

Leave Of Absence

Friday, January 30, 2009

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, January 30, 2009

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the following Members requesting leave of absence from today's sitting of the House: The hon. Basdeo Panday, Member for Couva North and Leader of the Opposition, and the hon. Donna Cox, Member of Parliament for Laventille East/Morvant. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. The audited accounts of Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies for the year ended September 30, 1996. [*The Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development* [Hon. R. Dumas]]
2. The audited accounts of Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies for the year ended September 30, 1997. (*Hon. R. Dumas*).
3. The audited accounts of Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies for the nine (9) months ended September 30, 1998. [*Hon. R. Dumas*]
4. The audited accounts of Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies for the year ended September 30, 1999. [*Hon. R. Dumas*]
5. The audited accounts of Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies for the year ended September 30, 2000. [*Hon. R. Dumas*]
6. The audited accounts of Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies for the year ended September 30, 2001. [*Hon. R. Dumas*]
7. The audited accounts of Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies for the year ended September 30, 2002. [*Hon. R. Dumas*]
8. The audited accounts of Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies for the year ended September 30, 2003. [*Hon. R. Dumas*]
9. The audited accounts of Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies for the year ended September 30, 2004. [*Hon. R. Dumas*]
10. The audited accounts of Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies for the year ended September 30, 2005. [*Hon. R. Dumas*]

Papers Laid

Friday, January 30, 2009

11. The audited accounts of Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies for the year ended September 30, 2006. [*Hon. R. Dumas*]

Papers 1 to 11 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

**SPIRALLING CRIME RATE
(GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE TO ADDRESS)**

Mr. Subhas Panday (*Princes Town North*): Madam Deputy Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Whereas the serious criminal activity and the crime rate have continued to spiral out of control;

And whereas law-abiding citizens are under siege and are mortally afraid of being murdered, raped, kidnapped or shut and/or robbed;

And whereas the Government does not appear to have the will or ability to effectively deal with this national crisis;

Be it resolved that this honourable House do condemn the Government for its failure to effectively deal with this unacceptable and serious crime situation.

I beg to move.

Madam Deputy Speaker, standing in my name is the Motion which I have just read out. But like the rest of the nation, I myself at this hour am confused and wonder if other crimes have not been committed on the people, especially the poor people of Trinidad and Tobago.

However, a press conference is now being conducted in which the Government and the Central Bank are taking action. I pray and hope that no crime is committed on the poor and suffering people of this country and that the relevant authorities take steps to prevent any untoward difficulty which the poor depositors of this country may suffer. If that goes on to cause unsuspecting depositors to suffer, that, indeed, would have been one of the greatest crimes inflicted on the poor people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Deputy Speaker, after I filed this Motion on the last occasion, I thought that Members on this side of the House have spoken so much on crime; I asked the question: Could we add anything new to drum into the hard head of this Government?

I read the contributions of the hon. Member for Tabaquite, the Chief Whip; I read contributions from other Members; I read contributions from the hon. Member for

Oropouche East. When one looks at the contributions, one would see that they are saying almost the same thing: trying to get this Government to move forward to deal with crime; but, lo and behold, they are not taking on the cries of the people.

So I thought that I would bring new blood, something new into the debate, as it pertains to crime. So I attempted to contact certain non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and certain other political parties. I have a letter from the distinguished leader of the Congress of the People, which was sent to the hon. Prime Minister, which I shall read into the record later on today. However, as I said, I spoke to a number of NGOs.

One NGO added a new dimension to crime; they said that this Parliament, this House, plays a great part in causing the crime rate to escalate. They said that this Parliament is moribund. They said that this Parliament is an anachronism; that the Parliament is not lively and sensitive to the problems affecting the people. They said that since each one of us here represents a constituency, the 41 of us represent all the people of Trinidad and Tobago; that if we, as the leaders in society, fail to discuss crime, then we are really telling the criminals, "Look, the Government has swept it under the carpet and they doh care about crime."

I asked the member of the NGO, "How could you say that?" He said, "Look at what this Government did." This Government on the First Session of the Eighth Parliament brought a motion on crime; it was such a slipshod motion, without a preamble, to let us know the thinking of Government; to let the population know how the Government is thinking, but merely, 'Be it resolved that this House take note of the efforts that the Government has embarked upon to deal with crime'.

They said also that it was a wishy-washy motion. When it came to the Parliament, this Government allowed debate on it for only a few hours, and when Members of the Opposition began to speak and make representation, when the representatives of the people began to speak on behalf of the people so that the voice of the people would be heard in Parliament, what did the Government do? I think we only had one speaker, the hon. Member for Oropouche East. What did they do?

When the crime rate was 385 at the end of the year, they brought a motion; and what did they do? On the first occasion, they struck the Motion, never to debate it again. I ask the mover of that Motion, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, "Would you kindly, on behalf of the Government, on behalf of the PNM, indicate to us why you are treating this country with such contempt?" Why, Member for Diego Martin North/East? You are the Leader of the House; would

Spiralling Crime Rate
[MR. S. PANDAY]

Friday, January 30, 2009

you like to tell the population why you allowed that Motion to languish on the Order Paper for a year without debating it? Would you? [*Desk thumping*]

He is here; he is the Leader of the House; he brought the Motion. Tell the nation whether you are interested in crime; whether you are interested in dealing with crime. If the answer is no and if you cannot stand and speak, then it is clear that the Government does not care about dealing with crime. [*Desk thumping*]

That non-governmental organization gave the reason they said the Parliament was anachronistic. This Opposition, in trying to goad the Government into debating crime, which was one of the most serious issues affecting the country—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Dumas: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. S. Panday: Cool it? You get it in Tobago already, Member for Tobago East. "You nearly lose Tobago East, yuh know." [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, when this Opposition comes before this House every Friday, trying to raise the issue of crime as it affects the people, what happens under Standing Order 12, a matter of definite urgent public importance? We on this side of the House believe that every life that is lost is a matter of definite urgent public importance; [*Desk thumping*] regardless of who you are.

I remember on this side of the House, during the Eighth Parliament, we brought no less than 15 Motions on the adjournment to deal with crime. The Standing Order says that it must be definite, urgent and of public importance, and because of that wide interpretation, we were struck down on every occasion.

These rules never qualified; it was either not urgent; it was not definite or it was not of public importance. This House has told the nation that crime is not definite. This House has told the population—mothers who are crying, whose young sons have been killed; mothers whose 13-year-old daughters have been killed—that crime is not definite; it is not urgent; it is not of public importance. That was why they said we were moribund; that the Parliament was irrelevant to the development of the society.

Madam Deputy Speaker, if even the honourable Speaker had ruled in such a way, saying that this Motion does not qualify under Standing Order 12, the PNM has the majority in the House, and with that majority they could have asked for the Standing Order to be suspended so that we could have our motions of urgent public importance on crime, be debated.

What did they do? They moved the adjournment of this House on more trivial and vindictive matters. Do you remember that the Member for Diego Martin North/East stood in this honourable House and said that they wanted to suspend the Standing Orders to allow the Member for San Fernando East, the hon. Prime Minister, to speak more than the allotted time? Do you remember that night? When the honourable Chief Whip said, "We will stay in the Parliament up to the prescribed time, and after that we are not going to stay to allow the Standing Orders to be used to insult and go after people because of vindictiveness."

1.45 p.m.

So this Government has already suspended the Standing Orders in the past to attack Members of this House. Do you remember the famous statement which was made that night: Where the money gone? Casting aspersions on people's character, but on such an important issue as crime this Government will not suspend the Standing Orders to debate it.

Is it afraid? It has told the people that this country is in good hands. We ask the Minister of National Security: "Minister, in terms of crime, is this country in good hands?" No. Yet when we tried to debate it they shut it down.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the NGO said if this Motion had been debated, what would have happened was that as Members made contributions over a period of time, the public would have been able to make contributions so they could sensitize the powers that be to the problems that are confronting them and also to make a contribution to the crime debate.

Although they were not sitting in the House, there would have been radio programmes and letters to the editor. People would have participated and it is hoped that Members on both sides would have brought those ideas and suggestions of the population on the table of the Parliament. That is why they say the Parliament is irrelevant, the Parliament does not care about them, it has a number of old archaic rules.

Madam Deputy Speaker, imagine the rules that control us in the year 2008, you will be surprised to know it is talking about removing the Privy Council, but the Standing Orders which we operate under are the House of Representatives Standing Orders 1961. This country has moved forward, but this House has stayed as though we are in a time warp. For 48 years we have Standing Orders that are totally irrelevant, fit for the colonial masters and the people in this Parliament have not reformed the Standing Orders to make this House relevant to the hopes, aspirations and pains of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to give the Member for Princes Town North the assurance that we will deal with the Standing Orders during this present session.

Mr. S. Panday: I am happy to hear that the Government is now trying to deal with the Standing Orders after 48 years, and they are not relevant at this time, they probably were relevant for the colonial times. We in this House hold on to these Standing Orders to hide from debating. What a shame! [*Desk thumping*] No wonder people say that you all are “kicksin’ in Parliament”. The population does not really know that we are really hamstrung with this old colonial set-up that we really cannot perform. They went on to say that Parliament must represent the will of the people and the will does not necessarily mean those in a first past the post system.

Madam Deputy Speaker, since the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East gave the assurance that we are going to deal with the Standing Orders at this time, I want to ask him that when the hon. Speaker shut down our motions, Definite Matters of Urgent Public Importance, the hon. Speaker being a man of the world and seeing what a serious situation the issues of crime are, realized that these Standing Orders are preventing informative debates on current issues that affect the majority of the population, he, being an upholder of law and order in the Parliament begged the Government. He said the law is as this, and my interpretation is that it does not qualify under the Standing Orders. Please, I am begging you, Members of the Government, to let us debate the Motion on crime.

The Member for Tabaquite, the Chief Whip, had brought two Motions on the Adjournment of the House and at the end of the day they were voted against and yet the Speaker asked him to take one day in the entire year. The Speaker fell on his feet and begged this Government to let us debate and I want to ask the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East why he did not accede to the hon. Speaker’s request.

Mr. Imbert: I will respond during my contribution.

Mr. S. Panday: Oh, you will answer in your own good time. That is the way you all treat crime. You will answer in your own good time.

Dr. Moonilal: Which is never. [*Interruption*]

Mr. S. Panday: Pardon, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre? Oh, you have a headache; you have money in the bank at the corner?

Madam Deputy Speaker, they cannot answer. Why did you ignore the wishes of the Speaker? I humbly submit that the Speaker was representing the wishes of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and they did not do it, and they sit here today smiling, while people's children are dying.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we are living in frightening times. How do you deal with crime in a situation where it involves the Parliament? I humbly submit as the NGO had indicated that when the Constitution reform comes into being, it must be crafted in such a way that the wishes of the people will be heard. For example, the hon. Speaker could strike any one of us on this side and we cannot say anything; they could do what they want and he cannot do them anything. Do you know why? It is because the Constitution creates a problem.

Madam Deputy Speaker, do you know how to remove a Speaker apart from locking him/her up as how the Member for San Fernando East had put under House arrest House Speaker Occah Seapaul? This Government, that same PNM regime, instead of moving forward, introduced legislation to this Parliament while they had the Speaker under House arrest to say a Speaker could be removed by a simple majority.

So if a Speaker wants to stand up for the rights of the people, he cannot do so because the people with the majority can throw him out overnight. That is why that NGO is saying we must be able to ensure that the rights of the people are protected in the new Constitution.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I have looked at the new Constitution and it has not given a single hope to the people for participatory democracy, so the Government could be called to book. There is nothing in the Constitution that gives the House the power to call on the Government to account to the people and maybe, one of the things may be you probably need the majority plus two or five, but do not put the future of the Speaker in the hands of people who do not want to debate, who refuse to answer and who use the Parliament to abuse people.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you know how the PNM abuses this House. When we ask questions in the Parliament, instead of trying to serve the people they get the public servants to write long, copious notes and speak about everything except the questions which the Opposition asks on behalf of the people, abusing the Standing Orders which were made pursuant to the Constitution which says that all questions come to an end at 2.15 p.m. So if they do not want to answer questions on crime which we ask on behalf of the people, they would take one question and take 45 minutes to answer it.

Spiralling Crime Rate
[MR. S. PANDAY]

Friday, January 30, 2009

Maybe in the proposed Constitution we must not have the Speaker as a toothless bulldog. If you say that the Speaker has the power to control the House, it must not only be to brutalize the Opposition, but he must be given genuine power, especially against the Government, because they are in office and there is a necessity to call upon them to answer to the nation. And maybe the Speaker should have the power to impose sanctions on delinquent Ministers. We probably need that.

So that NGO believes that the problem in the path of the solution to crime is the Parliament which this PNM Government has brought into hate, contempt, odium and ridicule, and the time has come when the Parliament must be modernized so when we have issues like crime to be debated, we will be able to move forward.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this Opposition has taken the fight against the Government. We know that you do not want to discuss crime, the reasons we know and will expose. So Cabinet's collective responsibility does not have lies and we must make the Parliament to deal with the important issues affecting the country, mainly the issue of crime.

Madam Deputy Speaker, apart from this academic argument by one NGO, and what I speak today is really what I have gathered from the NGOs bringing the voice of the people to be heard in the Parliament.

2.00 p.m.

You know, when we make contributions in this House, instead of answering the contributions; instead of having a powerful debate, let us say, on crime or on any other topic; instead of this Government trying to deal or to address the issues which have been raised by the Opposition, do you know what it does? It embarks on a blame game, putting the blame on other people.

As a matter of fact, last week in this honourable House this Minister, instead of saying: "Look, I cannot deal with crime; I am impotent. I do not know what to do; I am incompetent", do you know what he did? Last week, when he came to this House and he was debating the Finance Committee Report, do you remember what he said? He said: "What you all talking about crime?" Instead of saying that he is incompetent; instead of saying that the PNM cannot deal with crime—they are so wicked, they blame everybody, and I quote from January 23, 2009. He said to the accusation made by the Member for Oropouche East who said that they have encouraged criminal activities and they cannot deal with criminal activities because they themselves are involved. Of course, not only the Member for

Oropouche East said that, you remember a judge said: “Look at the criminal gangs in the URP”?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Carmona.

Mr. S. Panday: Justice Carmona. And I will refer to that in a minute. Listen to what he said. Instead of saying crime has increased from 99 under the UNC to over 500 under his watch and the watch of the PNM, listen to what he—I do not like to use uncharitable words, but listen to what he said:

“...the accusation made by the Member for 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—”

Then the Member for Couva South said:

“...You should be ashamed.”

Instead of dealing with crime, listen to how they deal with crime; blame game; blame game; blame game. He is so callous—*[Interruption]* Shameless? No, I would not use the word, shameless. He went further and said:

“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 fruit, especially in the area of crime, takes some time.”

Do you know what he is saying? The UNC is the cause of crime. He is not saying what steps he will take to deal with crime; he is not asking the Opposition, “Come on board; help us to deal with crime”, instead, blame game, blame game, blame game and that is the way they intend to deal with crime.

It seems to me that kind of blame-gaming is in the DNA of the PNM! They cannot get away from it! They hide their incompetence by making excuses and blaming people. This Minister of National Security, do you remember one time he blamed the commission? He is blaming everybody except his own incompetence. Listen to what he said in this House last week:

“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.”

That is the way the PNM intends to deal with crime, by making excuses.

Spiralling Crime Rate
[MR. S. PANDAY]

Friday, January 30, 2009

So this Government, instead of trying to grab the bull by the horns, has decided on the blame-game and to play politics with crime. This Government has no interest in dealing with crime; no interest whatsoever! Do you remember, Member for Tobago East, what that Member for San Fernando East said about crime just before the election in October 2007? What did he say? You do not remember? The Member for San Fernando East said that in the election crime was not an issue.

