Mr. Speaker, it continues:

"Expenditures have grown in tandem... The quality of expenditures has been in line with a long-term strategy aimed at bringing Trinidad and Tobago to a 'developed country status' by 2020..."

Look at the type of expenditure and they talk about wasting people's money. This is Moody's talking about the quality of our expenditure, the expert according to the Member for Couva South. He says we must listen to the experts. Well, listen to the expert who says that in this Government's management, the quality of expenditure has been in line with a long-term strategy aimed at bringing Trinidad and Tobago to a developed country status by 2020.

You want to know where the money went. This is where the money went:

"...with heavy investments in education, housing, infrastructure and health."

That is what Moody's had to say.

“Capital expenditures tripled in terms of GDP since fiscal year 2004.”

I move on from Moody's which is one of the expert rating agencies and go to Standard and Poor's and what they have to say about Trinidad and Tobago's economy.

The ratings on the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago reflect continued strengthening of the sovereign fiscal and external accounts on the back of a booming energy economy that has grown on an average of 9.3 per cent since 2003. The stable outlook reflects Standard and Poor's rating services expectation that the Government will continue to work on promoting the diversification of the economy.

The report goes on but I will not go into all the details of it, but merely to say, as with Moody's Report, Trinidad and Tobago is rated very highly by Standard and Poor's.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF)—these are all the experts and this is what they say about this country and how the economy has been managed by this Government. It started by saying that supported by a booming energy sector, Trinidad and Tobago's recent economic performance has been impressive. That is the word used.

During 2002—2007 real GDB growth averaged 9 per cent per capita income doubled in US dollar terms, but the unemployment rate and the public debt ratio were halved, and it said that improvements in social, political and competitive indicators have continued. This is the same debt the Member for Couva South spoke of.

Mr. Speaker, we have it from the IMF, Standard and Poor's and from Moody's. The Member for Oropouche East made the point—which was a good one—that we speak in figures. I was going to say the figures, but then I took them and translated what those indicators really say on an individual basis and what it means to each person in Trinidad and Tobago.

When we can tell you that we have foreign exchange reserves of over nearly US \$10 billion amounting to 11 months of import cover; when we can tell you that our economy continues to grow and is still expected to grow even in an environment of a global recession; when we can tell you that our unemployment rate is 4.5 per cent; when we can tell you that our Heritage and Stabilisation Fund has \$18 billion; when we can tell you that our banks are well capitalized, liquid and profitable still; when we can tell you all of those things what it says is that the people of Trinidad and Tobago are able, on an individual basis, to enjoy the benefits of the way in which we have managed the people's business.

I think the Member for Chaguanas East spoke about that, everybody has a job and nearly everyone who wants a job can get one in Trinidad and Tobago. That is what it means. More than that, and we take it down to individual basis because they asked continually: Where is the money going? I will tell you where the money is going, but before I go on to give those specifics, there is another point I wanted to make.

The Member for Caroni East was speaking about the debt profile of Trinidad and Tobago and listening to him, you will think that Trinidad and Tobago is in a terrible condition. When we look at our entire public sector debt, which is our domestic debt, our external debt and the contingency liability of which he spoke, we brought it down from nearly 50 per cent in 2003 to 28 per cent in 2008 and the last figure I have which was projected for 2008 was 27 per cent. But saying it in abstract does not give a real sense of how Trinidad and Tobago has managed its debt.

The international benchmark which I got from the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago is 50 per cent of GDP. For the Caribbean countries, the average is that their debt represents 80 per cent of their GDP and for European Union countries, their public sector debt represents 60 per cent of their GDP, for Trinidad and Tobago, it is 27 per cent of the GDP.

So for people to say that we have not managed the people's money well and that we have been irresponsible, every statistic defies that. We have shown how we have managed the debt well, how we have saved well, and in spite of the fact that the entire world is on a global recession, the projection still is for Trinidad and Tobago to grow; even if the growth is moderate, there is still a projection for growth.

Our unemployment levels are strong; we have very low unemployment on every single benchmark that you use. How can you say that we have not managed the people's affairs properly? I can assure you if the reverse were true, you would use those same figures you want to speak about all the time. I am confident if those figure showed that the unemployment rate in Trinidad and Tobago was 20 or 30 per cent we would hear about that.

12.30 a.m.

If the debt was high, we would hear about it ad nauseam. If we did not have the economy growing at the level it was growing, we would hear about it. But it is an inconvenient truth to hear that all those figures; all they are simply saying is how well we have managed the people's affairs. Even in the report; even in our expenditure—and it was a good point that was made—we have spent money—you asked where the money went? I will tell you where the money went. I am

taking it from those macroeconomic indicators and bringing it down to the man in the street, the person listening, maybe, to us at this hour.

