

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Friday, September 11, 2009*

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

**PRAYERS**[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**CONDOLENCES****(Mrs. Patricia Robinson)**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, by now it is common knowledge that the wife of former President, Arthur Raymond Napoleon Robinson, has passed away. Mr. Robinson, as you know, served as the Member for Tobago East; he also served as Prime Minister. His wife passed away, I think it was yesterday.

On your behalf and on my own behalf, I would wish to extend condolences to former President Robinson and his family, immediate and extended. I would direct the Clerk of the House to send an appropriate letter of condolence to former President Robinson and his family.

**PAPERS LAID**

1. Ministry of Works and Transport's administrative report for the period October 2007 to September 2008. [*The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]
2. Value Added Tax (Amendment to Schedule 2) Order, 2009. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira)*]
3. Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2009. [*Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira*]

**ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**

**Mr. Speaker:** These questions would be deferred for after the budget. In any event, the hon. Member for Chaguanas West is not here to ask these questions. Proceed.

*The following questions stood on the Order Paper in the name of Jack Warner (Chaguanas West):*

**Diego Martin Highway  
(Cause of Landslip)**

- 102.** Could the hon. Minister of Minister of Works and Transport state whether an investigation was carried out by the Ministry of Works and Transport to determine the cause of the landslip on the Diego Martin Highway in 2008 and if so, what were the results of such investigation?

**Asphalt Works  
(Preferred Sub-Contractor)**

- 103.** With respect to the Churchill Roosevelt and Uriah Butler Highway Interchange, can the hon. Minister of Works and Transport state whether Vinci was the preferred sub-contractor for the asphalt works and if not, how was Jusamco selected to undertake such works?

**Highway Interchange  
(Status of Contract)**

- 104.** Could the hon. Minister of Works and Transport state by how many months did the contract for the Churchill Roosevelt and Uriah Butler Highway Interchange exceed its original completion date and how much money, if any, did the contractor pay by way of liquidated damages?

*Questions, by leave, deferred.*

**STATEMENT BY MINISTER**

**Commission of Enquiry into the Construction Sector**

**The Attorney General (Sen. The Hon. John Jeremie SC):** Mr. Speaker, I was instructed by the Cabinet yesterday morning to address this honourable House today, on matters affecting the Commission of Enquiry into the Construction Sector.

Over the past week there has been great concern in the national community following the discovery that in circumstances still not known to us on this side, the appointment of the Commission of Enquiry into the Construction Sector had not been published in the *Gazette*. Cabinet has asked his Excellency, Mr. Anthony Lucky— [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC:** Cabinet has asked his Excellency, Mr. Anthony Lucky, retired Justice of Appeal and Judge of the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea, to conduct an urgent probe into how this error has arisen in the first case. Let me say from the outset that this Commission of Enquiry was appointed at the behest of and on behalf of the Government, arising out of the commitment of the hon. Prime Minister and that of the entire Cabinet, to the highest principles of transparency and integrity, particularly in matters relating to the public purse.

In obedience to those principles, on September 09, 2008, His Excellency the President, acting on the advice of the hon. Prime Minister, and based on a

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commitment given by the hon. Prime Minister in this very House, issued a Commission pursuant to section 2 of the Commissions of Enquiry Act, Chap. 19:01, appointing four persons as Commissioners to enquire into certain matters in relation to the construction sector.

The Commission began sitting and heard opening statements on January 12, 2009, and had up to this point in time, held three sets of hearings during the course of which a substantial amount of information was received by the Commissioners, by way of written statements, oral testimony under oath, and round-table discussions, on some eight items of the terms of reference.

The week of September 07, 2009, was set aside for further hearings into those issues, which remain outstanding from the Commission's original terms of reference, along with additional matters relating to the Cleaver Heights project, which was referred to the Commission by a further extension to the terms of reference dated May 21, 2009.

Thereafter, responses to Salmon letters were to be addressed, written closing submissions were to be received and the Commissioners were to write their report, and submit same to His Excellency the President. Only days prior to the commencement of the final set of hearings, it was discovered that the President's Commission had not been gazetted, as is required by section 15 of the Commissions of Enquiry Act, on September 09, 2008, when the Commission was established.

The result of the failure to gazette the President's Commission, as is said by some to be made clear by certain portions of the opinion of Privy Council in *Joachim v Attorney General of St. Vincent and the Grenadines*, is that the President's Commission is arguably wholly ineffective.

From a practical point of view, what this would mean is that the four Commissioners, albeit acting bona fides, were not at any time authorized to exercise the powers, which would ordinarily have been vested in them under the Act, and they would also not be under any legal obligation to complete the enquiry, submit a protected report and in particular, complete the outstanding terms of reference relating to the Cleaver Heights project.

Further, every witness, every Commissioner, every one of the various print and electronic media, which has covered the proceedings thus far, in good faith, runs a risk by virtue of their participation in the enquiry of being outside the statutory immunities set out in the Act.

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Mr. Speaker, the fact is that for all practical purposes, the President's Commission has been published in a variety of ways. The fact of appointment of the Commissioners, the terms of reference of the Commission, the expansion of those terms of reference and the purported exercise of powers under the Act, have all been communicated to the public via live video link, on the Internet and by the various print and electronic media, which have attended and reported on the hearings on a daily basis, and the public has been free to, and has attended the public hearings.

Mr. Speaker, publication in the *Gazette* is an unfortunate relic of our colonial past, the purpose of which was to ensure that even if there were no private enterprise free press to notify the public of a fact of national, or as in this case, legal significance, the public would not be prejudiced by ignorance. The State would undertake the responsibility of notification by ensuring that there was a reliable means of informing the public, by virtue of the official *Gazette*. This stipulation has, in this case, the unintended potential to defeat the work of the Commission, if we should fail to act decisively and correctly.

We are in uncharted waters. The *Joachim* case provides no assistance. It speaks to the failure to gazette and not to late publication. Our goal is noble: it is the preservation and protection of the Commission which we set up. The Commissioners have devoted a significant amount of time to the collection of evidence and other material relevant to the terms of reference, and that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has expended significant resources towards ensuring the successful progress and completion of this enquiry, cannot be disputed.

The public is entitled to legitimately expect a full report and recommendations in relation to the matters canvassed before the Commissioners. Similarly, those persons who have made allegations, and about whom allegations have been made during the proceedings, are entitled to have a determination of the issues one way or the other.

In all of these circumstances, it is our view that there has arisen a solemn duty on the part of the Government to take all legitimate steps to regularize this situation, so that the Commissioners may complete their assigned task on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

We have been guided in our response by three principles: first, a respect for the rule of law and principles of transparency; second, a respect for the principles protective of the rights of persons alleged to be wrongdoers; third, the necessity of the State to do what is right by the people of Trinidad and Tobago at all times.