I do not know if there was some kind of agreement between the criminals and the PNM because lo and behold, in September—October, the crime rate went down to give the Prime Minister the opportunity to say crime is not an issue in the election. PNM, “all yuh fool the people; all yuh pull wool over the eyes of the people”. Madam Deputy Speaker, I am sure you would have remembered the newspapers after that. The moment the PNM went back into power, November 2007 was the bloodiest month in the year of 2007!

It seems to me that the criminals are in cohorts. They slowed down the crime rate, allowed you to get back into office, allowed you to give the impression that everything was hunky-dory and that crime was not an issue, and the criminals went free again. Regardless of what they say, since they came back into Government in 2007, they cannot deal with it! But I feel more certain, they do not want to deal with it. The crime rate went up from 384; after that it went to 381, I think it was; then last year it was 550, and this Prime Minister told the country at the election that crime was not an issue.

To show you how they played on the minds of the people, he said, “Although crime is not an issue in this Government, I am still going to deal with crime.” And hence, what did they do? That same Minister of National Security and the honourable Prime Minister went and held a series of town meetings all over the country and said: “Although crime is not an issue, we are still going to deal with it.” They held nine or 10 meetings throughout the country, telling the people that, “We would take your ideas on board.”

I want to ask any one of the Members there: Have you read this? “Look it here”. Do not tell me that you are in Government and you are seeing people's blood flowing like water on the streets and you would not read your own report! The final report was: Public Consultation on Crime, April 18 to May 18, 2007.

I read this on a number of occasions. I have seen the various suggestions made by the public and I want any one of you there on the Government side to challenge me and tell me I am not speaking the truth when I say very few of the

recommendations by the public have been followed. So they carried the population for a ride, making them make all kinds of suggestions and at the end of the day, when you read it, you would see this is the best con-man job inflicted on the people of Trinidad and Tobago by this Government.

All of a sudden while they were going on these public consultations, it was the hon. Minister of National Security or the Prime Minister who said: “You know what we are going to do? We are going to set up a Crime and Justice Commission.” Nobody asked for that! So they set up this Crime and Justice Commission. Do you know not a single Member from the Cabinet was placed on that Commission? *[Interruption]* Who? Do you want to read it? Here it is. I will pass it. Read it.

Sen. Joseph: Why do you want a Member of Cabinet on the Commission?

Mr. S. Panday: Why? But you know what you did, you played politics by taking a Member on the Opposition side and putting him on the Commission; you took an Independent Senator and put him on the Commission. You were just playing politics with crime!

Dr. Browne: Bipartisan.

Mr. S. Panday: Bipartisan? Who is the person on the PNM to complete the bipartisan? Who? Tell us! They do not have it. They are missing it up here; they have lost it.

So they set up this Crime Commission and my information is that they just set it up as a “pappy-show” and the hon. Prime Minister is the person who set up this Crime Commission and he said that this Crime Commission—

Mr. Manning: Why do you not leave me alone?

Mr. S. Panday: Okay, I will leave you alone. So as this Crime Commission was set up, we knew that they were playing games; they were playing politics with crime. So on June 13, 2008 I asked a question:

“Could the hon. Minister of National Security state:

- (a) the date of the establishment of the Crime and Justice Commission;
- (b) whether the Crime Commission presented any recommendations...
- (c) if the answer to (b) is in the affirmative, has the Government acted upon any of these recommendations;
- (d) if the answer to (c) is in the affirmative, what have been the results;

Spiralling Crime Rate
[MR. S. PANDAY]

Friday, January 30, 2009

- (e) if the answer to (c) is in the negative, why not; and
- (f) if the answer to (b) is in the negative, what are the reasons for same?"

You set up a Commission and we knew you were playing politics with crime so we decided to probe you. And, again, the Member for Diego Martin North/East who speaks on behalf of everybody and cannot get his Ministry to work, says:

“Mr. Speaker, in the absence of the Minister of National Security...”

He wants everybody’s work, you know. They put that man there to do the water taxi and the moment it ran, they took away the chair and desk from him in the office. He is standing up in the office every day. You!

Dr. Moonilal: Who is that?

Mr. S. Panday: The Member for Diego Martin North/East took away the chair from the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo. The moment the water taxi moved, his chair and desk moved too. He is standing up in the office now, so the public servants are saying.

“The answer to part (a) is as follows: Hon. Members are advised that the recommendation to establish a Crime and Justice Commission which emanated from public consultation on Crime, was approved by Cabinet in 2007. The Commission was subsequently constituted and members appointed on August 23, 2007.”

Listen to what he said:

“The Commission recently completed (the first) interim report which includes recommendations focusing on closed circuit television, deportees, community policing, the Police Complaints Authority, forensics, computerization of...records...” et cetera.

I ask them: The Crime and Justice Commission made recommendations, have you implemented any? The answer was no. That is why I have been saying, you do not care about crime. You all probably have security, but poor people, businessmen and workers going to work; the maxi-taxi drivers; PH drivers, are getting killed. If you are not playing politics with crime, why did you not implement the recommendations of the Crime and Justice Commission? People are suffering! People are crying and it is time that the people stop talking and start taking action against the Government! They should hit the streets again to force you all to work! As I said, they are playing politics with crime.

2.15 p.m.

I will go on further to blame this Government for not taking active steps to deal with crime. When we had the package of legislation to deal with crime, the Police Complaints Authority was one of the Bills in the passage. A lady in my constituency named Miss Griffith said that long time when we played “police and tief, one fella had to be de police and de oder fellas to be tiefs. Under dis PNM Government de police and de tief is one”. Having said that, it shows that the people have lost confidence in the police service.

We joined with the Government to pass the Police Complaints Authority Bill No. 8. That Bill was passed in 2006 and gave teeth to the Police Complaints Authority. If a policeman had done anything wrong, that Bill has modernized the law to deal with the complaints. There are many poor people in Trinidad and Tobago whom certain police officers have abused. There have been occasions that I know when people have complained that when police hold them and they have money, the police would take either all or some of the money. In San Fernando, a lady had \$3,800 and when the police came they said it was only \$800. The lady started to cry and said that they went with her money.

You have the Police Complaints Authority to deal with problems like that. I ask the hon. Prime Minister and the Minister of National Security: Why is the Police Complaints Authority Bill inoperable? Do you know why? This Government does not want to lift the image of the police in the eyes of the people and create trust between the people and police.

I read this into the record.

“The Authority shall comprise a Director and a Deputy Director to be appointed by the President on the joint advice of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition.”

When have the director and deputy director not been appointed? Without the appointment of the director and the deputy director of the Police Complaints Authority, the authority cannot function.

This is such a piece of progressive legislation that the United National Congress participated in it. This piece of legislation has taken police investigating police from the Police Complaints Authority. This Bill has given the Police Complaints Authority the power to employ competent persons who will investigate police.

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

Spiralling Crime Rate
[MR. S. PANDAY]

Friday, January 30, 2009

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. S. Panday: I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker and all Members of this House for their graciousness. The Prime Minister is here and I will ask him a question. The Police Complaints Authority said that the President shall appoint on the joint advice of the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition. Suppose you have two pigheaded men as I think we have and you cannot get them to choose one person. [*Interruption*] Two borat. In the event that the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition cannot agree on the joint advice, the President should appoint the director and deputy director after consultation with the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition.

This law is so democratic that it gives the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition to come together for an appointment. It says that if they cannot do it the President would consult them and appoint. I ask the Prime Minister if he is au courant with the Constitution. Section 81 of the Constitution says:

“The Prime Minister shall keep the President fully informed concerning the general conduct of the government of Trinidad and Tobago and shall furnish the President with such information as he may request with respect to any particular matter relating to the government of Trinidad and Tobago.”

I ask the hon. Prime Minister: Do you have weekly meetings with the President? Why did you not bring this issue to the President? Why have you allowed the office of the director and deputy director of legal aid to stay in abeyance for so long? Why have you prevented the Police Complaints Authority from being functional? I humbly submit that the Government does not want to deal with crime. The Prime Minister said that he does not want to hear or answer. I know the hon. Minister of National Security has to answer this question. Why have you allowed the lack of appointment of the director of the Police Complaints Authority?

When that package of legislation was passed it was hoped that there would be interaction between the head of the Police Complaints Authority and the Commissioner of Police. They did not appoint the director of the Police Complaints Authority. Not only that. Do you know that they do not want to have the appointment of the Commissioner of Police? Why? You do not have to pay millions or billions of dollars for OPVs. There are simple things to do and you are not doing them. This Government and the Opposition joined together in passing legislation for the appointment of the Commissioner of Police.

The Police Service Commission did extensive research and presented the recommendation in Parliament. I ask them to tell us why they shut down the appointment with such frivolous excuses. When they realized what they were doing they said that it is not the man but the process they were upset with. They drafted it. Since last year July 04, they shut down the recommendation of the Police Service Commission for the appointment of the Commissioner of Police. This shameless, incompetent and hardhearted Government that does not care about crime is going into the second six months and has not brought the regulations before this House.

As a matter of fact I remember something now. When the Minister was in the Senate, Sen. Dana Seetahal SC asked why the director of the Police Complaints Authority was not appointed. What did the Minister say? I did not come to answer that. This Government does not care about crime. They feel that by spending money and making corrupt deals to buy boats from companies that have gone under is the way to deal with crime.

I ask the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Security: Which one is more important and pressing? Is it paying for a billion-dollar boat which cannot be delivered until sometime in the future or the appointment of the Commissioner of Police to manage the police service? Answer the question. Which is more important? Paying \$2 billion for these OPVs to a company that has gone under or the appointment of the director and deputy director of the Police Complaints Authority so we could deal with crime and put personnel in place to deal with crime? Which one is more costly? Over which one do you have more control? The appointment or ordering a ship that you cannot determine when it would be delivered?

It seems to me that they believe that by spending large sums of money they could fool the population with news that things would be good. Every time this Minister comes to this House he could never say what has been done to deal with crime. Do you know why? Because every time he comes to this honourable House this Minister says that we would do this or that in the future. They have entered into a contract to purchase the OPVs for over \$2 billion. It was done by government-to-government contract. The Member for Diego Martin North/East indicated that the government-to-government contract would ensure that they get the boat on time and the right quality. How does this government-to-government contract take place? Is there room for corruption? Tell us! There is no tendering. The Ministry of National Security has a special tendering process because of the nature of national security. Why did you not use the tendering process? Why did

Spiralling Crime Rate
[MR. S. PANDAY]

Friday, January 30, 2009

you have a government-to-government contract? Why was it not open? Why was it not transparent? Is there not room for corruption?

The hon. Minister said that they set up an inter-ministerial team to make recommendations and hire experts. How did you happen to go to Vosper Thornycroft? We have information that other countries were in the bid as Italy and Germany. Why did you choose the United Kingdom? [*Interruption*] The best. Were you aware that the company that was recommended to you by the British government was a company that was about to go under? Do you believe that they are so foolish? They want to see about themselves and you have money to throw away. Take your money and use it.

My information is that this Government visited one shipyard in Portsmouth. Did you go to Clyde? Did you go to Bristol? You took advice from the British government and they want to take care of their people so they recommended you to a company which was going under and has gone under. Where the money gone?

2.30 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we ask the question of the Prime Minister: Do you know that this company has been sold over to the BAE and that it is one of the most corrupted companies in the United Kingdom? Do you know it has been accused of bribing government officials in about 14 countries in the world, including Saudi Arabia? Do you know it was reported to the Serious Fraud Office? And that is the company this Government dealt with in a government-to-government contract? Do you know that BAE has taken over, and the company we had gone with, Vosper Thornycroft, has gone out of the shipbuilding business? So we have a contract with a company that has gone out of the shipbuilding business.

I quote from yesterday's Internet:

“Export orders

The joint venture has encountered problems with an export contract from Trinidad and Tobago, worth in excess of 150 million pounds, and to a lesser extent with the contract from Oman worth 450 million pounds, a VT spokesman said.”—And this company, which the British government directed you to, says—“It’s mainly been a shortage of engineering resource,...adding that both were existing VT contracts.”

The Minister came to this House last week, when he spoke on the Finance (Supplementary Appropriation) (2008) Bill. I do not know if he was thinking or if

he got up on the wrong side of the bed that morning; he talked so much garbage. He said when he spoke about offshore patrol vessels that the Government's ships were supposed to be delivered six months later. He said, just for the information of the Member for Couva South who had asked about the readiness of the delivery, that the contract effective dates for the three offshore patrol vessels were May 15, 2009, February 15, 2010, and October 15. He said that in June 2008, BVT, the same company we spoke about, said that OPV 1 could only be delivered on September 15, 2009.

We are talking billions of dollars and later they said that 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 2009;

Low down completion, which means that the vessel will be placed in the water for the first time in May 2009 and now the planned date for delivery was November 2009.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we are speaking of billions of dollars. We ask the Government, when they went on this government-to-government contract if they had a penalty clause for late delivery. It is taxpayers' money you are using. You are taking the people's money and entering contracts. What is the nature of the contract today? Let the Minister, when he replies, say whether there is a penalty clause in the contract. If not, the money should be taken from their pockets.

They believe that the way to deal with it is to fling money all over the place. He said that only when they get the vessels, we will see how they will deal with crime. They are telling the nation: "Look boys, run your racket, murder, import drugs and wait until we get this thing." You had a 360 degree radar system. You said you saw a pattern of criminal activity, but what did you do? Did you sit and watch the radar, see a pattern, fold your arms or sit on your hands? Why did you not take action? Why do you need these billion-dollar boats to take action? You did not even need a boat if you had the radar system. Where do you think these people who import the drugs from Venezuela land? They do not land in Piarco or Lopinot. They land on our ports and if you have a pattern of where they come in, why is it, without a boat, you do not put your land forces on the landing spot? Their radar sees the boats coming in and they are so shameless, they waste the people's money and they are giggling.

Madam Deputy Speaker, if they know where the drugs are being offloaded; if the radar spots the drugs coming or a boat is suspected, why not alert the police,

Spiralling Crime Rate
[MR. S. PANDAY]

Friday, January 30, 2009

the coast guard or the army so that helicopters can go down there? Why can you not put the police on land waiting to catch them? Interdiction is not only on sea; it is any place between the disembarkation and embarkation. This foolish and incompetent Government does not have sense at all. You cannot use the resources that we have; you have oil money; you are showing off with oil money. If it hits the fan, people will suffer. All we are saying is to deploy police or have all your coastal police stations properly equipped and take them at that point.

Assuming you would like to take them on shore, the Minister of National Security said that it is only seven minutes from Venezuela to Trinidad. There must be a designated path. Why not put 20 or 25 smaller fast vessels to surround the coast? Why do we have to spend all this money? When those things come here, they will be like the water taxis. Someone will put cloth in the gas tanks and they will not work. You are making excuses to make sure that you do not deal with crime. Why? Is it because you and the criminals are together? Is it because they are your base?

You bought a blimp. Why did you buy a blimp? You gave the Special Anti-Crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago (SAUTT) \$364 million in the last budget. If you look at the document, under Ministry of National Security, SAUTT has been given over \$1 billion. What does the country know about them? They were given \$270 billion; \$274 billion in 2008; this year, \$384 billion and we ask: What have we gained from that? Is it that you put your boys there and have them living happily? SAUTT has been there since 2003 and you spend more and more money on crime. What is happening? The murder rate is going up. To criticize them I think is necessary, but we must put our position on record.

All we have said has been said before by many people, but this Government does not intend to take action. The Law Association has given them advice and I ask the Minister: Did you take any of that advice or are you all hard-headed? You do not care and have money to spend and think that it is the panacea? They said that DNA legislation must be put into effect. We have enacted the legislation. Why has it not been put into full effect?