Shelter: that is one of the things that this Government is well known for, even today and in its past incarnations. I do not know if the UNC administration, in their history of building less than 500 houses in their five or six years in government, can even come near to our record and shelter is a basic need of humanity. So we talk about shelter, about education. I can go through all these figures: The Civilian Conservation Corps; the On-The-Job-Training; many of those programmes that you stopped; many of the programmes that we started—the University of Trinidad and Tobago. The Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education is here. I can go on and on, on the opportunities for all the young people to get an education.

So that is shelter; that is education; the opportunities we spoke last week on the pension benefits going up to \$2,000; we talked about the disability grant; the Senior Citizens Grant and I can give you many more examples. So when we talk about where the money has gone, the money has been spent on the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

In fact, I just wanted to mention in terms of some of the programmes—I think I had mentioned this before but I think it is worth repeating. When the Centre for the Department of Economics, Labour Market and Poverty Studies Unit did a study to determine the kinds of benefits the average household in Trinidad and Tobago could enjoy based on the number of grants that the Government provides—I will give you some of the types of grants: the school nutrition programme, the school textbooks rental programme, the school transportation programme, the education grant, CDAP, the disability grant, fuel subsidy, the food debit card—what it shows is this, that an average household can benefit from those grants on an average—they used different household profiles, but using a household of one adult, unemployed and four children; two in primary and two in secondary school, based on the benefits that you can enjoy from this Government, a total monthly benefit is as much as \$5,254. That would include the education grant, CDAP, the food debit card, and I can go on and on.

The point I am making here is, the question was asked: where has the money gone, and I think we have adequately indicated to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, the money has gone to the people of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Before I end my own contribution this morning now, because of the lateness of the hour, I just want to make one other point before I wind up, and that is the

statement that I believe the Member for Couva South made, saying that we are wrong; that I admitted that we got it wrong. The Member for Couva South may not have had the opportunity of hearing that I said, if we got it wrong, so did the rest of the world; so did the United States; so did China, India, Germany, Canada. I can go on and on and list every country in the world that got it wrong. Because one of the things we are certain about in this environment is volatility and uncertainty.

One of the points that must be made is that Trinidad and Tobago did not create the global recession. We did not create it. This is not of our making. This has happened in the so-called advanced economies. Trinidad and Tobago is affected by it as is every country. So the test that we must be held to and the only test that we must be held to, is how we have entered into this global recession and how we are managing it.

When we look at that and we look at the test and we look at Trinidad and Tobago, it is clear, not only our own assessment but the assessment of the IMF, the assessment of Moody's; the assessment of every international agency is that Trinidad and Tobago has entered into this recession in a very strong position. The test that we must be held to as the Government is how we navigate ourselves through this financial tsunami.

I want to say that this Government, over the last seven years, has shown its capacity to do so and to manage the people's affairs well. [*Desk thumping*] We are certain, with the fiscal and monetary policies that we have in place and the plan that this Government has put in place to finance the deficit—and by the way, I just want to make a point about the deficit financing. I went back and I looked—because I always like to get my figures, so to speak—and one of the things I found was when the UNC was in power, apart from the fact that they came back three times a year for supplementary appropriation—but when we do it, it is wrong; when they do it, it is not wrong. [*Desk thumping*] Apart from that, for three years in a row—I am looking for the paper with the figures—yes, I have it here—they ran a deficit. They ended their fiscal year in a deficit position: 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001. Was that their last year in office? Yes. But we went into office in the last quarter of 2001. And was that the time around the election? When was the election, at the end of 2001? Was that the time when there was a lot of road paving? Someone reminds me I was a member of Tidco and I do remember that when I joined Tidco as a member of the board of directors, the \$1 billion that was spent.

What does Tidco stand for? I know Minister Ross is here, from tourism. Does it have anything to do with tourism? But \$1 billion was spent on road paving. And you know, there were all kinds of reasons that were given as to why Tidco was

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chosen to pave roads. I believe it has to do with it being a company and not being as accountable to the Central Tenders Board or Nipdec, so it provided an avenue in order to go and pave roads.