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In this regard, on the instructions of the Cabinet, I have today taken steps to ensure that the President's Commission is gazetted. This must be carefully done, the full terms of reference along with an amendment, which would permit the Commissioners to make use of the evidence and other information collected during the course of the now suspended hearings, must form part of the terms which are to be gazetted.

Further, and in any event, to take the matter beyond argument, the Government will bring before Parliament as a matter of urgency, a Validation Bill, which I have already drafted on the instructions of the Cabinet, issued to me yesterday, to give statutory underpinning to the previous Acts of the Commission. Once the Validation Bill has obtained the approval of the Legislature—and I note here that the Opposition through the Member for Siparia, has already pledged its support—the Commissioners would be invited to complete their business and thereafter submit their report. These are the concrete steps which the Government will take beginning today to protect the Commission.

I thank you.

**10.15 a.m.**

**BACTERIOLOGICAL (BIOLOGICAL) AND TOXIN WEAPONS BILL**

Bill to give effect to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction [*The Minister of National Security*]; read the first time.

**APPROPRIATION BILL**

**(BUDGET)**

[Second Day]

*Question proposed.*

**Mr. Basdeo Panday** (*Couva North*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I listened to the hon. Minister ramble on for more than three hours on Monday last, I recalled the saying of the 17th Century French writer, moralist Francois de La Rochefoucauld, who a long time ago said:

“As great minds have the faculty of saying a great deal in a few words so lesser minds have a talent for talking much and saying nothing.”

[*Desk thumping and laughter*]

I do not wish to be uncharitable to the hon. Minister, but I am sure that most of you would agree that she had very little to say and she took a rather long time

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saying it. I believe that the Minister lost her way, because unlike the UNC in Government, the PNM does not start from an ideological mooring—

**Mr. Manning:** “Doh” make joke.

**Mr. B. Panday:**—but rather acts as it suits their political fancy, [*Desk thumping*] by “vaps”—so to speak—regardless of the consequences to the economy. The UNC starts from the belief that the purpose and function of any government is the welfare and well-being of all its peoples on a sustained basis.

The budget is therefore a statement not to be taken in isolation. It is part of a continuum designed to bring the greatest happiness to the greatest number of our citizens. The emphasis and object are and must always be the happiness of our people. That being so, the big and obvious question must be, who determines what will make the people happy? The simple answer is, the people of course, not the PNM, not the little corrupt cabal that runs the PNM, whose sole concern is their own welfare and well-being, and certainly not the Member for San Fernando East or his ubiquitous obeah woman. [*Desk thumping*]

That is why prior to this, our budget response, we embarked upon a series of consultations with several stakeholders in the society to elicit their views as to what they regarded as important in their lives and what they wanted. I am told that the Government went through similar motions with several organizations just as they did last year. But just as they did last year they ignored most of what the people said. That is the difference between the PNM and the UNC. And that is why after nine years people still say that the years between 1995 and 2001 were the best they had ever seen. [*Desk thumping*] The UNC was and has been the best government the country has ever seen. [*Desk thumping*] Today, nine years later, after nine years of PNM, they yearn for those halcyon days.

Over the past few weeks, we on this side have met national stakeholders to hear from them what their concerns were and how they felt that these concerns should be addressed. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all those patriotic citizens who took time off to participate in these consultations and for informing my presentation today. What is of great concern to me is the fact that many of these persons and groups advised that they had also spoken to and expressed the same issues to the Minister of Finance. As such, I am disappointed, as I know they are, in her budget 2010 document where she chose to gloss over the major problems facing the citizens of this country and opted instead to wallow in statistical misdirection in her attempts to justify her Government's expenditure of over \$300 billion since 2002.

I recall that during the debate on the 2008/2009 budget, we on this side, after consultation with the people, told you on that side that the critical problems facing the people in general were crime, the lack of proper health facilities, lack of regular supply of pipe-borne drinking water, unreliable electricity, increasing poverty, particularly among the aged and those on fixed incomes, of bad or non-existent roads, high prices, and in particular food prices, failure to deal in a sensible manner with agriculture, poor drainage and flooding, lack of access roads to agricultural lands, the use of agricultural lands for housing, real unemployment, the lack of purpose and direction in training and education and many more.

These were some of the matters which required urgent attention, but you ignored the needs of the people because your budget is not about that. Your budget is about how to stay in power and nothing more. Instead of addressing these simple problems plaguing the people, this PNM Government presented a budget of over \$50 billion, and after an expenditure of such a huge amount of money the people are still without a solution to the problems I have just enumerated. It is no wonder that the 2008/2009 budget was such a disaster. You started by basing the budget on an estimated price of oil at \$70 per barrel and gas \$4 per mmbtu. [*Interruption*]

The fallacy of this kind of budgeting is that you can fix the price of oil and gas at any arbitrary figure and so provide projected revenue at any level you want. It is fictitious! But that revenue is shifting sand. If you base your expenditure on that kind of uncertainty then what do you do when it is not realized? You go into a tailspin of course. If, however, you start from the cost of basic needs, then the people will get the most important things first before the money runs out: Water, roads, health care, drainage; before tall buildings. Your approach is wrong! [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the Minister premised her budget statement with a lie; exercising her best public relations gimmickry. The Minister of Finance titled her budget: "Strengthening Efficiency, Addressing the Challenges". Unfortunately, her presentation did no such thing! Having safely extricated herself from the fate of other less fortunate CL Financial depositors, the Minister seems to have lost sight of what the real challenges facing the country are; as she did in last year's budget, she does so again in budget 2010. She does not even make the slightest attempt to address the real challenges facing Trinidad and Tobago: Runaway crime, massive corruption in the state sector, poverty, sabotage of the agricultural sector, over-reliance of the energy sector, inadequate and inefficient health sector, the abandonment of the aged and those in requirement of social assistance, state-

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sponsored environmental destruction, the worsening business environment, massive flooding, high food prices, inadequate access to housing for the poor and middle income, difficulty in accessing foreign exchange, collapsing public infrastructure, productivity lost due to traffic jams, underemployment.

These are the issues facing the country! But budget 2010 continued in the vein of the past seven budgets making false promises they have made before and which they never intend to keep, even when they had all the money in the world. Do you think they will keep these promises now when money is scarce? The preliminary assessment of the state of this nation is the biggest problem we have—the Government itself. The problems to which I have just alluded pales to insignificance when you think about the corruption, incompetence and maladministration of this PNM Government led by Prime Minister Patrick Manning.

**Mr. Manning:** Oh, leave me alone!

**Mr. B. Panday:** They speak of fiscal discipline.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Finance spent the better part of her speech patting herself and her colleagues on their collective backs and repeatedly boasting of the Government's sound fiscal discipline and management of the economy. Mr. Speaker, joke is joke, [*Laughter*] but does the Minister really believe that the population of this country is so stupid as to wallow in that kind of self-serving panegyric.