The Law Association enacts laws to provide for the electronic monitoring of persons convicted of certain crimes; instead of that we pass draconian legislation for bail and if a policeman does not like you, he can keep you in custody for as long as he wants. They do not want to leave you outside and they cannot trace you.

The Law Association said to enact laws to provide for electronic monitoring. Will that hurt anybody? Why did you not bring that legislation? They say to

enact laws for adequate sentencing. We recommend that also. They said to enact rules for modern prison conditions; enact legislation to provide treatment for addicts and alternative to prison sentences; enact laws for the introduction of the breathalyser and speed guns.

Look at the number of persons who have died on the roads and this Government has passed the breathalyser law. Why have they not introduced the legislation to have the law in place? They do not care about people dying on the roads? Small infractions of the law like traffic offences lead to greater infractions. We are still with a stop clock and people waving a flag. This Government has spent \$200 billion. They have the police service so backward. The Minister of National Security has been there so long, has he ever thought about it? People are screaming in their ears—which I am doing now—I hope some pass through and not come out the other side.

They said to: enact legislation to provide for adequate support of victims; to raise the standard for entering the police service and to introduce methods for quick response. In Buen Intento, where one of my neighbours was killed, for three hours, from a police station one hour away, we did not get the police to come because there was no manpower. Have you ever checked it out? Never!

Computerization of police records, they are trying to do, but they are so incompetent the computer breaks down every day. Hon. Minister, do you know that for the Christmas season the fingerprint computer went down? Do you know that the country was open to criminal activity and the police could not do anything? For six and seven days, if someone did something, the police could not pick them up; no records.

All the police stations must be in a satisfactory state of repair. He fixed one halfway and left the others. Do you know, hon. Minister, that the San Fernando Police Station, near to the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, in the constituency of the Member for San Fernando West and next to the Prime Minister, that there is a tree growing on top the police station; that the mayor had to cut it down.

The Law Association went on to talk about video conferences so you would not have to pay your friends big money to transport people in the truck. Do you know about that? Why not introduce that to ease the pressure on the courts? They went on to say that education is cool, but you all cannot think so far.

As part of the long-term programme, the country's education must be addressed. Emphasis should be placed on proper mentoring in schools. We have many barrel children and we must not scorn them. We must provide for them to

Spiralling Crime Rate
[MR. S. PANDAY]

Friday, January 30, 2009

prevent them from becoming criminals, but you all do not care. All you want is the Bail Act. A foolish Minister once said that we do not have to implement the Act, once we pass it, people will get frightened.

It said that closed circuit cameras strengthen the Police Complaints Authority and today I have come here to indicate to the nation that nothing has been done.

2.45 p.m.

The UNC, by way of the Member for Siparia, had a crime plan. Hon. Minister, do you want a copy of it? This is the crime plan from the hon. Member for Siparia. There are 15 pages of recommendations, which include staffing of the protective services. Hear how bright we are on this side. The approach to crime fighting should be three-fold: prevention, protection and detection. In this crime plan, we have identified the issues, the problems relating to the issues and suggestions. I know you all cannot think like that. "Look ah copy. He eh want it." It speaks about staffing the police service; prevention and detection; insufficient time; human resource management; police reform; law enforcement; technology; closed-circuit cameras; lack of working vehicles; legislation on parental responsibility ignored in juvenile crimes; victim care; police investigation; and community policing. You do not have to buy a big boat for that. You spent billion of taxpayers' money. These are things that will deal with crime. You do not have to waste money. When those boats come, I wonder if you would be smart enough to be able to operate them. I spoke to everybody, every NGO and even certain parties.

The distinguished Leader of the COP had written the Leader of the Opposition. We have come here today to speak on behalf of everybody in Trinidad and Tobago. The distinguished Leader of the COP had written to the—"all yuh want tuh see split, so dat despite all yuh incompetence, all yuh would stay in office." Incompetent and lazy, that is the order of the day. The distinguished Leader of the COP spoke about dealing with drugs; road traffic; human trafficking; illegal firearms; crime fighting and drugs and money laundering. He went on to give a full thesis dealing with road traffic offences. He said that these slight offences could lead to greater offences. He said: "Let us deal with the issue of human trafficking and the sex trade." He spoke about crime-fighting technology. Time does not permit me to go through all of these. He wrote the Leader of the Opposition and said: "Now is the time. Now is the call to action." That was Winston Dookeran, Political Leader of the Congress of the People. On behalf of all the peoples of Trinidad and Tobago, now is the time for action. We must all join together to fight this scourge of crime.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Dr. Hamza Rafeeq (*Caroni Central*): Madam Deputy Speaker, I beg to second the Motion and reserve my right to speak at a later stage in the debate.

Question proposed.

The Minister of National Security (Sen. The Hon. Martin Joseph): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am pleased to participate in this debate on this Motion that is before us. In responding to the presentation made by the hon. Member for Princes Town North, he accused this Government of not being serious about crime and not ready to deal with issues pertaining to crime. He spent almost the majority of his presentation dealing with issues not relating to crime, yet he accuses us of not being serious about crime. I will not go there.

What I would do is treat specifically with the Motion, as indicated on the Order Paper. Let me start with the last comment that he made. He indicated that he quoted from the Political Leader of the COP. The Political Leader of the COP wrote both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, outlining a number of issues that he feels need to be addressed right away. I want to inform this honourable House that the Prime Minister responded to his letter and the Prime Minister indicated that his concerns have been forwarded to me, in my capacity as Minister of National Security, to address those issues raised and a wider discussion, in terms of what progress we have been making. We have been in contact with the Political Leader of the Congress of the People and a meeting has been scheduled for those discussions to take place.

Let me put that on the record and respond to the concerns raised by the Member for Princes Town North. This Government must place on record and will continue to place on record its concerns as to the state of crime and violence in this country and put it in the context of developed society status. This Government is clear on its vision for Trinidad and Tobago. We have declared that by 2020, Trinidad and Tobago will be a developed society in which the quality of life and the standard of living of our citizens will be comparable with what exist in any developed society. You have a clear vision. We are also clear that, with respect to crime and violence, when compared to developed societies, we are a long way from what is acceptable. There is absolutely no question about that. But, in understanding that there is a gap, we must be clear, in terms of what is contributing to the unacceptable levels of crime and violence in this country. We are putting measures in place to treat with them.

Spiralling Crime Rate
[SEN. THE HON. M. JOSEPH]

Friday, January 30, 2009

What I am going to do for this honourable House is to again bring to your attention where we are, as it relates to those developments. In order to deal with the question about the nation's safety and security, we focus on five areas:

- securing the nation's borders;
- strengthening law enforcement capacity;
- strengthening and modernizing the legislative framework;
- promoting socially-focused interventions; and
- utilizing modern relevant technologies.

The Ministry continues to provide strategic direction and ensure that law enforcement has the requisite resources and tools to effectively implement their task in the fight against crime. Central to the crime-fighting strategy is the cooperation and coordination among the various arms of law enforcement, the military and customs and excise. This cooperation and coordination also extends to regional and international partners. It is essential for us to understand that no one protective service or law enforcement agency on its own can treat with the challenges that we face.

When we look at other countries and treat with them, they would indicate to us that the question of coordination and cooperation is indispensable. In the case of the United States, there is the establishment of Homeland Security—a recognition of the need to move in a different direction. In the case of the United Kingdom, there is the establishment of the Serious Organized Crime Agency (SOCA). You would see that governments have recognized that they need to reorganize their law enforcement, in order to treat with the challenge.

We recognize also that there are two issues. The first issue is the question about our location and need to reduce the inflow of drugs and guns. The Member for Princes Town North, in his presentation, spoke about the question of buying these expensive vessels. Imagine he is talking about that not being necessary and that all we need to do is to stay on land, determine where the illicit boats are going and put police on the land to deal with that. That cannot provide us with the results that we need. It is because of the state of coast guard assets.

The Member also said that we have a radar system. Yes, that is a fact. The radar system shows us what is happening and the pattern of movements. It is as a result of the radar system showing us the pattern of movements, it is necessary for us to have assets in the water to intervene today. He is saying: “No, no, you do not

need boats. All you need to do is to put police on.” What did he refer to? [Interruption] Coastal police stations. The strategy that the Government has embarked on is based on involvement and discussion with law enforcement, both locally and internationally.

The United Nations World Bank, in 2007, reported on crime and violence in the Caribbean, policies, et cetera. They made it clear that the challenge that the Caribbean countries face is the location and that governments will do well to find ways and means to reduce the inflow of drugs and guns coming into their countries and also the increase in law enforcement capacity to treat with what is happening now.

I think he made a point about archaic laws. He was using the Standing Orders. He said that we are operating under colonial types of things. I am meaning no disrespect, but I want to make it abundantly clear the fact that law enforcement, in particular the police organization, finds itself in a situation today in which they are playing catch up is no fault of theirs. When I say it, it is convenient for him to say: “the Minister comes here and he criticizes the police and he blames—” That is one of the reasons this Minister is not a Minister who is in the public limelight a lot. I am being called a lot of times. We operate in a system where it will be nice to get the Commissioner of Police to say one thing and the Minister of National Security to say something. They like us to be at loggerheads and contradict. They would call and ask for something so that they can say the Minister contradicts. I have tried, in discharging my responsibilities, to be aware of the environment in which we operate and as a result, I have taken a particular approach to the discharging of my responsibilities. I am saying this because part of the challenge that we face—this Government has invested enormous amount of resources and will continue to invest its resources for improving the management of the police service.

In one breath we are hearing talks about all kinds of things that are wrong, yet, at the same time, they underestimate the importance of trying to transform the police. He talked about operating under Standing Orders that are 45 years old. The police service is operating under longer vintage. We have to bring the police service into a modern era. One colleague once described what we are trying to is like a mechanic driving a vehicle and trying to fix it as we are driving. That is basically it. You cannot go to the criminals and say: “Listen, the police service needs to be upgraded; we need more management approaches to deal with crime and violence, would you please hold? Would you give us a chance for us to develop this capacity?”

Spiralling Crime Rate
[SEN. THE HON. M. JOSEPH]

Friday, January 30, 2009

3.00 p.m.

Not only that, it is so ridiculous. Criminals exploit weaknesses in law enforcement. That is a standard thing. Not just local criminals, but international criminals. So, one of the things that this Government has taken note of is, you do not come and publicly say that these are our weaknesses. This is what we need to do. By doing that, you are saying this is what is happening and they could exploit it.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this Government recognizes that in order to improve its ability to deal with crime and violence—I am going back, because we are talking about a developed society by 2020. All of us have had experiences in developed societies. We see people on television, even though some of the television shows about law enforcement are exaggerated. In Washington, we see surveillance cameras and all kinds of things in modern operations. You have police officers with a greater amount of accountability. The point I am making is that the same way we recognize that there is a gap between what we want as a developed society, it is the same way there is a gap between a modern police organization and our police organization. We do not have to come and say that. What we have to do is to recognize the nature of the gap and fix it.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is of concern to us that the transformation is taking much longer than we would have liked. There is no question about that. As a result, this is contributing to the unacceptable levels of crime and violence. Even as we say that, let us be clear. What we must be clear on is that we must move from anecdotal to what the facts are in terms of reporting. They do not like to hear me say that. It was reported that the Minister comes to the Parliament and riddle off statistics, et cetera, but that is the barometer of performance. That is the measurement. When it is good, we report that it is good and when it is bad we report it, because we have always said that we do not jimmy the statistics. First of all, we do not generate statistics. Statistics come from the police. While I am on that matter, this Government, as part of the modernization of law enforcement, revolutionized the way in which crime data is being gathered and processed in the police service.

We have moved from a modus operandi that existed before where historical data on crime was used at the end of the month, et cetera. We have introduced CAPA where we now have real time crime statistics being generated to law enforcement, so that they are in a better position to deal with crime and violence.

What do we have? With respect to homicides, in 2004 it was 260; 2005, 386; 2006, 371; 2007, 391; and 2008, 544. Clearly, this is unacceptable. In terms of

homicides, it is the highest level, but not only that. In 2004, homicides related to gang-related crimes were 32; 2005, 73; 2006, 159; 2007, 210; and 2008, 270.

If one looks at it, the key contributor to the level of homicides in this country is gang-related crimes. If you extract gang-related crimes from other homicides, we would be “normal”, even though every single death is unacceptable. The point is, there is no society in this world where you do not have crime. I am not going to be biblical and historical because people tell me that Cain killed Abel, and from the beginning of time there were murders. I am not going to go down that philosophical route. What I would say is that in terms of our situation, we see clearly that it is the question of gang-related homicides that are contributing tremendously to crime.

The other matter is drugs. In 2004 there were 10; in 2005, 10; in 2006, 77; in 2007, 44; and in 2008, 33. The thing that is really causing this great concern—related to it is when you look at the weapons that are being used. I want to link the strategy that we are using and show how it is an informed strategy. So, we are seeing gang-related homicides and they are a major contributor to this situation.

With respect to weapons used, for the information of the House, in 2004, 180 firearms were used in homicides; in 2005, 272; in 2006, 269; in 2007, 303; and in 2008, 432. We recognize that it is the drug trade which is being accompanied by guns coming into the country and creating the problem. As indicated earlier on, the strategy is to curtail the inflow of drugs and guns coming into the country.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is not confined to Trinidad and Tobago. The entire Caribbean region is experiencing the same situation; drugs and guns. I have said over and over in this Parliament that the pattern is, if when the drugs come into Trinidad and Tobago and when it leaves Trinidad and Tobago it goes straight north and no other route in the Caribbean, then the drugs will continue north and then the guns stay here. If the drugs and the guns go to another Caribbean country, the guns stay at the last drop off point in the region.

Again, this is not just Martin Joseph saying this. The record shows that this is the pattern and other Caribbean countries are faced with it. So, the strategy is to reduce the inflow of drugs and guns. That is the reason the Government took the decision to invest in the three offshore patrol vessels. I do not know if anybody ever went out into the gulf coast and saw what out there looks like. So, when we talk about our borders, the three offshore patrol vessels will provide the coast guard with the capacity to be able to be out there. They would be able to patrol and launch smaller craft off them, and they are going to give us an increased level of security.

Spiralling Crime Rate
[SEN. THE HON. M. JOSEPH]

Friday, January 30, 2009

Now, they are saying, if we have to wait until such time for those assets, we are not going to solve crime. The answer is no. We are not saying that. All we are saying is that in its absence, we are still being challenged. Basically, operating with the principle; we use what we have until we get what we want. They said why do we not buy smaller vessels, but we are purchasing smaller vessels. There are smaller vessels that are being purchased. The point about it is that we need sufficient offshore assets to be able to counter this situation. The Member said not to play politics with crime, and I am not playing politics.

I started by saying that the category of crime that is creating the greatest challenge is the question of homicides. Let me just make sure that I complete the record. There was a 39 per cent increase in homicides over the period 2007/2008; with respect to wounding and shooting, a 7.2 per cent increase; with respect to rape and incest, a 23 per cent reduction over 2007/2008; with respect to kidnappings, a 23 per cent reduction; with respect to break-ins and burglary, 8.4 per cent reduction—this is information coming from CAPA. The Minister of National Security does not generate crime records. With respect to robberies, 4.9 per cent; with respect to fraud offences, 3.8 per cent increase; larceny, 5.9 per cent increase; larceny of motor vehicles, a 10 per cent reduction; larceny of dwelling houses, 6 per cent reduction; narcotic offences, 16.7 per cent reduction and other serious crimes, 17.5 per cent reduction. Overall, there was a 4.8 per cent reduction.