In fact, when I did enquire why in 2002—because one of the things this PNM administration has prided itself on is taking a position of having either a balanced budget or a small surplus. So when I looked back and saw that whilst in 2003 we ended up with \$775 million; in 2004 we had a surplus of \$211 million; in 2005 a surplus of \$2 billion—we who waste money, ended up with a surplus of \$2, 413 million—when in 2006 we ended up with a surplus of \$1.8 billion; in 2007, \$268 million; in 2008, nearly \$3 billion—\$2.7 billion. The point I am making, I queried why in 2002 there was a deficit of \$104 million.

I was informed, reliably so, that it was because of the kind of irresponsible expenditure in the first quarter of the fiscal year when, by the way, the UNC administration was still in office. Maybe it is a coincidence.

Hon. Member: That cannot be a coincidence.

Hon. K. Nunez-Testeira: I do not think so, you know, but I am just telling you of what I was informed. And they have the temerity to come to this honourable House and talk about us being irresponsible? No, you have to be joking! All the figures and all the facts do not support that. All you do is make wild accusations and pull figures out of the air. They do that all the time! And many of them on that side are trained as lawyers—*[Interruption]* I am not talking of their quality as lawyers but they are trained as lawyers and one of the things that you learn as a lawyer is that if you make a statement, support it. They make statements and they cannot support them. If they had to talk the truth, they know that when they look at the facts, by anybody's standard we have managed the economy well.

[The Member for Caroni East stands.]

No, I am not giving way. *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Speaker: Order, please! Hon. Minister, the Member for Caroni East stood of a point of order—36(5) you said? That talks about imputing improper motives—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Correction; 35(b) *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Speaker: Order! The hon. Member has raised a point of order, 35(b) and it is a perfectly valid point of order. He wants to elucidate on some matter. Let me warn you, you cannot take forever on it, please.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Thank you for that ruling. I just want to correct what the Minister of Finance is saying. I am quoting from the Auditor General's report of April 29, 2008 on page 83, which says that in 2003 the Government had a deficit of \$969 million; 2004, a deficit of \$1.696 billion; 2005, a deficit of \$829 million; 2006, \$1.681 billion, and 2007. So she is wrong.

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: Mr. Speaker, do you know how many times we have gone through this? With due respect, do you know how many times the Member for Caroni East has made that point? I am going to pull out the *Hansard*. Do you know how many times the Member for Siparia has made the same point? You very well know the answer to that. You know that those figures do not include the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and you know it does not include the Infrastructure Development Fund. You know that it does not include that!

[The Member for Caroni East stands]

Mr. Speaker: No. Listen, this is not a "pappy-show" at this point. Please, I am ruling it out of order. Please continue. *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is late and I know that the Member for Caroni East has brought up that point before, also the Member for Siparia and they do it all the time, trying to mislead this House, in my respectful view, or apparent misleading of the population. *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mrs. K. Nunez-Tesheira: Mr. Speaker, it is late and we have had to endure—and I really mean it—the Member for Princes Town North—

Hon. Member: The Member for Fyzabad.

Mrs. K. Nunez-Tesheira: Oh, well he is in a—I suspect the next time you hear him—he has a list, you know, and I will bet my last dollar that the next time he makes a contribution, he is coming with a list and we are going to hear how much we paid for macaroni in 1995; how much we paid for the wacker in 1995 and he is going to take the 1995 figures while we are in 2009, and say: "You see how much the UNC did?" We are going to hear all about that again. I can bet my bottom dollar on that. But we on this side endured it.

So I would like to complete my contribution to this debate on this Saturday morning and just say that in terms of all the figures and all the facts—the incontrovertible facts—that this Government, the People's National Movement Government, has proven unequivocally its ability to manage this country's

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economy—irrefutable—and I can give the country the assurance that this Government, under the leadership of Patrick Manning and the Members of this Cabinet, will do this country proud as it has done over the last six years.

I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

12.45 a.m.

Question put and agreed to.

Report adopted.

FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION) (2008) BILL

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That a Bill to provide for the supplementary appropriation for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending 30th September, 2008 of the sum of the issue which was authorized by the Appropriation Act, 2008; be read a second time.

Question proposed.

Dr. Hamza Rafeeq (Caroni Central): Mr. Speaker, I would have liked to contribute to this debate, but because of the lateness of the hour, I will save it for another day.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Question put and agreed to, That the Bill be read a third time.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, thankfully, I beg to move that the House do now adjourn to Friday, January 30, 2009 at 1.30 p.m., which is Private Members' Day. Perhaps the Opposition will tell us what we will be doing on that day.

Mr. Maharaj SC: Mr. Speaker, the Motion filed by the Member for Princes Town North on crime will be debated and we will have the Motion on the Adjournment from today.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 12.49 a.m.