One year ago she came to this House and presented a budget with a projected surplus, within weeks she had to review the budget, and then not once but twice, and still ended up with a deficit larger than the one she predicted. That is exactly the point I was making earlier on, they had no priorities and so they could not adjust expenditure. If they had started with a list of priorities they would have been able to adjust. And to add insult to injury, the Minister comes to this Parliament and has the temerity to say, and I quote her: “In making the decision to continue our expenditure programme the records will show that we got it right.” Madam, the records show that you got it all wrong! [*Desk thumping*]

Not only is the Government unwilling to accept responsibility for bringing this country to its knees, the hon. Minister of Finance actually comes to the Parliament and expects the population to believe that having to borrow \$8.5 billion to cover State-sanctioned corruption is a good thing. And, as with all things under the PNM, it gets worse, the Minister would have us believe that the fall in revenue was unpredictable and no one knew that energy prices were going to fall and that is why the deficit is as large as it was last year.



Of course, no one knew that the price of oil and gas would fall. That is precisely why you should prioritize your expenditure. Okay, so last year you did not know that the price of oil would have fallen or the price of energy would have fallen, but what about this year? This year the Minister knew long in advance that energy prices would be low and energy revenues would be low as a result, yet she returned with another whopping deficit of \$7.7 billion.

I like this Minister. She appears to be smiling in the face of every adversity, or at least she appears to be. She came to this Parliament and tried her best to convince the nation that all is okay with the economy and with the country, despite the fact of reduction in revenues, as she continues to spend and spend, subjecting the future generation to increasing debt obligations.

**10.30 a.m.**

Against the backdrop of global recession, falling demand for our manufactured goods, domestic contraction of the economy, low prices for our primary export products with projections for the continued low prices and falling revenues, the insistence of the Government to continue the same level of expenditure can never be justified. It is illogical, it is irrational and it makes no sense. I am sorry to say this, but it is even stupid.

This administration having long shut its ears and eyes against the cries and pleas of the population, continues in merry oblivion to the realities of the crisis in which it has thrust the country. In a period of two years, the Ministers increased the public debt of Trinidad and Tobago by a massive \$16.2 billion, which is equal to 44 per cent of the Government's projected revenue for fiscal 2010. This can be nothing short of gross fiscal mismanagement.

I predict that the Minister's freehandedness with the public's money will soon result in a deficit in 2010 of more than the \$7.7 billion she claims here today. We have heard many stories of the ascent from rags to riches. It is said that those who do not learn from the mistakes of history are condemned to repeating them. Or to put it another way, doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results is the first sign of madness.

Thirty years ago the PNM took this country from riches to rags. During the oil boom of the 1970s, the PNM government was characterized by wild excesses, throwing money at every national problem without addressing the issues. Productivity levels collapsed, while the income levels rose; make-work projects developed as Government gave handouts rather than provide productive employment; imports skyrocketed as food production was sacrificed to the energy

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sector; the state-sanctioned corruption flourished and squandermania a level previously unheard of was the order of the day. Today, some 30 years later, the PNM has repeated this feat, but on a much larger scale. The last seven years have witnessed a repeat of the wild excesses by the Government.

In one year, this Government spent more than previous PNM governments would have during the whole term in the 1970s. Such was the level of excesses. They made the same mistakes: the make-work projects; the import dependence; the failure to diversify the economy; the state-sanctioned corruption; the failure to train future generations; the mega projects; the inadequacy of the savings. Once more the PNM has taken the country from riches to rags. This time it took a mere 14 months to accomplish.

Mr. Speaker, if the people sound irritated, it is because they are. I am of the firm view that the Minister and her government are guilty of criminal neglect. For seven years the Opposition UNC came to this House and pleaded with the Government to restrain itself from the excesses it was practising. For seven years we cautioned the Government about the need to save. For seven years we warned the Government of the potential for price shocks and the severity of the impact it will have on the domestic economy. For seven years the Opposition cautioned the Government about putting all of its eggs in one basket, and the need to diversity the economic base of the country. For seven years the PNM refused to listen, and the revenues increased, and expenditure increased simultaneously.

This country earned more than \$250 billion in revenues over the past seven years. It has spent \$292 billion in the same period, yet today our citizens still have to sleep on the floors of our nation's hospitals because of the absence of bed space; our education system is irrelevant to our needs as a developing country; functional literacy remains a significant issue; our agriculture sector remains undeveloped; the manufacturing sector is in decline; the minimum wage is unacceptably low; tourism is in decline. The only thing growing in this country is crime, and under this PNM government criminal activity including white-collar crime. [*Desk thumping*] Once more we have to ask of the PNM government: where the money gone? Once the flagship of the Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago is now being brought to its proverbial knees by the absolute incompetence, corruption, mismanagement, nepotism and the failure of the Government to address pressing issues facing the nation. I once described this PNM government as the apotheosis of corruption and incompetence. Nothing has happened in the past nine years to make me change that view.

Mr. Speaker, budget 2010 represents a continuation of a series of failed budgets, manifesting a plethora of broken promises and the pursuit of several

multi-billion dollar projects without economic, social or financial justification. There have been radical changes in the local and international economies which have significantly affected this country and which required a new mandate, a new ideology with requisite policies and strategies to reflect these new parameters. I expected the 2010 budget to reflect the global economic downturn; the need to curtail and prioritize Government's spending so as to stimulate a fledging domestic economy.

Alas, 2010 budget repeats the mishmash of budgets in the past, including the continued over-dependence on energy revenues. This is because this Government does not understand the mandate of the people. Maybe it does, but it does not care.

While the power of this country was desperately fighting off inflationary spiral caused by the Government, the Prime Minister increased his salary three times. While citizens plead for housing, the Prime Minister reacts by spending over \$200 million on a palace for himself. While 14 per cent of our population were recently described as indigent poor, and do not know where the next meal is coming from, this Prime Minister is willing to spend close to \$1 billion to hold weekend parties. While our citizens are being raped and killed, the Prime Minister has private security for himself and his family. Having frittered away our nation's legacy, the Government seems determine to create the illusion of normalcy as evidence by the shared magnitude of the 2010 budget, and the clear refusal of the Government to reevaluate its priorities.

Budget 2010 offers no hope to the population, that this Government will either recognize the problems the citizens are facing, or that they are even listening to the cries of the people, or even understand the basic principles of budgeting. Given that this is the Minister of Finance's second attempt, and unfortunately her second consecutive failure, I propose now with the greatest humility to make a few remarks on the basics of public budgeting.