You see, while they criticize and complain about what is happening, I think it is unfair to law enforcement. So, as I said, it is the homicides that are creating the greatest challenge. Gang-related homicides are creating the biggest challenge, and the question of how we need to treat with that. So, I have talked about the inflow of drugs, arms and ammunition as a major catalyst in the current level of violent criminal activity.

The nation's marine assets are being strengthened with the procurement of two small armed vessels. Those vessels—again, in the interest of trying to say what it is we are doing, it is almost like saying to the criminal element to expect the vessels by a certain date. Do you follow? This is not in our best interest. When we say that we cannot come and publicly say these are the things that we are doing, they say it is because we are not doing anything.

We are increasing the coastal assets to ensure the protection of our coastal areas and those things are going to enhance and improve law enforcement. We can expect an increase in the ability to reduce the inflow of drugs and guns coming into the country as a result of the naval assets. We are also increasing the capacity. We have two C26 aircraft and we are also increasing the capacity of

those two aircraft to give us increased capacity. Let me just put it like that without going into specific details with respect to what it is we are doing.

I have said at my first Cabinet press conference that we do not expect the same level of homicides which occurred in 2008 to be occurring in 2009. Somebody said that is pie in the sky, wishful thinking and to say how we are going to do that—whether there are going to be new measures or whether we have a new crime plan. We do not have a new crime plan, but what we are going to be seeing is the result of the measures that we are putting in place bearing fruit. So, we are also talking about the air assets.

A smaller aircraft, a 310, is also being outfitted to provide critical surveillance support to the other two C26 aircraft. The Member made a lot of noise and talked about SAUTT. SAUTT has two helicopters and an airship and those assets are also being used cooperatively in coordinated exercises to ensure the expectation, that is, being in a position to determine the inflow of drugs and guns coming into the country and that those assets are properly deployed and used to reduce crime.

3.15 p.m.

The intention is to reduce the inflow of drugs and guns. When we reduce the inflow of drugs and guns that is going to manifest itself in terms of what is happening on the streets.

Law enforcement will tell you there is also the downside of that in the first instance, and that is if we do not deal with the whole question about the gangs in a proper way—and we will talk about that just now—we are going to have gangs fighting over a smaller amount of "turf". So that part of the dislocation that is going to be coming as a result of clamouring down on the border will require another set of reaction from the displacement that is likely to take place. I will say something about that later on.

Additionally, we have to combat the shipment of drugs, guns and ammunition. The Customs and Excise Division is working closely with the Ministry of National Security, and has modernized and upgraded its detection and surveillance technologies. Also, law enforcement agencies continue to work with the United States Customs, Drug Enforcement Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Interpol and similar agencies from the United Kingdom and Canada.

Just recently, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago entered into an agreement with the Tobacco, Alcohol and Firearms Bureau of the Department of Homeland Security, with respect to e-tracing, the tracing of guns. That again, is going to give

Spiralling Crime Rate
[SEN. THE HON. M. JOSEPH]

Friday, January 30, 2009

us a fillip. Also the region introduced the Regional Integrated Ballistic Information Network (RIBIN) capability, that will allow the region to be in a better position to deal with the tracing of firearms.

You will not believe, Madam Deputy Speaker, hon. Members, we had a situation here very recently—and again, you do not want to talk about the operations of the police—where a firearm used on a homicide illegally from South Carolina; that firearm was also involved in some shooting in South Carolina. So, that this e-tracing and this RIBIN capability will allow law enforcement to be in a better position to be able to trace, and that is important in terms of modern law enforcement capability.

Madam Deputy Speaker, law enforcement has to find the illegal firearms. Here is information I have available to me. In 2008—listen again to the information provided—there were 111,422 patrols, 1,548 roadblocks and 1,438 exercises which led to the recovery in 2008 of—432 firearms were seized; 4,500 rounds of ammunition; 140.74 kilogrammes of cocaine; 3,710 kilogrammes of marijuana were seized. These operations also resulted in 9,758 persons being arrested; the execution of 6,596 warrants, and the issuance of 29,419 tickets. So, it will be unfair to give the impression that law enforcement is not stepping up in terms of how it is doing business.

I spoke about the Crime and Problem Analysis (CAPA) Unit, which is providing law enforcement with real time crime data. I cannot underscore the importance of this CAPA Unit. I am sure the hon. Member for Tabaquite will also speak to it, because I know he is also in receipt of information.

Mr. Maharaj SC: You find out everything.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Not illegally. You do not have to sneak to find out anything. I remember the last time he brought a motion and he was able to quote, but he did not say that the information came from the improved Crime and Problem Analysis Unit, from the police. But you did not ask what it is that they are doing a little differently now, so that the information is more timely, more accurate. Give somebody some credit.

Mr. Maharaj SC: I will give you credit.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Not me, it is the Government, because it is the Government that is recognizing the need to modernize the law enforcement. They figure all you have to do is stand and say modernize, modernize; police "ain't"

working right; do that, do that. He talked about blame and defend, but nobody is blaming and defending more than him. It is not about blaming.

The last time we said that it is taking a little longer, they told me I should be fired, because I should have known that it was going to take so long. I want us to underscore that we are dealing with a police organization that has to be in the 21st Century. As I am saying, through no fault of theirs, because I have to be careful, because I am sure somebody is going to come in this debate, I guarantee you somebody is going to come in this debate and say, the Minister “stand and criticize”.

When I was here last Friday responding to some concerns, I made it clear, and I will talk about that just now, in terms of the legislation, the power of the police and all of those things. This time my friend from Tabaquite, obviously—I do not want to say dated, because that sounds too strong, because he quoted some parts of the Constitution at the time I was not in a position to be as explicit as I will be today. I went and got my information and I am going to deal with that, because that is very, very important, because at the end of the day we are not responsible for operations and we cannot be.

In all the discussions, attempts were made to make sure that at the end of the day the politicians were not going to be involved in operations. I cannot tell somebody as much as—let me not say that. I cannot tell the police to go lock up somebody; I cannot; I cannot, and that is as it ought to be.

The Crime and Problem Analysis Unit: four senior crime analysts and 11 junior crime analysts have been recruited. I want to underscore this. As Minister of National Security, I have yet to go to the Cabinet to ask the Cabinet to provide resources necessary for law enforcement and rightfully so, justifying and being refused.

So, when they say this Government does not have the political will, this, that and the other, I think it is an unfair criticism, and sometimes it is at the expense of other areas where resources would have to go to, but because of the commitment to security and safety, the Member for Princes Town North said, we figure everything is about money. Security is expensive. The Member for Tabaquite knows that. It is a very expensive proposition, but the cost of not investing there is going to be so much worse that we have no choice, we have to invest.

As I said earlier on, the fact that we are not reaping the investment in a timely manner as we would like, there is cause for concern, but we are sure we are building a platform for a modern police, so that a year from now, two years from

Spiralling Crime Rate
[SEN. THE HON. M. JOSEPH]

Friday, January 30, 2009

now, we are not going to be talking about the same things. I can assure you that. We will not be talking about the same things, because we are building an organization that is built to last. I want you to understand something, even as you are building that organization, you cannot build it to operate just in 2008; it has to be flexible, because we do not know what the challenges and the threats will be in 2009. It might be cybercrimes, it might be other kinds of things. So, you have to build an organization that has to be adaptive to the environment in which it is operating.

That is the challenge we face. Even as we build it, they talk about building to last, and they say, oh, that is only "ol' talk". We are talking about changing a police organization, through no fault of its own that is not in step with the environment in which it is operating. I am being careful, because it is convenient for people to say, the Minister is criticizing the police, because we love to be able to say that. We could have taken a short cut; we could have come and said, everything is wrong; this is wrong; this is wrong; that is wrong. That does not help.

We recognize what is wrong; we have a responsibility to make sure that it is fixed and that is what we are doing. At the end of the day I want you to understand that as far as operation aspects of the police service are concerned, that is the commissioner. That is the reason we pass laws, together with the Opposition, to strengthen the office of the Commissioner of Police and to give the Commissioner of Police the authority, the autonomy, et cetera, to run his police organization.

While I am on that, let me just speak to that because I think that the Member for Tabaquite had raised, when I was here the last time: What are the responsibilities of the Minister of National Security regarding the security of the nation, specifically with regard to the governance of the police service, which plays a key role in the nation's domestic security?

The Constitution does not provide much detail on this matter, but it is clear when taking the Constitution as a whole, the responsibilities and powers of the governance of the police are shared among at least three governing entities, that the Minister's powers are limited. Provisions of the Police Service Act of 2006, also provide for additional governing responsibilities to be fulfilled by the Police Complaints Authority. If he did not say anything right in his contribution, the Member for Princes Town talked about the Police Complaints Authority.

The Constitution gives governance, responsibilities and authority over the police to the following: the Minister of National Security, Police Service Commission,

and the Commissioner of Police. In addition, the Constitution gives the courts the power to review certain decisions and practices involving the police service when they are properly brought before the courts. The courts have the power to uphold or strike down certain claims about the scope of the authority that any of these entities may claim.

The Police Complaints Authority Act of 2006 also gives the Police Complaints Authority the responsibility and power to review and investigate complaints filed against the police. My colleague from Tabaquite, section 85(1) states:

"Where any Minister has been assigned responsibility for any department of government, he shall exercise general direction and control over that department; and, subject to such direction and control, the department shall be under the supervision of a Permanent Secretary whose office shall be a public office."

The question is: What are the limits of the responsibilities and power in the phrase "general direction and control"? The Constitution does not spell this out, but it does make clearer what these limits are by how it establishes the authority and responsibilities of other governing entities. For instance, section 123A(1) states:

"Subject to section 123(1), the Commissioner of Police shall have the complete power to manage the Police Service and is required to ensure that the human, financial and material resources available to the Service are used in an efficient and effective manner."

This section could not be clearer in establishing that it is the Commissioner of Police who runs the police service, and logically, no other entity is afforded the responsibility and the authority to do so. The Constitution could not be clearer on this. I might add, the Commissioner of Police is the only head of a division within the Ministry of National Security who holds such power.

The only constraint explicitly placed on the authority and responsibilities of the Commissioner of Police is found in section 123(1), which assigns certain governing functions specifically to the Police Service Commission.

3.30 p.m.

These include the appointment and removal of the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioners of Police, monitoring the performance of these officers and their organization, delivering an annual performance appraisal report of these offices and deciding on appeals filed against the Commissioner of Police and regarding discipline and promotions. And, as pointed out, the Police Complaints Authority Act assigns to the Police Complaints Authority the power to review and investigate all

Spiralling Crime Rate
[SEN. THE HON. M. JOSEPH]

Friday, January 30, 2009

serious complaints against police officers below the rank of Deputy Commissioner. So the question arises, what are the governing responsibilities and powers remaining to the Minister of National Security after those that are explicitly granted to other persons and bodies have been taken into account? Let me tell you how I interpret my general powers and responsibilities. They fall into three categories—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Passing the buck.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: You see, you hear. You hear the uninformed—*[Crosstalk]* and there is a reason why I am going explicitly into this, Madam Deputy Speaker. There is a reason why I am reading so that it is clear. Okay? *[Crosstalk]*

I communicate to the Commissioner of Police what I see as the top priorities for his organization in contributing to the nation's security. When I say “I”, in my capacity as Minister of National Security as that indicated by the Government of the day, not me in no personal capacity, but as a Member of Cabinet. For example, early in our administration we made it clear to the then Commissioner that transforming the police service into a functional, professional and modern police organization was a top priority and in those circumstances we got assistance. You came here and you lambasted us about Prof. Mastrofski and “Maswoski” and “mas all kind of ski”, designed, again, to make sure—and they came and asked, how much millions of dollars you are spending on Prof. Mastrofski and all kinds of stuff to professionalize and modernize the police organization. You hear? *[Desk thumping]*

So, when they asked what it is we have been doing, they obviously, not recognizing that what is required to move the organization—and he keeps saying that sometimes I sound like a recurring decimal. This is one time I do not mind being accused of being a recurring decimal. Because at the end of the day—

Ms. Kangaloo: Turn to. *[Motions for the Minister to speak to Madam Deputy Speaker]*

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Sorry, I am not supposed to—I am supposed to be talking to you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am sorry, forgive me, forgive me; in my exuberance I might have gotten carried away. He was not here all the time so that now he is back—*[Interruption]*

Because at the end of the day—you know when I was a first year student in Economics they used to talk about “wigets”, I never knew what a “wiget” was. They always used to talk about “wigets”.

Hon. Member: It is widget.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: It is widget. Look, they are even telling me I am saying it wrong, they say it is widget. I never knew what was a widget, but what I did know is that my professors always used to say if you want to get good widgets you had to get good widget makers, because widget makers make widgets.

Law enforcement, if we want professional law enforcement, law enforcement that is in keeping with our vision of developed society—I hear people telling me, why our police do not look like police in New York or police in Miami? You see, in order for them to look like that it means that there is a whole reorientation, there is a whole understanding. There are some people who for example say why our police cannot go home with their vehicles? Because of the situation everybody has a solution and a suggestion, et cetera. But, again I do not want to seem like if I am shifting gears, you would not believe over the last five years this Government has purchased some 600-plus vehicles, the most vehicles purchased for—

Mr. S. Panday: Where they gone?

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I thank hon. Members for extending my time. I wish I could tell you I was not going to use all of it but it is more likely that I am going to use all of it. It is more likely.

Hon. Member: No problem, no problem. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: I was just indicating how some people are saying, why you cannot—

Mr. Ramnath: But where are the vehicles really?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: That is the point, the vehicles are here, the question is about deployment. That is the problem! [*Interruption*] You know, as I said the last time, and I hope this time having put everything in context and I hope the Member for Oropouche East was hearing so that he would put in context that you are not saying “blame and defend.” So, when people come to me and say, “Why when a citizen call they cannot get somebody to respond to, a vehicle cannot be available?”

Dr. Gopeesingh: It is not Sen. The Hon. Martin Joseph fault.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Yes. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, I was talking about—[*Interruption*] in the circumstances since they joined us late, my role in terms, and I talked about communicating to the Commissioner of Police the top priorities of the Government as it relates and I talked about the modernization of the police, because the modernization of the police is indispensable for the management.

Because the challenge faced is the question about management and in all fairness, management in today's world is completely different from management in the past. So that the whole management principles et cetera, that are required, again, it is important that police at all levels say what?

Mr. S. Panday: So, Stephen Williams is the best man then? [*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: [*Laughs*] But, Madam Deputy Speaker, they figured that all it has to be is management at the top, it is management at every level, it is management of the police stations, [*Interruption*] police station districts and it is about the work at all levels of the police service the issue of management, and as I am saying that this Government recognizes that as its top priority and as a result invested and brought in people to help in terms of the transformation of the police service to deal with the issues of management.

So, that is what I am saying in terms of my general powers and responsibilities: communicating to the Commissioner what the Government sees as the top priorities, identifying and making sure that the resources are provided. I was making the point that we have not shirked on providing the resources.

The Member for Princes Town North talked about what do we consider to be the number one priority, whether or not it is about the offshore patrol or whether or not—

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is a combination of a number of things and all I am saying is that the purchase of the offshore patrol vessels was not done at the expense of other things that the police need to be doing in order to improve on its performance. It is a combination of things—and here is the reason why if you notice over the last three or four years the Ministry of National Security was the third ministry in terms of resources. The Government has not, as I indicated, compromised—

Mr. S. Panday: Money is not all.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: We know money is not all but we know money is important in terms of providing the resources. Okay? As Minister of National Security—[*Interruption*] and that is the point I am making—the second point is about making sure that the Cabinet provides the ministry with sufficient resources.

Third, as Minister of National Security, I have the responsibility and authority to monitor the implementation of the various programmes and policies within the police service. This function can be likened to that of a navigator of a ship. A navigator keeps the captain informed of the ship's progress in moving towards its destination and warns him when the ship approaches dangerous waters and other navigational hazards, and that is what.

Dr. Gopeesingh: But you are the navigator there. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: The reform legislation of 2006 afforded the Ministry of National Security the resources to create a professional office within the Ministry of National Security to perform this key function, it is called the Office of Law Enforcement Policy. This office has been staffed by a director and an associate director, both with police management expertise and both capable of performing the sorts of assessments I need to monitor the police service progress and they are in the process of recruiting and hiring additional staff.

So, I thought if only for the interest of the Member for Tabaquite, because as I said last Friday, the Member for Tabaquite raised the question about the role and responsibility of the Minister of National Security vis a vis section 85 of the Constitution, and as I indicated, section 123A and 123(1) make it abundantly clear with respect to the authority and responsibility of the—

So, we talked about the Crime and Problem Analysis Unit. We have also strengthened the Canine Unit, the current technical team of the Canine Unit with a complement of eight dogs, recovered some 15 firearms, 40 kilos of cocaine, 307 kilos of marijuana. The canine unit also has six bomb detection dogs, two narcotic dogs, nine dogs in training and only yesterday Cabinet approved a recommendation made by the Ministry of National Security to purchase 42 dogs to ensure that the police service as it relates to its Canine Unit is up to strength—[*Interruption*]—12 canines to be trained for single purpose narcotics, four canines to be assigned to the airport in Tobago—I mean they are scuffling about the canine.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Canine Unit allows the police to be able to detect persons who are coming through—legitimate now, this is not for the coast areas—the airports with narcotics, guns, et cetera. You see it in all international airports,

Spiralling Crime Rate
[SEN. THE HON. M. JOSEPH]

Friday, January 30, 2009

you see it. So, all we are doing now, again, is strengthening the capacity of law enforcement to detect the inflowing drugs and guns coming into the country. Forty-two canines, as I said, four canines to be assigned in the airport in Tobago, eight canines to be assigned to the airport in Trinidad and 30 dual purpose canines to be trained for use in gun alert and tracking, six to be assigned to Tobago, four to the Port of Spain division, four to Central, six to South, four to the Eastern Division and two to the Western Division.

The gangs, as I indicated earlier on, continue to be the area of the greatest challenge and once we treat with the question about gangs, effectively, what we will do is that that will serve as an important leverage in terms of reducing the gang-related homicides and also the question about the gangs and its guns. The question about the control of the gangs has posed a big challenge to law enforcement, because you now have a situation where gangs are a whole lot more sophisticated. There is also the possibility, hon. Members, that some of these gang members may be coming in with a higher level of sophistication, some of them may have been oriented in other jurisdictions and they have now been sent back home and their networks continue to exist and it is posing a challenge.

I am trying to be as circumspect as I can. People do not like to hear me make comparisons because they keep saying this is Trinidad, but Trinidad does not operate in some isolation, we do not operate in a vacuum. Needless to say, all over the world, especially the places where we are likely to get them coming from, the increase in gang-related violence is on the increase. It is on the increase. A number of you all go on the Internet and stuff, I do not think that I need to quote FBI:

“Burgeoning gangs behind 80 per cent of US crime.”

Every state will tell you about the state of gangs and gangs’ contribution to the crime and violence and the countries, and a number of the gangs again is the question about drugs. I do not want to say fair share, but we have a sufficient amount of that to have to deal with as it relates to gangs.

3.45 p.m.

Now, there are those who keep saying that the Government is encouraging gang activities as it relates to URP and I want to make something abundantly clear. Madam Deputy Speaker, hon. Members, one of the things that we need to understand here, we need to understand that there are some people in our society because of their past, will never be able to get work in the private sector or in some other sectors. We need to understand that—and if we do not understand

that—he talked about as lawmakers and he talked about the NGOs saying that, "As a Parliament, we are not effective, et cetera." We need to understand as I said, that there is a category of people who under normal circumstances could never be employed, and as a result, the Unemployment Relief Programme provides those persons with the opportunity for employment.

The challenge that we face—and we are not running from that—is that we have to make sure that while they are employed in the Unemployment Relief Programme, they have no control over certain things. For example, no control over recruitment—certain things—because the likelihood of ghost and other things. That is the challenge because you have people come to you and say, "If it was not for URP, I cannot find a job nowhere. Because I was incarcerated, I was—" "That is it, but some of you conveniently love to say that the Government is funding gangs through URP.

Mr. Ramnath: Why do you not move Tobago East from?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: What are you asking me? Yes, [*Interruption*] Madam Deputy Speaker, when I do not obey the rules and speak to you, I get into trouble and it is always nicer to speak to you than to speak to anybody else in the Parliament. [*Desk thumping*] So let me speak—on that side I mean—to you. So, I am saying the question about the gangs—and the gangs is a challenge that we face and it is something that requires a deliberate effort, and that deliberate effort is being made to treat with that.

First of all, it is to deal with those persons who are now members of gangs. We have the Repeat Offenders Programme. We have a programme that exists that will allow law enforcement to look at those persons, their criminal records and see how quickly they can be brought to prosecution—that is the Repeat Offenders Programme.

Secondly, we have to make sure that those persons who must rely on the State for employment, that in being provided with employment, it is done within certain kinds of strict rules, and then the other challenge is to prevent persons from joining gangs. So that is the joining gangs and that is where a whole government approach is taking place as it relates to that. It is in that context that, Government entered into an agreement with the Inter-American Development Bank to establish the Citizens Security Programme when we came here and talk about that.

The Citizens Security Programme operating in 22 communities, all designed to make sure—there are some Members on the other side who I am sure some of

Spiralling Crime Rate
[SEN. THE HON. M. JOSEPH]

Friday, January 30, 2009

their communities are part of the programme. I am sure they would have been written to and would have been told that the programme is in existence—*[Interruption]* because it is not in your community. But I am sure because it is not a partisan, those 22 communities were picked, it was done very scientifically for which the Citizens Security Programme is operating and it is a pro-social programme to serve as a deterrent prevention from getting people involved in criminal activities, treating with the community, et cetera, et cetera. *[Interruption]* No, no, you know that.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the question about—what I am focusing on is making sure that the resources required to treat with crime and violence, that law enforcement needs to be provided with. The Member for Princes Town North also talked about training, let me just back up. I do not want to talk about the number of bullet proof vests, the number of firearms and all of the other equipment that the police organization is being provided with.

This Government has a commitment of recognizing that there is a need for us to be recruiting some 500 police officers annually for the next four years. We have indicated that. To date, there are 195 police officers who are currently on training. Let me just say something, the challenge that we face with meeting this 500 requirement annually, a couple things:

One, remember we have raised the qualification level. You must now have five O levels. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Ramnath: Speak English.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: They must pass polygraph test, psychological test—and you will be amazed about the challenges that we face as it relates to meeting the requirements.

So it is not that, the 500 per annum is not something that we are still not aspiring to, the challenge we face is persons meeting it. Do you know what we have to do, Madam Deputy Speaker? It means then, that the police service must be a preferred career for citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. S. Panday: Agreed.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: It is not, and perhaps there might have been reasons for, because we are now coming out of this archaic thing, so now that police is a modern organization with career prospects, et cetera, et cetera, we expect that there will be a greater amount of interest. So it also means that we have to go back to the schools with respect to career development, et cetera, et cetera, to make sure—*[Interruption]*

Mr. S. Panday: And head hunt.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph:—that we can attract the kinds of persons that we need in the police service. So as we modernize the police service, it becomes attractive. It becomes a career option and persons who are willing to join the police service will be meeting the academic qualifications necessary as we lift the bar as it relates to that.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I assure you that the actions that we are taking will guarantee—I tell people I am going to be living in this country long after I am a Minister of National Security. You think I do not have an interest in making sure I live in a safe and secure country. [*Desk thumping*] You think this Government is happy that there are people who are concerned about their security and safety. You all make it out as if we like that. Let me tell you all what is the concern that the Member for Princes Town North expressed, and I will say it here now when he talked about the fact that, "Oh, we went to bed with the criminals."

The Opposition thought that they were going to bring down the Government on the question of crime. That is what they thought. They thought that was our Achilles heel. They were going to bring us down on the question about crime and the fact that it did not happen, is the one for which it is they had some concerns. You follow what I am saying. So that in some instances—you see as much as you do not want to politicize the whole question about crime, you do not want to politicize it, but then sometimes there are some things that you just cannot let go unnoticed. Madam Deputy Speaker, on that point I need to say something that I have been wanting to say for the longest while.

There was a time when in the hustings for an election—there was an election, both political parties on the hustings—you said all kinds of things, et cetera; an election was won; a Government was formed and then the only issues took place in the Parliament. The Opposition will debate the concerns of the Government's policies and programmes. But we have a new development in this country, I do not know if people are taking notice. The new development is that even after an election is over, you hear people being called upon to engage in something called "civil disobedience". What is that? What does the individual citizen internalize as civil disobedience?

Mr. S. Panday: Ask Mandela.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: What is civil disobedience in the context of the management of the affairs of this country? I just ask. It is a rhetorical question. What is civil disobedience? No, no, no, no! In the context of all what it is, in a

Spiralling Crime Rate
[SEN. THE HON. M. JOSEPH]

Friday, January 30, 2009

few years what is civil disobedience; what is it about; how is it internalized; how is it manifested; and how do individuals engage in civil disobedience? How? Against what, against whom? How does it manifest itself? I think that is something that—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Moonilal: What relevance is it?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: What relevance? How do you mean what relevance, in the scheme of crime and violence, in the scheme of disorder, et cetera, et cetera? That is irrelevance, Member for Oropouche East.

Hon. Member: It sends a message to the gang lords.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: It sends a message to the gang lords? Madam Deputy Speaker, I talked about the question of vehicles and I indicated over the last three years 693 vehicles were provided to the police. The hon. Member raised the point about the laser gun. I think the challenge that we face with that is the question about the—it is about calibration of equipment and it has to do with some instrument—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: Is it about the taser?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: No, not the taser, the speed gun. It is somewhere in the process, but it is on the cards, hon. Member for Princes Town North because yes, we recognized that there is an outdated way in which it is that speed is measured. And not only that, I am sure you realize that law enforcement cannot even measure speed in the night, it could only be done in the day.

Mr. S. Panday: I told you that.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: So, it is really something that we really need to implement in short order. Let me come back to the question about training because you also talked about training.

Mr. Ramnath: *[Inaudible]* the requirements of the police.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: I think they amended all of that. Those things were amended in the—I could be a police officer too.

Hon. Member: What about Diego Martin North/East?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Some 1,200 officers were trained from a combination of personnel from Hendon Bramshill Police Colleges, and Resident United Kingdom Officers using core programmes from those organizations and specially adapted for the local environment: crime scene first responder course, crime investigator levels 1 and II, crime scene technician, basic investigation programmes, courtroom skills, interview technique and surveillance.

We have also strengthened the 555 programme, introduced dedicated supervisors and operators. You would recall that 555 was also implemented on the basis of a successful similar programme in Jamaica called “Kingfish”, and a successful programme in the United Kingdom called, “Tryden”. So that coming out of 555, citizens are able to call toll free confident lines where they could provide information to law enforcement on which law enforcement able to operate. Some 1,579 actionable calls have been received since its implementation.

The Member for Princes Town North also talked about the surveillance cameras. To date, there are some 100-plus cameras installed in Port of Spain and in San Fernando. Some 400 cameras are going to be installed over the next three months. They are operational, there is a command centre from which the law enforcement is able to operate.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I spoke about the training to increase the strength. As it stands now, as I indicated there are 197 in training, some 46 municipal police officers graduated on November 22, 2008. Another 37 municipal police are training right now. A new curriculum is in place. Police recruits are now the recipients of courses focusing on domestic violence, conflict resolution, crisis intervention, customer relations, critical incident management, policing for people, gangs, sociology, law enforcement, ethics, special needs, population.

4.00 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we renovated 51 police stations over the last two years. We have received five new police stations; of course, you realize the challenge we faced in terms of the length of time it has taken to construct those five police stations. Some 19 police stations are earmarked to be constructed over the next three years. [*Crosstalk*]

I have responded adequately, I believe, to the Motion raised by the Member for Princes Town North, indicating what the Government is doing; what the Government has done and what the Government will continue to do to ensure that, at the end of the day, our vision for Trinidad and Tobago of a developed society, on or before 2020, where the quality of life and standard of living of our citizens are comparable to what exist in a developed society, and where the question of their safety and security are paramount.

We will continue to do everything in our power to ensure that our citizens are provided with the level of safety and security befitting each and every one of them.

I thank you.

Mr. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj SC (*Tabaquite*): Madam Deputy Speaker, I had hoped that after the hon. Minister of National Security had spoken, we and the people of Trinidad and Tobago would have gotten some comfort, some feeling of security, that the Government was going to translate all these lectures into action on the streets, and that people would be safer, [*Desk thumping*] at their homes, on their way to work and anywhere they are in Trinidad and Tobago.

I have examined the speeches of the Minister of National Security over the last few years. [*Interruption*]

Mr. S. Panday: Same thing!

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: Unfortunately, I cannot see any light under the tunnel that the serious crime situation in Trinidad and Tobago would be under control, with the greatest respect, in the time that he would be a minister. He is a very good man; he has the best intentions in the world. I know that he was a lecturer in management at the University of the West Indies. When you listen to his speeches in the debate, you cannot get away from the fact that he is an effective lecturer. [*Laughter*] But this is not what is needed in Trinidad and Tobago at this time.

Hon. Members: Aww!

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: What is needed in Trinidad and Tobago are solutions to the problems. [*Desk thumping*] We are having these lectures, all this rhetoric. We do not need the Minister of National Security to tell us that if you control drugs and guns coming into Trinidad and Tobago crime would be reduced; everybody has known that for the last 10 years, for the last 15 years.

We do not need to know what the police are doing in respect of some of these matters. We have reached the stage in Trinidad and Tobago, in that, what we need to know is: What the Government has done and what it is doing in order to make people feel safer. [*Crosstalk*]

As a matter of fact, the man who should have been the Commissioner of Police publicly stated a few nights ago that the strategies for fighting crime have failed.

Mr. S. Panday: True!

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: He said that the Government must look again at the strategies; they have all failed. The Minister of National Security himself stated a few months ago that the Ministry of National Security has failed in the fight

against crime. Everybody in Trinidad and Tobago knows that the Government has failed. Why are you coming to talk about criminal gangs?

You came into this House and told the country that there were 66 criminal gangs; that there were 500 members of those gangs; that you knew who they were; that they were going to be brought to justice. What has happened? You came into this House and told us that the number of those gangs had increased and that they had become more widespread in Trinidad and Tobago.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Eighty-five now.

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: So what is this? Is this a lecture group? Is this a university? This is where you are elected to govern the country. The police service was not elected to govern the country. You cannot come here and say that the police perform acts of governance; that is untrue; that is untrue. The Police Complaints Authority does not perform acts of governance.

Under section 75 of the Constitution, the Cabinet governs the country, and the Cabinet is responsible to the Parliament. [*Desk thumping*] So you must accept responsibility, as a minister, if the agency, the police service, has failed. The strategies have failed.

Based on what the Minister is saying, the Prime Minister could get up and say that he is not responsible for UDeCott; that he is not responsible for any crimes committed at UDeCott. He could get up and say, on your analogy, that what happened at UDeCott, under Cabinet oversight, he was not responsible for. He could get up and say, because of what you said, hon. Minister, that although the former Minister of Planning, Housing and Environment said that there were irregularities, that there was abuse of power, and the Prime Minister did not do anything about it, he is not responsible, the Government is not responsible. [*Desk thumping*] That does not make sense.