I think it is useful to remind the hon. Minister that it was the UNC government which managed to deliver the goods and services to the people on \$9 per barrel of oil, [*Desk thumping*] whilst her government has been unable to do the same with oil at US \$130 per barrel. That is because the UNC government understood what a budget should do. [*Desk thumping*] Budgeting for a country is not the same as private sector budgeting. As such, a budget is not merely an annual accounting proposal of public revenue and public expenditure. The central government budget has four primary functions:

Management: As an effective management tool, budgeting involved planning, co-ordination, control, evaluation reporting and review. It follows then that the

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budget must contain sufficiently, specific or quantifiable targets, the attainment of which can easily be determined by costing or performance audits. Thus, the occasion of the annual budget presents an opportunity for the stewardship of the Government to be assessed with regard of the level of achievement of the objectives which would have been identified. This is why most budgets begin with a review of the previous year's expenditure, specifically in terms of attaining identified goals. For the first time that I can recall, this year, *The Review of the Economy* is missing from the bundle of documents given to us. [*Desk thumping*]

**Accountability:** Since the budget is passed by the elected Members of the Parliament, it has the stature of statute. Any financial variation from that approved by the Legislature must be justified and similarly approved by the Parliament.

**Budget should deal with control:** The processes whereby the budget is presented, debated and approved by Parliament ensures that the Legislature can meaningfully and not merely formally participate in the formulation of broad policies and programmes; their scrutiny, approval and implementation to the annual budget. It also means that the Parliament can effectively relate performance and achievement of the Executive to the objectives and policies as laid down by it.

It is this process which tries to ensure that the Government obtains value for the taxpayers' money and that the norms of economy, efficiency and effectiveness, are observed.

The budget should deal with planning. The annual budget should provide a plan of action for the next financial year, specifying the Government's long-term and short-term objectives and quantify the target, and therefore, requires the identification of the Government's priorities. At the level of budgets and programmes, the choice is between alternative courses of action so as to address the traditional public sector goals of:

1. optimal allocation of resources;
2. stabilization of economic activity;
3. the improvement of the standard of living, usually assessed as a equitable distribution of income; and
4. the promotion of economic growth;

are all pursued in an organizational context. In the short run, achievement of these goals has to be co-ordinated by means of administrative and legal instruments along which budget policy and procedure are the most important.

Mr. Speaker, planning in the budget process reflects political pressures as well as financial pressures and financial analysis. Just as a board of directors is elected to manage a company on behalf of and for the benefit of the shareholders owners of that company, a government is elected to manage the resources of a country for the benefit of the citizenry. To this extent, the concerns of budget makers constitute a balancing act between financial, economic, political, social and administrative needs.

**10.45 a.m.**

The budget statement must reflect the ideology of the Government manifested in the identification of the Government's priorities, its policy objectives and specific targets to be attained in the fiscal year. By extension then, successive budgets represent a continuum of comprehensive plans of action, the end result of which must be, by definition, the improvement in the welfare of the citizens of the country.

The principal function of a government is not to build monuments and palaces, not to enrich friends and family, not to impose the whims of the political directorate on the people; the core function of a government is to improve the lives of the citizens, not only their supporters, but all the citizens of the country. This is what the UNC philosophy is: People centred budgeting. It is of our view that a government is supposed to use the resources of the country for the benefit of the citizens of the country. Logically then, the annual budget, which says how the Government intends to spend the resources of the country, should clearly show how the lives of the citizens would be uplifted. In fact, that is how the budget should be assessed: How much the lives of the citizenry have improved. Was this a budget?

Mr. Speaker, the budget 2010 was woefully lacking in required information. On Monday the Minister presented 43 pages of fluff, a carefully designed smokescreen which revealed no plan. She presented a destination, but no road map, and what direction she did propose was hazy, misty and more likely a mirage. It appears that the only plan the Government had was to spend, spend and spend.

The Minister came to the Parliament at a critical time in our country's economic life to ask for the approval of \$44.4 billion for the next financial year. However, the Minister presented no explanation of how she has spent an average of \$127 million per day in 2008. I want to repeat that. [*Interruption*] [*Laughter*] [*Mr. B. Panday blows his nose*]

Had we a better health system, I would not be in this condition. [*Crosstalk*] [*Desk thumping*]

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The Minister presented no explanation of how she had spent an average of \$127 million per day in 2008. In this case, the Government has not told the nation what objectives and targets identified in the 2009 Budget and for which money was allocated and approved by the Parliament, had been fulfilled. There is, thus, no justification for failure to meet targets or failure to implement targets proposed. For the first time, ever the standard Review of the Economy for 2009 was not included in the package provided to Members of this House.

**Mr. Manning:** Yet.

**Mr. B. Panday:** Did I hear I right; after the budget? Is that the attitude with which you treat this House and the people, with such contempt? Not yet?

The public relations manifesto called Vision 2020 Operational Plan 2007—2010, 2008—2009 Progress Report, is a study in misdirection; as an example, on page 29 the Government lists, with great pride, that 95 per cent of the population is now receiving a potable water supply. On page 271, the report indicates that in 2008 the same 95 per cent of the population had a potable water supply. It goes further, in 2008, 76 per cent of the population did not have a water supply on a continuous basis. When dealing with water we must distinguish between an access to water supply and water supply on a continuous basis. What this is saying, therefore, is that one year later in 2009 the figures are unchanged. This means that despite the expenditure of \$2.4 billion on the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) in 2009, there was no improvement in the number of persons receiving a water supply. Where has the money gone?

Moreover, according to the data, it costs taxpayers \$10 billion between 2005 and 2009 to have a 3 per cent increase in the number of persons who received a potable water supply. Using the Central Statistical Office (CSO) figures, it was estimated that 3 per cent of the population translated into 39,275 persons—and here is where it gets crazy and scary. Using the data provided by the Government, I have calculated that this Government paid an average of \$254,731 per person to provide a potable water supply to an individual; a quarter of a million dollars per person. It gets worse.

If we assume that more than one person lives in the same house—let us, for argument sake, say two persons, and this is extremely conservative—it means that it costs taxpayers half a million dollars per house to have access to potable water; not a regular supply mind you. At those figures, it is cheaper to purchase a small reverse osmosis machine for every single one of these persons and never have to worry about WASA line maintenance again. [*Desk thumping*] The data provided concealed more than it revealed; but it gets worse.

The omission of the Review of the Economy made me very suspicious, because it is there that I usually look for information on contingent liabilities: BOLT, leases and open market operations, data which is not included in the budget or the budget speech, but which constitutes significant components of the Government's expenditure for the period.

Available information shows that the gross public sector debt outstanding has been continuously and steadily climbing. In 2001, under the UNC government the gross public sector debt was \$29.8 million. Ironically, under the PNM, despite a 278 per cent increase in government revenues, between 2001 and 2009 the Government indebtedness increased by 326 per cent over the same period. Where was all this money going? Higher revenues than ever and still increasing debt, means the Government was borrowing heavily although its coffers were full. It means too that the expenditure was excessive.

Normally the rationale for borrowing, when you have money, is to establish a good credit rating, but then such a rating was already afforded Trinidad and Tobago. So why borrow at times of high income? I found this too illogical, until Monday.

The Minister loves to throw around phrases which, unfortunately, she does not understand. On Monday it was clear that the Minister's 2010 phrase, "output budgeting" was not her own. Output budgeting is a decades old concept, which is based on a process whereby the output required is identified as the inputs needed at each functional area of production and delivery.

Mr. Speaker, in listening to the Minister it became clear that it was only then that the Minister realized she was supposed to plan the expenditure. For efficiency and effectiveness such planning should be done in detail, with the output established before. Is this not how basic projected planning is done? Madam Minister, do you not see your objectives before and then plan around them? Actually, I am asking rhetorically, because it is clear from the multitude of projects on the Government's hands now, which are over budget by millions and, in some cases, hundreds of millions, that absolutely no budgeting was done of any sort, and we know why.

It is clear that feasibility studies are not done; cost benefit analyses not done, and so on. The Government or, in this case, the Prime Minister, decides what he wants and then throws as much money as he could find, until the project gets done. Such is the case of the scandalous Brian Lara Stadium, which has now exceeded initial estimates by several hundred billion, has past every overshot, every date, and the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs has no idea when it would

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be finished or how much it would eventually cost. Mr. Prime Minister, for the sake of Brian Lara, remove his name from that stadium. [*Desk thumping*] And you call that prudent management; I wonder what our zealous Minister of Finance has done to ensure transparency, accountability and value for money on that project.

Even as the Minister's feigned interest in output budgeting is faked, the Minister said that they were going to implement output budgeting processes, but because of capacity constraints they could not do it now. They would, therefore, set up an IFMIS system, which is not output based, but would establish the financial functionality which would eventually serve as the platform for introducing output budgeting. Did you follow that, Mr. Speaker? In other words, "doh hold yuh breath".

The Government cannot agree if we are in a slow down or a recession. Joseph Goebbels, a Nazi propaganda expert, declared, and I quote:

"If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from the political, economic and/or military consequences of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its power to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the State." [*Desk thumping*]

For several months now, the Government has aggressively marketed the idea that Trinidad and Tobago's economy was experiencing a slow down in growth. Initially the position was based on a definition that a recession only existed when there were two continuous periods of contraction or negative growth in the gross domestic product (GDP).

### **11.00 a.m.**

The Prime Minister, aided and abetted by the Minister of Finance, repeatedly parroted the term "economic slow down"; this was after the Central Bank had released data showing that for the second consecutive quarter, the country had registered a contraction in the economy. In the midst of this, the Prime Minister advised the nation and I quote:

"I would like to say to you that when we had called on you to tighten your belt at the first sight of downturn in the United States, the State and private sectors responded quickly. Now you can release your belts and breathe a little. The commercial banks in Trinidad and Tobago have a liquidity problem. There is a surplus of cash in the economy."



Mr. Manning then declared that his Cabinet had discussed the current economic activities and:

‘...we have agreed that we would not allow the country to slow down or go into recession...’

Mr. Speaker, I have no desire to prove that the Prime Minister is a stranger to the truth; he needs no help in that regard. The data which the Central Bank will produce conveniently after this budget debate is finished, will show that Trinidad and Tobago is in fact undeniably in a recession. Common sense tells us that a slow down means that you are still going forward albeit at a slower rate and to show that the economy is not going forward, negative economic growth does not mean slow down, and it is dishonest to imply otherwise regardless of what you call it, this country's economy is in trouble. More than that, the Prime Minister's comments show that he understands the importance of Government's actions in terms of the signals those actions send to the business community, investors and the nation in general.

What is sad, however, is that armed with this knowledge, the Prime Minister still engaged in classical mismanagement of the economy and feels the desperate need to spend money on public relations gimmickry rather than engage in real planning for sustainable development.

**Mr. Manning:** What is the point?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** You now wake up or what?

**Mr. B. Panday:** I know that from the Standard and Poor's experience the Opposition runs the risk of being called unpatriotic for speaking the truth. I am equally certain that we will be hearing in this debate that the lower ranking of this country was due to the Opposition's commitment to openness and transparency.

Mr. Speaker, Standard and Poor's are not amateurs, they know what is going on, they do not need the Opposition to tell them. I refuse to subscribe to the policy espoused by the Prime Minister on a previous occasion that even if something is wrong, and you know it is wrong, it is wrong to say it in the Parliament, the media or otherwise. I am sure that is the lesson he teaches his Ministers; they seem to have learnt well.

The blame for the fact that the Trinidad and Tobago economy is in crisis must be laid where it is due, squarely and absolutely on the shoulders of a corrupt, inefficient Government led by Prime Minister Patrick Manning and Minister Karen Nunez-Tesheira. [*Desk thumping*]

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The failure to implement basic management practices like cost-benefit analyses, feasibility studies, project management, accountability, cost and performance assessment of government agencies, particularly the multipurpose special companies which have been set up; the failure to seriously pursue diversification of the economy beyond the paper commitment and tunnel vision promotion of the natural gas industry to the exclusion of all others; the failure to take any decisive action in the last year to offer protection and stimulation to the domestic business community in general despite the knowledge that a recession was coming, all this have resulted in a decline in business confidence in the Government and by extension in the economy.

The Minister of Finance never tires of boasting that her Government has managed the Trinidad and Tobago economy well. The current financial social crisis which confronts Trinidad and Tobago clearly puts the lie to her boast. The economic growth experienced by this country in the last years had nothing to do with this Government's economic policies— [*Desk thumping*] it was based on the hike in the price of energy products prompted by international factors beyond our control. When those prices fell as we knew they would, the bottom fell out of the barrel and the country was shunted overnight from lender to borrower.

The failure of this Government to utilize the massive revenues from the energy boom to develop industry and capacity, to diversifying the economy and to uplift the standard of living of our citizens meant that the country went from boom to bust in a matter of days with nothing to show for it but massive international debt incurred ironically when the country had money, had nothing else to show for it but tall buildings.

I now come to some budget fallacies. This budget contains many fallacies. The Minister of Finance in the midst of a global recession, at the first tentative step of what may be recovery on the international scenario, and in the midst of a significant downturn in the domestic economy, manages to project a return to positive growth in 2010.

While I respect her learning in law, the Minister has demonstrated absolutely no knowledge of basic economic principles and management practices since she has been in this House. She claims not to understand what rollover means in the insurance industry, of course, but incredulously is predicting a 2 per cent real growth in GDP in fiscal 2010. How she has come upon this figure is anybody's guess. If there is going to be a 2 per cent growth in 2010, there must be certain sectors within which the Minister expects there will be sufficient growth to lead to an overall 2 per cent growth. Which are these?

It cannot be oil, because oil prices and output are low and are not expected to grow in the short term. It certainly cannot be gas because even the Minister accepts that gas prices are expected to remain low for some time and this will discourage exploration. Is it agriculture? That is impossible given that the sector contributes less than 1 per cent of GDP on an annual basis. Is it tourism, manufacturing, construction? What is it?