As a matter of fact, if you look at your Constitution, you would see under section 75 that responsible government is entrenched in the Constitution. Do you know what that means? That means as a minister you exercise control and direction over your ministry. You are politically responsible to the people through Parliament for its efficiency and if it does not do any work. You are politically responsible. That is why in constitutional law, you cannot come here and blame a public servant for what has happened, to exonerate you; you have to accept that responsibility.

But what is happening in this country is that the Government has adopted a new policy of not accepting responsibility; it is blaming everybody else. [*Crosstalk*]

Spiralling Crime Rate
[MR. MAHARAJ SC]

Friday, January 30, 2009

When the time comes, would you tell the electorate that the Commissioner of Police did not do his job?

Another excuse coming up, and I am very surprised, is that you do not want to talk, because if you talk it will make the criminals aware of what you are doing. [*Crosstalk*] Are you telling us that for strategies to fight crime, if you tell the country what you are doing, it would make the criminals aware, so that the criminal justice system could be compromised? That does not make sense; that cannot make sense.

Dr. Gopeesingh: That is why anaconda and Baghdad failed, because they were watching Parliament?

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: I want to remind the Minister that in 2005, you told this House and the Senate that the time for action was then; that people were fed up listening to speeches and words; that if the Opposition voted for a package of legislation, the Government would have crime under control. Your colleague then, the Attorney General at the time, said words to that effect.

Mr. S. Panday: Look it here! [*Mr. S. Panday lifts document*]

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: I want to get it quite clear: I know it is a difficult task. I know that the crime problem in Trinidad and Tobago would be a difficult task for any government. I know from everything else that has come out in the public eye, we have a major problem with criminal gangs; we have a major problem with drugs and firearms coming into Trinidad and Tobago. So we cannot take away from the fact that it is a difficult problem.

I will also concede that the police are trying their best with the strategies which the Government has to fight crime. I cannot dispute that. Yes, in a police service you would have good officers and you would have bad officers; that happens across the world. But the issue is, having recognized that, being aware of that, what is the Government doing and what has it done in order to make it a successful fight against crime?

Under the system that we operate, if the Minister is even trying his best, but his strategies are not working, the management of his Ministry is not working; it is not being micro managed in order to get the police to solve the problems; the only honourable thing to do, for any minister, is to tender his resignation. That is how it operates. [*Desk thumping*]

For example, if it is found that a ministry has gotten its human and financial resources, but for some reason it is not being managed to achieve the objective for

which the money is being spent, we cannot go to the population, the minister cannot go to the population and say, "I am trying my best", because the people have voted you for action and for solutions. The way the democratic system works, under our system, is that if the government cannot solve the problem, the government has to get out. That is how it works.

So I do not think that your contribution today—and I am not disputing your best intentions in the world—has really answered the Motion of the Member for Princes Town North. [*Desk thumping*]

Listen to what it says, before I read to you what you said in 2005 and before I read to you some of the statistics of the crime situation in Trinidad and Tobago. It is not an answer to this crime Motion to come here and show that in some areas of crime there has been a reduction. You need to show the person at the ground level of our society, to whom a crime has been committed or who has a problem, and who wants to know if crimes are being committed, or is the Government translating its policy into action by preventing those crimes and by detecting those crimes and by having those persons who have committed those crimes convicted, are they being punished. The persons in the jails, are they being rehabilitated when they come out into society? That is what the society would be interested in.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we have all this talk about Vision 2020, all this talk about international summits and this motto of prosperity, security and principles of good governance, but all that will fall down if people cannot be safe and secure in their homes, at their workplace. Right now in Trinidad and Tobago, persons do not want to go out in the night; business places are closed very early; persons have to lock up their homes at 7 o'clock and 8 o'clock; they are not coming out at all; businesses are being closed; people are getting out of business.

Human blood is on the streets, in their homes; mothers are weeping; they are seeing human blood all over the place. We are in our darkest hour. As a government you cannot come here and tell us that, "Ah trying meh best; ah doing dis; ah spending dis money; ah have dis expert; ah have dat expert." It is time for action. What you said in 2005 was true. People are fed up with talk.

Listen to what this Motion says:

"Whereas the serious criminal activity and the crime rate have continued to spiral out of control;

And whereas law-abiding citizens are under siege and are mortally afraid of being murdered, raped, kidnapped or shut and/or robbed;

Spiralling Crime Rate
[MR. MAHARAJ SC]

Friday, January 30, 2009

And whereas the Government does not appear to have the will or ability to effectively deal with this national crisis;

Be it resolved that this honourable House do condemn the Government for its failure to effectively deal with this unacceptable and serious crime situation.”

Hon. Minister, you have to show that by your policy, by your management of your Ministry and by your direction and control of your Ministry, that you have been able to have an effective detection policy for crime; it has been implemented; that you have a policy and a plan and it is working, and that crime is being prevented.

You have to show that when the crime is committed, they would be prosecuted, the guilty would be convicted, and that if they are innocent, yes they will go free. But when they are convicted, they would be effectively prosecuted to ensure that the conviction stands and persons are punished for those crimes.

We cannot have the situation that has been happening for the last two years. You have a situation, as I will show you from the statistics, where most of the persons who committed murders have not been detected; most of the persons who have committed serious crimes have not been detected.

Mr. S. Panday: Less than 20 per cent!

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: As a matter of fact, what you have in reality is anarchy. You have the criminals recognizing that, "We can commit the crime and we will not be detected." They recognize that, "Even if we are detected, we will be acquitted." There could be no crime plan, no crime strategy, if that is happening. If that is happening, you are facilitating the criminals; unconsciously that is what you are doing.

I am not accusing you or the Government being involved; I am not saying that. I am saying that by your policy, your actions and/or inaction, the crime rate is out of control and continues to be out of control.

I am not disputing that you want to live in Trinidad and Tobago after you are no longer in office; most of us would do that, but that is not the issue. The issue is billions of taxpayers' dollars have been spent in the fight against crime. The Government has held out the promise to the population that it will solve crime and it will control crime, but it has not done that.

Let me give you some of the figures which I am sure you know. These figures came from the agency of the police which you all have created, and you should be

congratulated for that data, but the priority is not having the data. Yes, it is good to have data; it will probably assist in the fight against crime, but the most important priority is to detect the crime and punish those who are convicted.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I have the figures from 2002—October 31, 2008. The total number of murders committed for that period was 2,360; the detection rate was 25 per cent. So you have some 1,760 persons who committed murders and have not been detected, from 2002—2008.

Madam Deputy Speaker, 1,760 persons who have committed murders and are outside there in a situation in which we have an uncontrollable crime situation, and murders continue to rise.

4.15 p.m.

From 2002 to October 31, 2008 in respect of other serious crimes; rape, kidnapping, burglary, et cetera we have a total of 111,134 serious crimes committed and if you use the 25 per cent detection rate, you would have had only 28,000 persons detected. So you have 83,134 persons who have committed serious crimes in Trinidad and Tobago over the last six years and they are still outside, not detected.

Hon. Minister, whichever Government was in office at this time, this would be totally unacceptable. No member of the society who loves Trinidad and Tobago could regard this as acceptable and, therefore, it is no answer to say yes, we know about it. You said you were not happy with it but that is not the answer; the answer is not whether we are happy or sad because all of us would be unhappy. The answer is that you have failed as a Minister to bring solutions to this problem. [*Desk thumping*]

Let us look at children; there has been a drastic increase of children committing crime in Trinidad and Tobago from the police statistics. Before 2002, children between 12—18 years you would have had two or six children for the year not even in double figures from the statistics I got. In 2002 it then started to double, and then it tripled. Do you know from 2002 to October 2008 we have had 263 children; that is children between the ages of 12—18 who committed minor crime?

Let us now look at serious crimes committed by children which are like murder, kidnapping, robbery, et cetera. In 2001 and before that you would have 5, 6, 10, 12 or 13. In 2002—2008, there was a drastic increase for example in 2007, there were 289 children 12—18 years committing serious crime; in 2008, 268; between 2002 to October 2008, there were 775.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is frightening. Children age 12—18 years with a population of 1.3 million people. Let me read to you some things you said years ago about the crime situation in Trinidad and Tobago when things were very bad but not as bad as they are today.

On June 07, 2005 your colleague, the then Attorney General said:

“Mr. Speaker, the Government recognizes that our people have grown tired of plans, talks and discussions of the problems. The police service was not up to the task of tackling the criminal network in the country and it needed legislation to cause the police to do this.”

Their package of legislation was announced and then it was stated that the legislative package in the short term can lead to a demonstrable reduction in crime. The Attorney General went on to say that the death penalty would be implemented and persons on death row will be hanged.

Well, we have had the legislation and the Attorney General recognizing that people were fed up with what you are saying today; plans, talks and discussions of the problem. They needed action. The police service was not equipped with the legislative powers; they wanted the Opposition to support them, the Opposition supported you. You said if the legislation were passed we would see the reduction in crime, but we have not seen a reduction, we have seen an increase. What is the honourable thing to do when that is said and it does not happen? That was said in 2005 and we are now in 2009 and you are saying the same thing.

Listen to what you said, hon. Minister. You said that it needed an interagency task force to deal specifically with homicide and if we got that, we would see results. Today you tell us that there is a major problem, it is on the increase and you blame it on the guns; maybe you are correct. My colleague, the Member for Siparia, said you had blamed it on that before but you said you would not allow these criminal elements to run or compromise the country's inexorable drive towards developed nation status by 2020. And you are telling us the same thing here, that we will have developed status by 2020.

If from 2005—2009 we did not reduce crime and we are getting worse, you are becoming more undeveloped status, you are taking us back. It is not developed status, it is underdeveloped status.

Mr. Ramnath: That is like what is happening with UDeCott.

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC : I want to ask you if it is guns and drugs, because hon. Minister when I served as Attorney General of this country we knew that and

within a year we took steps and crime was reduced. The crimes of 1995 were reduced by 1996. The then Minister of National Security, Minister Theodore and the government put measures in place and micromanaged the action and did not interfere with their discretion.

If you have a shop and you are supposed to run it and produce a profit but you are only giving instructions, writing letters and theory essays, and giving speeches but you are not involved in seeing if they are carried out and what is happening and appraising them, you will not make a profit, there will be a deficit.

You have been so geared up with your lecturing job you had at the university, you are probably lecturing to the police and the ministry and not micromanaging the ministry. If you figure that has to be done, you have to have a system that you ask for time frames. You call in the police and ask what they have done; you are not interfering in any prosecution but in administration. Under the Constitution, you have powers of direction and control so a ministry will never be profitable or progress if the Minister stands aloof from the ministry. You cannot stand aloof from the ministry and its problems, you have to get involved and be a part of it.

[Hon. P. Manning stands]

Mr. Ramnath: You are standing aloof now?

Mr. Manning: Madam Deputy Speaker, I am very pleased that the hon. Member for Tabaquite has agreed to give way. The Member for Tabaquite is advocating that Ministers micromanage their ministries which means that the span of responsibility of the Minister cannot be too wide to be able to do that. Is that what the Member is saying?

4.30 p.m.

Is the Member for Tabaquite therefore agreeing with the Government that you need a large Cabinet to be able to run a country at this stage of its development?

Hon. Members: No!

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: As a matter of fact, the main function of a Minister is to manage his Ministry. That is his core responsibility and if he cannot micromanage his Ministry, he has to get out. If you, as Prime Minister, could not micromanage your office to know what happened in UDeCott, you cannot say that you can manage.

Mr. Manning: I would like to draw to the attention of the hon. Member for Tabaquite that what he is saying is very different from what they have said over the

Spiralling Crime Rate
[MR. P. MANNING]

Friday, January 30, 2009

years. Their argument has been over the years that Ministers are responsible for policy and the public service, the permanent secretary and others are responsible for the execution of the policy. That has been their position. In other words, what is being said by the Member for Tabaquite this afternoon is very different from what traditionally they have been saying.

Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC: The Constitution says direction and control and if you cannot direct the police service and control the police service to fight crime, you have to go.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Deputy Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Monday, February 02, 2009 at 10.00 a.m. We wish to do two pieces of legislation on that day: the amendments to the Insurance Act and amendments to the Central Bank Act. Members will get draft copies of these Bills tomorrow. The Legislation Review Committee will be looking at these Bills over the weekend and, hopefully, there will not—as I indicated in the note passed over—be any fundamental changes and we intend to take those two Bills through all their stages on Monday.

Mr. S. Panday: Could you kindly hint us about what sections you would be working on?

Hon. C. Imbert: You would see it when you get it tomorrow. *[Interruption]* There will be no fundamental changes to the draft that you are going to get tomorrow. It is a fact that the amendments to the Central Bank Act will require a special majority and we are asking for the support of hon. Members opposite with respect to that special majority.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting of this House is suspended. We will resume at 5.03 p.m. and then there are two Motions on the Adjournment that we would do at that time.

4.34 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.04 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, as I indicated there are two Motions on the Adjournment and we will deal first with the Motion on the Adjournment as filed by the Member for Caroni Central.

**National Oncology Centre
(Delay in Construction of)**

Dr. Hamza Rafeeq (*Caroni Central*): Madam Deputy Speaker, I had filed this Motion a couple months ago and when Parliament was prorogued in December, the Motion lapsed. So I re-filed it and I am very happy to be debating this today.

The incidence of cancer is increasing all over the world and in particular in Trinidad and Tobago. Trinidad and Tobago is no exception. There are approximately 3,000 cases per year of cancer. The diagnosis of cancer is no longer a death sentence. Treatment modalities have improved to the extent that in some cancers you can actually get a cure and in some cancers you can live for quite a long time after it has been diagnosed. But there are two approaches that are necessary. One is that there should be early detection of the cancer and, secondly, there should be the appropriate treatment.

In today's approach in dealing with the management of cancer there are several modalities of treatment, one of which is radio therapy. We have in Trinidad and Tobago a radiotherapy centre in St. James and in that centre there are two cobalt machines, one of which is about 30 years old and the other one is about 10 years old and those are the two machines that provide radiotherapy treatment for the thousands of patients who have been diagnosed with cancer and who need radiotherapy treatment in Trinidad and Tobago. That is apart from those who access treatment at the private hospitals.

A decision was taken many years ago to construct and to establish a cancer centre to deal with all aspects of cancer, from detection right up to rehabilitation and palliation. Towards that end, when we were in government, we conducted a feasibility study for the construction of that centre and through international tendering we hired a firm to do a feasibility study for us. That would have given us information on where to site that centre, the size of the radiotherapy centre, the equipment that was necessary for the centre; the staffing that was required and, of course, training arrangements for the staff that would be required to work in that centre.

The report of that feasibility study was received sometime around January—February 2002, that was just after the Government had changed, and the Government of the day took the decision to enter into a government-to-government arrangement with the government of Canada to provide service for the construction of that centre. I will deal with the government-to-government

National Oncology Centre
[DR. RAFEEQ]

Friday, January 30, 2009

arrangement issue in a little while because somehow I think the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago have not benefited in ways that they could have benefited if that had gone out for open tendering.

What happened was that the same company that did the feasibility study was awarded the contract for the oversight of the construction of that centre. We did mention at that time that there would be serious conflict of interest situations if the same company that did the feasibility study was responsible for the oversight of that centre.

In 2004, in the presentation of the national budget, the Prime Minister who was Minister of Finance at that time, said, and I quote:

“Construction is expected to begin during this year on the National Oncology Centre at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex.”

That was in 2004.

5.10 p.m.

In 2005, he mentioned in the budget, “we shall continue work on the National Oncology Centre”. Of course, work had not even started as yet.