Mr. Speaker, none of the current sectors are in a position to generate adequate value added to pull this economy out of the hole that it is in, and certainly the Minister's 2010 budget offers nothing to spark a resurgence of any sector of the economy.

We on this side have absolutely no confidence in the Minister's projection of positive growth in 2010. We see nothing to engender public confidence and to stimulate consumer demand, we see nothing here to stem the fall in business confidence. It is clear that she is seeking to generate business confidence, but her words and the actions of the Government do not match. The Minister has been wrong on every projection she has made about the economy in the last two years, and we are certain that she is wrong again. In fact, it appears that the Minister has pegged her hopes, not in the development of the non-energy sector, but in the rebound of natural gas prices. International events indicate that this is foolhardy and once again reckless. But maybe she knows, and that is why she is trying to impose the most obscene taxes.

I now turn to the motor vehicle and related taxes. The UNC's philosophy is premised on a simple tax code with a low taxation rate but with high compliance. In this scenario, the existence of nuisance taxes is to be avoided.

This population will recall that during the term of the UNC government, we did not raise a single tax—[*Desk thumping*] even though oil was at an average of \$10 per barrel. Nuisance taxes make life too difficult for the ordinary people and the taxes that are expected to be raised by increasing the fine on traffic offences is based on the presumption of continued lawlessness. This is the first time I have seen the success of a budget predicated on an increase in crime. It is in this light that the increased penalties should be examined.

A budget is not the place to deal with road traffic fatalities and so on—

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** Nor gender affairs.

**Mr. B. Panday:** —and with fines as a deterrent to road traffic offences; a budget is not the place to deal with that, that is for a legislative and administrative programme.

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Mr. Speaker, the Minister is not foolhardy enough to believe that a \$1,000 fine for a broken tail light, or the 1,000 per cent increase in the fine for illegal tints will stop the carnage on the nation's road. Certainly, she does not think that the population believes that this was the purpose of the increased fine. As a matter of fact, I find it curious that the Minister seems more intent in preventing dark tints than in penalizing speeding drivers.

Mr. Speaker, the penalty for murder is death, yet every day someone is murdered in this country. The fines will have no effect on the road carnage because of the increase in fines, because the resources required for policing are woefully inadequate. There are simply not enough police officers available for these fines to make a difference. What is required is not increases in penalties, it is increased policing and in the absence of that, these fines must be viewed for what they are; a desperate attempt by a Government on the ropes to grab money from anywhere possible to fund its squandermania. [*Desk thumping*]

If the Minister was really serious about stopping the carnage on the roads, police officers would not have to hide behind posts and raise a stick to signal a speeder, they will be equipped with speed guns. If the Minister was really serious about addressing the carnage on the road, she would have implemented the use of the breathalyzer. The conclusion is obvious; these fines are pure and simple desperate attempts to prop up Government's expenditure. Incidentally, what became of all that camera equipment and so on that was brought in for the Summit? Are they still there? Are they working?

From the \$50 billion budget last year to picking the pockets of motorists to fill the void caused by squandermania, Lord, how far we have fallen and how fast.

**11.15 a.m.**

Mr. Speaker, there also seems to be some issues raised by motorists about the process used by the police to determine the legality or illegality of the tints on vehicles. I am advised that a special piece of equipment is required to prove that the tint is illegal and that, therefore, the Ministry is putting licensing officers at a disadvantage in the execution of their duties. And talking about licensing officers, can this Government explain why the licensing authority is not yet computerized? Would that not reduce crime, particularly car stealing?

Now for the property tax—I now turn to the infamous and notorious property tax. For the first time we have seen a government introduce a tax on wealth. The Minister advises that property taxes are old and colonial and she is therefore moving to modernize this. But she does not understand what a property tax is. A

property tax is a tax that is levied on property in a particular jurisdiction and the income from the tax levied is pooled with other property taxes from the jurisdiction to be used for the benefit of that jurisdiction in which the property is located. [*Desk thumping*]

It has its rationale in the U.S. school district system where property taxes finance school boards and the level of tax usually reflects the standard of the schools in the area. Applying property tax in the scenario she had presented is regressive as it is related to the provision of no service and the revenue goes into the Consolidated Fund. This, too, is to be seen for what it is, a desperate attempt to raise funds to satisfy the Government's spending craze. The property tax is also regretted for another reason. It penalizes initiative.

In Trinidad and Tobago, there are many pensioners who have managed to save their money and have invested it in a home during their working lives. Their savings, then, is manifested in their home. These persons are now being asked to fund what is a substantial sum, to pay on an annual basis when they are already in a difficult situation of fixed and low incomes. The Government encouraged many persons to acquire homes via the NHA and now the HDC. These are poor persons. The Government offered them grants and loans to fix up their homes and now like a thief in the night, has blindsided them with this tax.

A small three-bedroom home in an average neighbourhood may be rented out for about \$5,000 a month or \$60,000 per year. The owner of this home would now be expected to find \$1,800 per year, which is a substantial figure for the pensioner. Moreover, many of these persons would already be servicing mortgages. The punitive effect of this tax will be felt most by those who built in what were once rural areas like Princes Town, Couva, which have now become towns, and those who are living along the major highways of this country.

We on this side believe that this tax is regressive and I want to suggest that the Government reconsider the financing—[*Desk thumping*] Yes, I want to suggest that the Government reconsider the financing of this wastage in another manner. But as with everything else under the PNM, it gets worse.

What happens if the homeowner has a parlour or a produce shed under his house within which he sells extra produce from his garden, as is common along the roadways of this country? It becomes a commercial property and will now be levied at twice the rate of a residential property. I wonder too, about who will be responsible for the assessment. It is to be noted that the ministry is referring to a nationwide exercise. And how frequently will the assessment be done? Frankly,

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this tax sends the wrong signal to citizens; it discourages home ownership and this will have implications for the construction industry, which the ministry is seeking to stimulate. It hits the middle class squarely in the solar plexus.

The Minister has taxed foreign used cars and homes. Like last year, the Minister seeks to penalize the middle class and the poor. She seeks to penalize the investment in property. Soon, under the PNM, only the very rich will be able to afford to buy new vehicles or to own a home. In classic fashion, however, the Minister has given with one hand, incentives to stimulate the construction industry and with this tax, neutralize the effect of the incentive. [*Desk thumping*]

A government of broken promises, that is what the PNM has become; a government of lies, deceit and hypocrisy.

**Mr. Manning:** That is not a parliamentary word.

**Mr. B. Panday:** No. When you call somebody a liar, that is unparliamentary. Study the law. There is a saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammed, upon whom be peace, that warns, and I quote:

"There are three signs of a hypocrite: when he speaks, he speaks lies; when he makes a promise, he breaks it and when he is trusted, he betrays this trust."