In 2006, in the budget he said, “by 2007 we expect that the construction of the Point Fortin Hospital, the Scarborough Hospital, the National Oncology Centre and a new wing at the San Fernando General Hospital would all be completed”. The centre had not started as yet.

In April 2007, the sod was turned for the construction of the National Oncology Centre; something happened shortly thereafter and work has stopped. Today, if you pass there you would see that the place is overgrown with bushes and nothing is going on as far as the construction of that centre is concerned.

Today, if you are diagnosed with cancer you would have to wait about three to six months before you can access radiotherapy treatment at St. James. You will get treatment from the cobalt machine which is not the best treatment available for the management of cancer at this point in time. The preferred modality of treatment is the linear accelerator and this is what the centre at Mount Hope was supposed to provide. My understanding is—and I think that the Minister mentioned at some point in time—that the Government had difficulty with the company that was doing the oversight for the centre and the company that was engaged to construct it. Probably, they are in arbitration now.

The point is no work is going on there and people continue to suffer and die. If you are diagnosed with cancer and you do not have the funds to access

treatment at one of the private centres like the Brian Lara Centre in Port of Spain or the centre at San Fernando, you would have to wait three to six months before you can access treatment and you may very well die before you get the proper treatment.

We told the government at the time that it entered into this government-to-government arrangement, that it was not the correct thing to do. I hope that the Minister will tell us who made the approach in that government-to-government arrangement. Did the government of Canada make the approach to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, or did the Government of Trinidad and Tobago approach the Canadian government to ask for support? What was the involvement of the Canadian government? Is it that they provided the Government of Trinidad and Tobago with a list of names of companies or people who were involved in the construction and supervision of cancer centres and then the Government made the final choice, or the Government suggested one name and went with that?

By going into this government-to-government arrangement, getting one name and dealing with that company, we lost the opportunity for competitive tendering. We would have had the opportunity to look at different aspects of companies that deal with the construction of cancer centres and select the best one that would give value for money and the best centre available for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. We do not know what we have lost by going to a government and asking them to select a company for us.

Right now, if the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is engaged in arbitration with that particular company that did the feasibility study, there would have been serious conflict of interest situations. Most likely, they would have written the terms of reference for the company that would have done the supervision. With whom is the Government having the arbitration? Is it with the government of Canada or the company?

What have the citizens gained by that government-to-government arrangement? If we had gone for open tendering, today, we would have had a new centre offering treatment to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. In April 2007, when the sod was turned for the construction of that centre, it was said then that it would have taken 30 months to construct. That means that by September or October this year, it should have been opened to the public.

As it stands today, we do not know when it will start and when it would be completed. In the meantime people are dying. We have a downturn in the economy and we know that allocation for all the ministries has been cut. I want to

National Oncology Centre
[DR. RAFEEQ]

Friday, January 30, 2009

find out what is happening with the allocation of the Ministry of Health with regards to the oncology centre. Has the allocation for the oncology centre been cut or is the money still available? When is the construction expected to start and when is it expected to be completed?

We also want to know what is happening with the training activities for the staff that would work at the centre. When I was in the ministry we had sent several persons to be trained in the field of oncology. I feel certain that most of them have been absorbed elsewhere. Within two years, the private sector has constructed two oncology centres, one in north Trinidad and the other in south Trinidad. In seven years the Government has not been able to construct one. I feel certain that the people who have been trained have been absorbed in the private sector because they would not wait three, four and five years for the Government's centre to be completed in order to access employment. With 2,000 or 3,000 new cases every year and 1,300 to 1,400 persons dying every year, this has become a very urgent issue.

Somehow you get the impression that this Government is not concerned too much with death because 550 persons were murdered; 250 persons died in road accidents; 120 died from dengue and so many are dying from cancer. The Government has to be serious. This is a very serious issue. It was said that in conceiving the idea of having an oncology centre in Trinidad and Tobago, we would not only treat patients from Trinidad and Tobago but also the other islands in the Caribbean. I am making a plea to the Government to take this issue very seriously and get the project back on the road. Tell us how soon the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago can expect to have this centre opened so that they can be treated in the proper manner and their lives can be saved.

Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Health (Sen. The Hon. Jerry Narace): Madam Deputy Speaker, while I must reject this Motion from the outset, I welcome the opportunity through this forum to share with the national community the matters and all the issues around this oncology centre. Since this new Government came into office we have been working assiduously to increase access and provide quality health care and treatment for cancer patients by developing the necessary infrastructure, institutional capacity and technical resources at our existing facilities.

The Member for Caroni Central knows that what obtains today did not obtain when he was the minister of health. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago is currently finalizing the contract arrangements for the construction of an ultra

modern national oncology centre. The centre is expected to be operational by the end of this year and would provide state of the art oncology services. The ministry recognizes the need to provide timely and easy access to oncology services. In the interim, we have been able to increase the capacity at our existing institutions and, where possible, negotiate with private providers.

The Ministry of Health has undertaken some major infrastructural improvements at the National Radiotherapy Centre in St. James, in terms of plant, equipment and other supporting systems. This is directed at creating an environment conducive to new, optimized and efficient radiotherapy services with patients accessing this facility in greater comfort, backed by an upgrade of medical records and appointment systems and an interface with well-trained and dedicated staff.

I am pleased to report to this honourable House our five-point upgrade plan for the National Radiotherapy Centre in St. James. The plan entails the following:

- The procurement and installation of a source change for the cobalt machine which would increase the number of persons accessing treatment from 40 to approximately 75 patients per day.
- The procurement and installation of the CT simulator which allows a patient to receive full CT scan in three to five minutes, as opposed to 10 to 20 minutes. This is one of the latest advances in the field of radiation oncology for the treatment of cancer.
- The procurement and installation of additional fume cupboards which should increase the capacity to mix chemotherapy, thus reducing the waiting time for treatment.
- The installation of a block cutting machine which focuses only on the cancerous area to be treated, rather than the entire area of the body. This measure shall reduce the level of radiation exposure and the overall waiting time.
- The increase in the number of radiation therapists from two to six persons to increase productivity and output.

More importantly, while all the pieces of equipment are installed, the plant would be operational pending an electricity upgrade in the next few weeks.

In addition, the number of in-patient beds in the female ward at the NRC will be expanded from 20 to 30 and a stricter shift system will be instituted to clear the backlog of persons waiting to access this service. Moreover, in our effort to respond to cancer patients' needs, the ministry through partnership with the private sector has been

National Oncology Centre
[SEN. THE HON. J. NARACE]

Friday, January 30, 2009

improving access to radiation therapy. We have been able to contract services and negotiate a 20 per cent discount and increase the volume of patients admitted to the Brian Lara Cancer Centre. Through this new arrangement, more of our public sector patients would be able to access care at this facility. It went down from US \$10,000 to US \$8,000.

In October of this year, we opened the Vitas House Facility to improve and facilitate the quality of life of patients at the later stages of cancer and patients who in some cases are likely to be ill-treated, or marginalized. This is the first facility in the English-speaking Caribbean to offer such services. Your good friend was very instrumental in that, Member for Tabaquite. The Ministry of Health is also working closely with the South West, the Eastern and Tobago Regional Health Authorities to introduce satellite centres in their regions to provide basic oncology services such as administration of chemotherapy, general medical care, counselling and other support. This means that in the very near future, patients from these regions would no longer need to travel to the NRC to access these basic services.

The Ministry of Health is also placing great emphasis on human resource development. You asked about that, Member for Caroni Central. In 2008, we awarded 60 scholarships and approximately 120 bursaries for studies in different health disciplines. Specifically for oncology, four doctors are now being trained abroad, two in radiation, one in surgery and one in urology. We have a human resource plan that accompanies all that we are doing. These are significant improvements which provide tangible evidence of our commitment to deliver on our promises and be true to our mission of improving the quality of our health care delivery, by improving the access and treatment conditions of our patients.

Hon. Members, I wish to state that globally there has been a dramatic shift in the perception of cancer and it has been recognized that the needs of individuals with cancer; those at risk for developing cancer and those surviving cancer are forever changing. According to the World Health Organization Report 2008, by Peter Boyd, director of the WHO International Agency for Research on Cancer, cancer is projected to overtake heart disease and become the number one killer by 2010 and this represents a real challenge for health systems worldwide. Member for Caroni Central, I take your point.

5.25 p.m.

Furthermore, the World Cancer Report 2008 estimated that over 12 million were diagnosed with cancer over the last year. The report reveals that the global

cancer burden has doubled in the last 30 years of the 20th Century and it is estimated that this will double again by 2020 and nearly triple by 2030. So we recognize the seriousness.

The current priorities for cancer control must focus on the identification, delivery and evaluation of effective cancer control measures. While prevention research is important, translation of research in its broadest sense is of paramount importance to cancer control because it covers the spectrum for translating cutting-edge scientific discovery into new approaches to cancer treatment, to translating knowledge of cancer risk factors into changes in population behaviour.

As much as we focus on cancer patients and their care, I need to stress at this point that the Ministry of Health has adopted this international framework and it is taking a dynamic approach to refocusing its efforts on the prevention of the disease using health promotion and education as primary tools towards that end. Health promotion includes building healthy public policy, creating healthy environments, strengthening community action, developing personal skills through information and education and reorienting health care services towards prevention of illness and promotion of health.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Health is big on the prevention programme. You would have noticed that we have been putting out a number of upgraded health centres and reconstructed health centres; all of this to strengthen our primary care network and to do the preventive work. We are going out into the communities because we wish to focus on community-led health care. We are also building strong policy and we hope for the support of the Opposition when we bring the Tobacco Control Bill, because that is critical in this area as well.

The role of the health sector must move increasingly in a health promotion direction, beyond its responsibility to provide clinical and creative services. To that end, we have established the National Chronic Disease Advisory Committee, led by Dr. Paul Teelucksingh, who is doing some lovely work. I will not go through all of that with you. Also important is our Tobacco Control Bill, tobacco being positively correlated with cancer. We believe that this legislation will be effective in addressing cancer prevention.

It may be useful to mention that, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) data, tobacco use is responsible for 1.8 million cancer deaths per year globally. Sixty per cent of those deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries. It is not just early detection; it is early detection and also the preventive environment. These are only some of the interventions that we are looking into.

National Oncology Centre
[SEN. THE HON. J. NARACE]

Friday, January 30, 2009

I noticed you raised a point about the new wing at the San Fernando General Hospital. That wing has been completed. You raised the point of the Point Fortin Hospital. The Point Fortin Hospital and the Oncology Centre are targetted for this year. The Oncology Centre will be completed by the end of the year.

So the Government is committed to the creation of an environment that cares for all regardless of the type of illness, cultural, economic and social background of our patients. At the Ministry of Health, we believe firmly that the business of health care extends above and beyond mere health policy and administration. Our job is to care about people and to do everything in our power to prevent and to bring urgent relief to the burden of suffering, while simultaneously implementing First World systems to deliver efficient and effective services.

I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

**Dengue, Yellow Fever and Leptispirosis
(Preventive Measures, Incidence of and Deaths)**

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): Madam Deputy Speaker, the matter this evening is on the failure of the Government to provide, through accurate information to the nation, the incidence of and deaths arising from dengue infection, in addition to inadequate preventive measures and nationwide education programmes on yellow fever and the leptispirosis disease.

As early as January 25 last year, I raised a matter of urgent public importance here in the House, in accordance with Standing Order 12 of the House of Representatives, namely: the impending national epidemic of life-threatening dengue haemorrhagic fever as a result of the presence of and exposure to the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito discovered in Port of Spain, Chaguanas and St. Madeleine within the last two weeks and the infection of 12 Chinese construction workers in Port of Spain and families in Central and South Trinidad.

The press carried headlines on dengue, on January 25, 2008. Everyone would have seen them: “12 Chinese workers sick DENGUE”. I indicated that the matter was urgent then, with which the hon. Speaker of the House agreed, and allowed the matter to be debated. I asked that immediate action be taken by the Minister and the Ministry of Health to prevent an impending outbreak of life-threatening dengue haemorrhagic fever. The media highlighted this issue on Friday, January 11, 2008 in the *Express*: “Fear of Dengue Fever Outbreak”; and the *Newsday*, on January 06, 2008, “Dengue fever sends family to hospital”. It is in that context that we raised the Motion.

In the hon. Minister of Health's response—and I quote from what the Minister said in Parliament:

“I thought it would have been a difficult task dealing with it, but as my colleague and friend from Diego Martin North/East would say, ‘This is suck eye’.”

He trivialized the dreaded dengue outbreak, dealing with it as “suck eye”. Those words have come back to haunt you, hon. Minister. Scores of innocent people have died from this disease which you at that time described as “suck eye”.

You quoted from two pages of documents on Vision 2020; not dealing with dengue. You also said that you had answered the question at the post-Cabinet conference the day before and that there were no inordinate reports brought to you. He said that no inordinate reports were brought to him when the media was highlighting the dengue outbreak almost daily. That was obviously a Minister in denial, calling it increased incidents. He and his Chief Medical Officer were refusing to admit that the death of young Sasha Bickram was due to dengue. The post mortem report subsequently proved them to be strangers to the truth. I believe they were conveniently in psychological denial.

The hon. Minister said, in January, that they had put a technical team together which identified a plan because they were pursuing First World status. During the following 11 months—the deaths of scores of innocent children and adults are on the hands of the Minister, his Chief Medical Officer and the Ministry's team. We believe that they, by acts of omission and failure to implement nationwide measures, have committed criminal offences on this population causing the deaths of so many people.

Hon. Minister Jerry Narace, in winding up in Parliament in January, said that he would like to tell the world that there was no dengue outbreak. He went on to say that now that they had brought the matter under some control and that dengue was no longer a major problem in Trinidad and Tobago, the Government was about showing people how they could live longer and healthier. I think it was an oxymoronic statement by the Minister when scores of innocent citizens have lost their lives as a result of the negligence, failure and incompetence of both the hon. Minister and the Ministry of Health.

On September 05, 2008, eight months later, the hon. Speaker again allowed another Motion of urgent public importance on the national epidemic of the dreaded dengue in various parts of Trinidad; eight months after the Minister of

Dengue, Yellow Fever and Leptospirosis
[DR. GOPEESINGH]

Friday, January 30, 2009

Health failed to manage and contain the deadly disease throughout several parts of Trinidad—Mayaro, San Fernando and Princes Town; in fact, throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

So we spoke about dengue in January and in September, yet in December, just last month, we lost the life of a bright, young, 22-year-old student in Freeport and many others to dengue; all preventable if the hon. Minister were not flippant and treated it as “suck eye”, politicking about First World status and being in self-denial.

The hon. Minister rejected the Motion again and said that the UNC wanted to “mash up” the country. I think that this was heartlessness when people were dying at that time from dengue. At that time, there were no platelets in hospitals for treatment of the dengue haemorrhagic patients. You need five units of blood to make one unit of platelets and there was none at the hospitals at that time. There was overcrowding, patients being sent home to die and no testing of any kind for dengue available at public institutions. Families had to go to private labs for testing.

There was a lack of resources and equipment resulting in doctors telling poor patients that they came to the hospital at the risk of dying. Patient care was seriously compromised.

Even today, the *Express* of Wednesday, January 07, 2009, “Grande woman loses dengue battle”.

“A 76-year-old woman became the first dengue victim of the year. Camille Greenaway of Coronation Road, Sangre Grande, died on Sunday after battling with dengue haemorrhagic fever at the Sangre Grande Hospital for several days.”

We have a lady three days on a stretcher, a story by Stacey Moore on Saturday, January 03, 2009.

“A Williamsville mother’s dream of spending New Year’s Day with her family turned into a three-day nightmare after she contracted dengue haemorrhagic fever and had to sleep on a stretcher for three days before being placed in a bed at the San Fernando General Hospital.