Mr. Speaker, every year since 2000, the Minister of Finance comes to this Chamber and continues to commit the country to undertaking projects which, in many cases, include funding them in the Draft Estimates, in the Development Programme or in the PSIP. Unfortunately it has become the habit of the PNM Government not to undertake these projects, even though moneys were allocated to them, often with no explanation and no accounting for the funds assigned. Sadly, many of these projects are actually critically-needed infrastructural projects and in many cases, public works, such as schools, pre-schools, hospitals, highways, drainage and the like.

In other cases policy-related promises, including national development plans, are also scheduled and never delivered. We are all too familiar with some of these projects. They have been with us for a while, repeatedly promised by this Government and never delivered. As such, budgetary promises tend to be viewed with suspicion and sarcasm. We are convinced that if the Government did not deliver the projects which they promised when they had money, they most certainly will not do so now, when funds are scarce as a result of the current international domestic climate and profligate spending.

Moreover, I find it shameless that the current Minister of Finance would have been reduced to extracting from her predecessors' bag of broken promises to pad

her budget speech, 2010. This is an unprofessional practice and an unethical one. I think plagiarism should apply to politicians, not only to priests.

I am certain that the Minister has no intention to implement these recycled commitments and, as such, to include them in her presentation is nothing short of intellectual dishonesty. [*Desk thumping*] The result has been a population that no longer has confidence in the words of the Government, even when they are enacted in statute. In the case of this Government, history has shown us that they cannot be trusted at all.

Sadly, the Minister of Finance, a political neophyte, has shown how quickly she is able to adapt to the PNM tradition of making promises, never meant to be kept. In listening to the hon. Minister of Finance on Monday, if this population had a sense of *deja vu*, a strange familiarity with many of the proposals and projects identified in the presentation, they were not alone; so was I all too familiar with some of the proposals and broken promises of the national community.

Let us just look at a few of them: *praedial larceny*. In her recent budget presentation, the Minister of Finance announced, with a straight face; I quote:

"Mr. Speaker, *praedial larceny* is a major disincentive to agriculture."

It took a rocket scientist to know that one.

"This Government is committed to putting an end to this illegal activity and will soon implement the Agriculture Ranger Squad (ARS) to reduce the incidence of theft within the agricultural communities. The Squad will provide a 24-hour police presence in designated agricultural areas. The first phase of the project is earmarked for the county of Caroni with focus on the Carlsen Field community."

Budget 2010. One year before, this very Minister in this very House, with that very smile on her face, said:

"Mr. Speaker, *praedial larceny* is one of the greatest scourges that plague our agricultural sector and is a definite disincentive to political investors in the sector. The Government will be taking stringent measures to put an end to this illegal activity.

At a National Consultation on food prices last year, a new arrangement including support from the private security services was announced to treat with the question of *Praedial Larceny*."

Budget 2009. For reference, you would recall that we had proved that *praedial larceny* existed in the establishment and had been so for a long time. In fact, it carried a regular complement of 39 persons of varying ranges. The *praedial*

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larceny squad still exists in the 2010 Estimates of Expenditure for the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Affairs. The 2010 agricultural ranger squad will, in fact, have the same function as the praedial larceny squad and, for all intents and purposes, is the same in principle. It appears that the great feat of the Minister was simply to rename the squad. What an achievement. But it gets worse.

The PNM Government promised a praedial larceny squad as far back as in the budget for fiscal year 2007. The Minister of Finance then said, and I quote:

"Government will provide funding, manpower equipment and adequate logistical support for the establishment of a praedial larceny police unit."

Budget 2007. Even then it was already part of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. The praedial larceny unit was not established in 2007, as promised, but this new Minister of Finance has the dubious honour of making the same promise in two consecutive years. We look forward to 2011 to see a return of this promise, because it is clear, if the Government did not implement the project when it had money, it certainly is unlikely to implement in times of—  
[Desk thumping] As I said, this was promised in 2007. Even then it was already part of the squad as I said.

### **11.30 a.m.**

I come to the next pet subject CNG conversion. I now return to this joke called CNG conversion. This year, the Minister promised and I quote her again. Page 10 states:

"It is our intention to increase the number of service stations retailing Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) throughout the country before the end of the new fiscal year, as we promote an environmentally friendly, cleaner and cheaper fuel which will also reduce transportation costs to the benefit of commuters and the national economy. As the number of service stations offering CNG increases, we will be able to reduce the subsidy on gas as a more economical source of fuel will be available to our people. We will also support the cost of CNG conversion kits as well as the importation of CNG ready vehicles."

But last year, the Minister promised, I quote again. Page 47 states:

"Mr. Speaker the Government is in the process of expanding the distribution of Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) as we move to a cheaper, economically efficient and environmental friendly fuel system. As a consequence, we propose to remove the Customs Duty and Value Added Tax on the Conversion Kits for modifying from Gas to CNG Kits...further to this measure the Government proposes to convert all public service vehicles to CNG usage.



The Government will also put measures in place to increase the number of service stations and geographic distribution of these stations offering CNG. This will be achieved over the next two years and begin a progressive move to reduce the fuel subsidy which now amounts to \$2.4 billion."

Budget 2009, that was.

Point Fortin Hospital: Perhaps the most repeated promise and by extension the most failed-to-keep promise is to build a hospital in Point Fortin. This year the Minister said and I quote her again. Page 29 states:

"Mr. Speaker, approximately 500 beds will be available upon the completion of the Point Fortin, Arima, Sangre Grande and Scarborough hospitals which will be constructed on a phased basis."

The irony is that the Minister appears blissfully unaware that the Point Fortin Hospital has not been started up as at the time she was speaking. In the 2004 budget, the Minister of Finance had promised, I quote again. Page 50 states:

"Construction is expected to begin during this year on the National Oncology Centre at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, and the St. James District Health Facility and the Point Fortin District Hospital."

That was budget 2004. It did not start then. In 2005, the promise was repeated thus. Page 21 states:

"Construction of the new Point Fortin Hospital will also start in 2005."

This is 2009. It did not start then either. In the 2006 budget speech, once more the Point Fortin Hospital was promised. The Minister said and I quote again. Page 33 states:

"By 2007, we expect that construction of the Point Fortin and Scarborough Hospitals, the National Oncology Centre and a new wing of the San Fernando General Hospital will be completed."

That was budget 2006. You said that.

Presenting the 2007 budget, the Minister of Finance said and I quote him:

"The construction of the Point Fortin and Scarborough Hospitals as well as the new wing for the San Fernando General Hospital are projected to be completed in 2007. The construction of the National Health Laboratory will also commence in 2007."

They did not build it in 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and they certainly will not build it in 2010. [*Desk thumping*]

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On the promise of highways or is it the highway of promises? [*Laughter*] The Minister of Finance announced and I quote. Page 23 states:

"By the end of March 2010, it is expected that construction will begin on the following new major highway projects:

- The extension of the Solomon Hochoy Highway from San Fernando to Point Fortin;
- The construction of a new highway from San Fernando to Mayaro;
- The extension of the Churchill Roosevelt Highway from Wallerfield to Manzanilla; and
- The construction of a causeway from Mucurapo to Chaguaramas."