Ria Chanai, 45, of Poona Road Williamsville, said four weeks ago she started experiencing pain followed by heavy fever and vomiting...

She said that one day she began vomiting green, blue and blood she became frightened.

‘When I started to vomit all those colours my aunt decided to take me to the hospital.’

Chanai was warded at the hospital, three weeks before Christmas Day where she was diagnosed with the haemorrhagic fever but was later discharged...

After being discharged, Chanai said that her condition got worse and she collapsed at home. One of her daughters called for an ambulance and she was taken to the hospital. ‘When I reached the hospital at 4 am on Old Year’s Day I was placed in a wheelchair inside the emergency section and left there for about three hours...’

She said she could not feel her body and kept vomiting. Chanai said she was placed on a stretcher which she slept on for three days.

I thought they were coming to move me to a bed. But I was moved from the wheelchair to a stretcher...”

A stretcher for three days? A lady with dengue fever, Madam Deputy Speaker?

“I wanted to scream, but the pain was so much, my lips could not even open...”

Chanai said she was upset that she had to sleep for three days on a stretcher.

On January 02, 2009, Penal/Debe reported 90 dengue cases. The Penal/Debe district has reported more than 90 confirmed cases of dengue in the last two months of 2008. Then comes the Ministry to say it is going to reveal a dengue action plan, one year later, when we raised it in January 2008. Louis Homer, South Bureau, Monday, January 05, 2009: “Ministry to reveal dengue plan”.

What is even more discomfoting and terrible is that the Ministry officials tried to deny the population the facts relating to dengue. When they said that the incidence was about 3,582 cases in Trinidad, 100 confirmed cases by the public health laboratory, we said that they were misleading the nation.

There were 11 deaths already recorded by September 25, 2008. How is it that the Ministry of Health can come with bogus figures and say that only six people died, when as at September 25, 2008, Josh Moonilal, Sasha Bickram, Solomon Mehenbaig, Elicia Mootilal, Cindy Ramnarine, Anand Dwarika, Aziza Ali, Rishi Mahabir, Ramlal Moonesar and Adrian Ojeer, age 07 from Longdenville Government School, 11 persons, had died? The Chief Medical Officer is saying that only six people died. Madam Deputy Speaker, something is radically wrong. They are trying to fool the population in the midst of their incompetence.

5.40 p.m.

How could this Ministry and the Chief Medical Officer say that only six people died? Madam Deputy Speaker, something is radically wrong. Were they trying to mislead and fool the population in the midst of their incompetence? They said that there were 3,832 confirmed cases.

We know that throughout Trinidad and Tobago—I have checked a laboratory in North Trinidad, the St. Clair Medical Lab, and a second lab in Mical Building. Everyday, they receive at least 50 cases in each lab; that makes 100 cases for testing for Dengue. Ten per cent of these cases are positive. It means that out of the 100 blood samples taken, 10 per cent is positive and for seven days per week, that is 20. That amounts to 280 for the month. Therefore, if you extrapolate for the year, in one or two laboratories, that makes 3,360. That is only a sample of what existed. We have had more than 6,000 or 7,000 cases, but the Ministry was denying it. Even their calculations were wrong. If there were 3,832 cases of dengue, what has happened? They said that the incidence is 3,832 cases. In a population of 1.3 million, that makes the incidence at 295 per 100,000. They can calculate it. If we say that there are only 5,500 cases, the incidence is 430; much higher than even Brazil, which has endemic dengue fever.

The Pan American World Health Organization gave them some recommendations such as training of the medical community and transformation of emergency and accident observations beds for hospitalization of Dengue patients with a 24-hour shift. People cannot get a stretcher. According to Dr. Margaret Chan, Director General of the World Health Organization:

“Examining the data available in Trinidad and Tobago, we observe that the incidence and patterns of the Dengue infection, the type 2 Virus in 2008, demonstrated an extremely high infection rate for children and complications associated with Dengue, which were more prevalent than in previous years.”

That was the Director General of WHO, telling Trinidad and Tobago—obviously, the Minister does not want to hear about it.

In my last two minutes—I said that I would speak about yellow fever. I want to refer the Minister and his colleagues in the Ministry of Health to this text book, *Harrison’s Principles of Internal Medicine*, which is the Bible of medicine. There are two volumes. I want to read this:

“The key to control of both dengue fever and DHF/DSS is the control of *A. aegypti*, which also reduces the risk of urban yellow fever...circulation. Control efforts have been handicapped by the presence of nondegradable tires and long-lived plastic containers in trash repositories, insecticide resistance, urban poverty...”

On the other case, leptospirosis, which I mentioned:

“Leptospirosis is an infectious disease caused by pathogenic leptospire...”

That is caused by the urine from rat, which people sometimes drink in the households where there is no water. The incidence of leptospirosis has increased. The *Aedes aegypti* mosquito causing dengue and yellow fever need to be eradicated. We want to know what plans the Minister has in the midst of this massive number of patient cases in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Minister of Health (Sen. The Hon. Jerry Narace): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. First of all, I was misquoted by the hon. Member, when he said that I said “suck eye”. It was not about that. I said that dealing with him is “suck eye”. I want to tell him that there was another Dhanraj Singh in that government. That Dhanraj Singh used to harass me and may he rest in peace, because in the end he joined the PNM. All I want to say to that Member is, Dhanraj. Remember that.

I want to declare that this Government is committed to preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health, through its public health programmes. Moreover, the Ministry of Health is treating with public health issues in a systematic, organized and strategic way. What he did not tell you is that during the period when the UNC was in office, there were 95 reported deaths and there were 11 reported deaths on this occasion of which six were confirmed. He did not tell you that. In particular, all the—therefore, I want to reject this Motion and the Member, if I can—public health activities and programmes in the Ministry follow a model, which is based on the following essential public health functions:

- the health situation monitoring and analysis;
- public health surveillance, research and control of risks and damage to public health;
- health promotion;
- social participation and empowerment of citizens in health;
- development of policy, planning and managerial capacity to support efforts in public health;
- public regulation and enforcement;
- human resources development and training in public health; and
- quality assurance of individual and population-based health services.

Therefore, all of our public health interventions are aimed to prevent disease through surveillance of cases and the promotion of healthy behaviours and are designed so that they perform all of the above health functions.

Since this Government has been in office, we have been working to provide true and accurate information to the nation on all our public health issues. We have restructured our National Surveillance Unit and strengthened its human resources. We have upgraded the reporting mechanisms and subsequently our ability to forecast and make the necessary adjustments to deal with important issues such as dengue, yellow fever and other public health issues on an ongoing basis in a more timely fashion. Let me say from the onset that we at the Ministry of Health will continue to improve and provide true, accurate and validated information within our public health sector. These are the simple facts, in terms of surveillance and data reporting.

The purpose of the infectious disease surveillance system is to monitor the occurrence of communicable diseases, identify trends, predict changes and guide public health interventions. The communicable disease system is designed to provide a sensitive measure of changes in the pattern of occurrence of disease. This approach is consistent with the international best practice and it has also been adopted by the surveillance activity associated with dengue fever.

The national surveillance system routinely collects data on the occurrence of dengue and other communicable diseases and data are collected from:

- counties and hospitals, which routinely send their reports to the NSU on a weekly basis;
- the Trinidad Public Health Laboratory, which receives samples of severe or atypical dengue illness for confirmation of the diagnosis of dengue; and
- from private laboratories and private physicians.

Review of these data indicated that 2008 was predicted to be a year of increased dengue activity and several steps were taken to monitor and control the occurrence of dengue in the local population. These steps included increased attention to the completeness and timeliness of data from health facilities on the occurrence of dengue, strength surveillance, as well as measures aimed at reducing mosquito vector populations and breeding sites.

Bearing in mind that the purpose of surveillance for dengue is to provide data to guide public health interventions aimed at interrupting/limiting disease spread, strategic improvements were made in 2008, in terms of data collection mechanisms of

the NSU, in order to strengthen the capacity for public health response. I want to know what Dr. Clive Teeluckdharry and all those people who are working so hard would think of you when you try to refer to them as being dishonest. I want to expose you and all those good professionals who work there. I would talk a bit about that. As a matter of fact, I would tell you some more about that.

More specifically, a request—[*Interruption*] When you disrespect them like that. He had a taste of what people had to say yesterday evening. He was made to be embarrassed yesterday, on the kinds of utterances that come out from the other side. We would talk about that another time.

More specifically, a request was made to all health facilities to line-list all cases of dengue presenting to the health care system, so that an accurate count of the number of dengue cases could be maintained, so that comprehensive vector control activity could be facilitated. With effect from the first epidemiologic week of January 2009, all the reported cases must be accompanied by a name and address, in order to maintain both an accurate count of and an effective response to cases of dengue within the community.

I recognize that one case of dengue is one too many. The Ministry recognizes it and the Government recognizes it. I am not here to say that in 1996, the figures were 95 reported deaths in the period of the UNC. The number of reported cases was 17,000. He was a chairman of a regional health authority and the Member for Caroni Central was a doctor. That is okay. We are responsible. We are in government. You are over there. We are over here. We will do our work.

I have asked the CMO to provide a comprehensive update on the status of yellow fever in this country. You attended the same function when the President of the TTMA—you, Member for Caroni East—praised the Minister of Health and praised Dr. Solaiman Juman, the new president—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: I spoke?

Sen. The Hon. J. Narace: You did not speak. I said the President of the TTMA. [*Interruption*] Madam Deputy Speaker, nobody is interested in what he has to say. I am talking about the President of the TTMA. I would like to—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Who praised you?

Sen. The Hon. J. Narace: He praised me, in front of you. I would like to take this opportunity to share the highlights of this report with you and the national community. It is important to clarify one important point here. There are two types—[*Interruption*] Admit it; be a man and admit it. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: One person praised you.

Sen. The Hon. J. Narace: That is all right. There are two types of yellow fever transmission patterns, the jungle or sylvatic fever and the urban yellow fever. The jungle yellow fever is a disease of monkeys. It is spread from monkey to monkey by the bite of the infected haemogogous mosquitoes in the forest. Urban yellow fever is a disease of humans. It is spread from person to person by the bite of infected *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes.

Right now in Trinidad and Tobago, we are experiencing a jungle cycle, not an urban cycle. There is pretty much nothing we can do to prevent jungle cycles. However, what we can prevent is the urban cycle. In fact, we have been successful in that regard for the past 30 years. There have been no confirmed human cases of yellow fever in Trinidad and Tobago since 1979. Yellow fever is preventable through vaccination. Protection by the yellow fever vaccines last for at least 10 years. In Trinidad and Tobago, the yellow fever vaccine is routinely given to.

- all children one year to 18 months old;
- school children 10 years and over;
- all persons working in forested areas; and
- persons travelling to countries where yellow fever is endemic.

Our health care centres are currently following a strategic, targeted and systematic approach in vaccine administration. More specifically, vaccines are administered on a priority basis. The priority groups receiving vaccination are:

- 1-year-old children;
- people who live and/or work in the forests and in affected areas;
- persons who frequent forests, such as hunters, health care workers, security workers, et cetera.

Persons who have been immunized for yellow fever in the past 10 years do not need boosters. Vaccines are given every single day at all our health centres, with the first priority being to the groups that I have mentioned. As we get more vaccines, immunization continues as normal.

It is also important to note that vaccine administration is not a simple process. It is highly scientific and may have implications. Vaccine administration is done under certain very specific conditions and in order to prevent adverse events, we

are proceeding in a very structured and proper manner; something you would know nothing about, Member for Caroni Central. Our health care professionals are well trained and follow the international guidelines for vaccine storage, preparation and administration.

The Ministry of Health has been and will continue to be very serious, responsible and careful in immunization procedures, so as to ensure proper administration and maximum effectiveness of vaccines.

5.55 p.m

From January 01, 2009—January 23, 2009, we have immunized 4,645 persons in St. Andrew; 6,919 in St. David and in Nariva/Mayaro, approximately 7,000; a total of 24,000.

Childhood immunization coverage for yellow fever in Trinidad and Tobago has been 90 per cent for the last five years. Further, for the school age group of 10—14 year olds, over the last five-year period, 43,134 children have been immunized up-to-date. During the period 2003—2008, a total of 355,000 yellow fever vaccines were routinely registered.

A careful review and consideration of these numbers indicate a high vaccination coverage of the population, with most having received more than two doses of the vaccine. The targeted approach to vaccination will continue and along with all other public health initiatives undertaken, we believe we are effectively addressing the yellow fever circulation alert in the region.

As at January 28, 2009, we have approximately 5,000 doses available throughout our health facilities in the country and another 2,500 doses at central storage; 60,000 doses are expected to arrive in the country in the next four days to be followed by another 50,000 doses later on. We have ordered a total of 190,000 doses for the year. This morning, I was speaking to the head of PAHO and I have informed him to order a further 60,000 doses. We have been most proactive in dealing with this issue.

Moreover, the Ministry of Health is in communication with PAHO in Washington regarding yellow fever. In fact, Dr. Beryl Irons, PAHO immunization advisor for the Caribbean sub-region is currently collaborating with the staff at the Ministry of Health in reviewing the immunization process, providing support and assessing the current public health plans in place for yellow fever.

In closing, I would like to appeal to the national community—when I say that, while we should all take personal responsibility for our health and follow the Ministry's guidelines on yellow fever, I wish to condemn alarmist behaviour by political

Dengue, Yellow Fever and Leptospirosis
[SEN. THE HON. J. NARACE]

Friday, January 30, 2009

opportunists which only leads to panic. Instead, we would much prefer proper information dissemination which the Ministry of Health is doing.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to advise them to do like the Member for Chaguanas West—and probably the Member for Tabaquite will also do it—and put out a flyer. He has circulated some information, so the Member is mobilizing his community. [*Interruption*] He got it from the Ministry of Health. He asked me for it. He got it from me. In fact, we have sent flyers to every single home. We have microphones on the streets and direct mailing. At the end of the day, 90 per cent is controlled by source reduction.

Madam Deputy Speaker, a few points I would like the national community to be aware of are the following: check your immunization status; if you are not immunized, avoid going into the forests; if you are not immunized and you live and work in the forest or in an affected area, visit your nearest health centre to get immunization; and, most importantly, eradicate—get rid of—places in and around your home where mosquitoes can breed.

As I said, in the beginning, the Ministry of Health has been addressing public health issues through a specific strategic approach which is consistent with best international practices and includes surveillance, research, health promotion, community participation, access to services, et cetera. Our integrated approach and programmes are not limited to yellow fever or dengue, but also leptospirosis and other diseases. It should be clear that our health education and sensitization covers a whole realm of public health issues.

At the end of the day, it is really citizens and communities who make the difference and who have the power to fight vector-borne diseases through source reduction. Local government is also actively involved in this process and we have repeatedly said that the Ministry of Health has an integrated approach to the prevention and control of vector-borne diseases, such as dengue and so forth, which includes a number of other stakeholders and actors who play a crucial role.

In fact, the Ministry of Health intends to continue to work closely with the Ministry of Local Government and other authorities to implement the Litter Act, which will assist in litter management and will cater for a cleaner environment which will in turn contribute to the fight against public health threats, such as dengue and yellow fever.

Effectively, addressing public health issues is a collective responsibility shared by the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Local Government, other local authorities, private corporations and organizations, communities, perhaps, more

importantly, individual citizens. Hence, all our programmes are aimed at being multi-sectoral adopting an integrated management approach to public health issues.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I reject outright, anything that the Member for Caroni East has to say. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Commonwealth Parliamentary Association
(Cancellation of Meeting)**

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, before I put the question, I have been advised that the CPA meeting that was carded for Tuesday, February 03, 2009 has been postponed to a date to be fixed.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.01 p.m.