Budget 2010.

These two were not new ideas having been promised several times before and not delivered. In the 2004 budget the Minister of Finance had promised that in 2005, the construction of the Solomon Hochoy Highway to Point Fortin was scheduled to begin. In 2005, the Minister's budget speech committed the Government to extend the Churchill Roosevelt Highway from Wallerfield to Manzanilla. The causeway from Mucurapo to Chaguamas was promised in the 2006 budget as well.

**Mr. Manning:** To Chaguamas?

**Mr. B. Panday:** Chaguaramas. "Yuh listening. That's nice." The Causeway from Mucurapo to Chaguamas to Chaguaramas. [*Interruption*] Watching you. Watching you.

**Mr. Manning:** Second time.

**Mr. B. Panday:** Promised in the 2006 budget as well as the construction of a new highway from San Fernando to Princes Town.

In the 2007 budget, again highways were promised from San Fernando to Point Fortin, San Fernando to Princes Town, and Wallerfield to Manzanilla.

The mega farms were promised before as well. CNG was promised before. The construction of several ECCES are an annual promise now.

We on this side are aware that matters regarding the exchange rate must be handled carefully. We are committed to a stable exchange rate, one that is predictable and which will remain stable for an extended period of time. But the actions of this Government are causing us on this side and citizens generally, great distress.

On the one hand Central Bank rationing foreign exchange to citizens in forms and thus the market is being tightly managed, but the Government's fiscal indiscipline over 2008/2009 and in the upcoming fiscal year 2010, will end the predicted reduction in foreign exchange earnings from the energy sector which has put severe pressure on the exchange rate.

In last year's budget it was estimated that the Central Bank lost about \$1.5 billion in foreign reserves in trying to meet consumer demand. Our foreign exchange reserves then fell by \$1.5 billion. At that rate we will likely lose another \$1.5 billion in the new fiscal 2010. The Minister is spending at a rapid rate, living in the hope that energy prices will recover while the rest of us are living in the knowledge that things are bad. The Minister is engaging in a course of action which will burn a hole in our reserves in fiscal year 2010. I warn of a very real possibility of a very serious problem.

In case you think I am being alarmist, I want to remind you that the PNM in 1983 to 1996 engaged in the same reckless behaviour and burned all the country's savings in three years resulting in bankruptcy. The level of the burn by this Government is substantially greater, so the crisis may emerge much sooner. The Minister must make a definite statement about the foreign exchange parity. Already, despite being managed by the Central Bank, citizens are having grave difficulty in accessing foreign exchange and are being subjected to a process of rationing.

Manufacturers are unable to guarantee payment for inputs. Containers at the port are accruing charges daily as payments are delayed, so affecting adversely their competitiveness. The Government's reckless spending pattern is pushing the country towards a possible devaluation in the short term. I expect that the Minister would make a firm affirmative statement, one that she could back up in regard to the Government's policy about devaluation.

I want to point the Minister in the direction of true management. Under the UNC the price of oil dropped by 50 per cent from \$19 to US \$9 while the UNC was in office. The effect on the exchange rate was zero. That is prudent management of the kind that this Minister and her Government are incapable. [*Desk thumping*] In boom time when moneys are plenty almost anybody can manage an economy. It takes knowledge and ability to steady the economy when funds are scarce.

Our manufacturing sector continued a precipitous decline throughout 2008 and 2009, as the Government focused on make-work projects and handouts rather than the development of permanent well-paying jobs, so the Prime Minister could

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declare full employment around 5 per cent back in 2007. I guess now that more than 10,000 persons have lost their jobs and the unemployment rate has once more reached 5 per cent, the Prime Minister would continue to crow that the country has again achieved full employment. This would be the first Government that achieved full employment by a loss of jobs.

Every PNM budget speech in the last seven years recognizes the importance of the business sector. The PNM Vision 2020 lists as a core development pillar enabling competitive business. The PNM went on and further in the Vision 2020 Operational Plan 2007/2010 to establish three goals in regard to business.

Goal one: Macroeconomic stability will be maintained. Have they achieved this? No.

Goal two: The business climate that attracts investors and encourages competitive business to start and grow will be created. Has this been achieved? No.

Goal three: Competitive business will transform Trinidad and Tobago into a diversified economy with exciting growth opportunity. Has the PNM achieved this? No.

We are now heading into 2010 fiscal year by which time all these identified goals should have been achieved. As of now none of these goals have been attained. Having read the 2010 budget which maps the PNM's intention for the next fiscal year, I am convinced that none will be attained. What is there in the 2010 budget which will encourage anyone to invest in business in Trinidad and Tobago in the non-energy sector? Absolutely nothing! This Government has promised so much when money was flowing like water and delivered so little. Lack of money was certainly not the reason for failure and now with money in short supply we know that they will not deliver now either. It is now being mooted in many circles that PNM stands for promises nothing more.

**11.45 a.m.**

And like all things under the PNM, it gets worse. I ask the Minister of Finance: Where is the promised Research and Development Facility? Where are the investment promotion initiatives? Where is the development of collateral investment promotion material? Where is the Human Resource Management Information System? Where is the Trade Information Network? Where is the Business Incubator Programme? Where is the natural gas pipeline to Tobago? Where is the Entrepreneurial Training Institute Incubation Centre in Tobago?

Where is the Fisheries Management Knowledge Centre? I can go on and on. The fact is that this Government made a whole lot of promises to the people of this country and never had any intention of keeping them. [*Desk thumping*]

I have long maintained that Vision 2020 was never meant to be implemented by this Government in the first place. It was a public relations exercise which the PNM managed to con a few of our thinkers into working to produce a blueprint which it could wave about during an election and which it has no intention whatever of implementing. It was never committed to the 2020 vision. They stole that catchphrase from Malaysia.

What is the true state of Trinidad and Tobago's business competitiveness under the PNM? On Tuesday of this week, the World Economic Forum released its 2009/2010 Global Competitiveness Report. The report defines competitiveness as a collection of factors, policies and institutions which determine the level of productivity of a country and which, therefore, determines the level of prosperity that can be obtained by an economy. In short, the index not just assesses the current position of the country in comparison with the rest of the world but, as its competitiveness determines, marketability of its projects for future growth potential.

The index is a ranking of 34 countries utilizing a wide range of indices with a rank of 1 being the best and 34 being the worst. It is no secret that under this Government the country's potential has become increasingly worse. The Global Competitiveness Report produces two separate but related indices: The Global Competitiveness Index and the Business Competitiveness Index. The Global Competitiveness Index assesses the state of the macroeconomy and despite the multiple assertions by the Minister of Finance and her Prime Minister about the state of the economy over the past years, the index reveals a continuous slide downwards since the PNM came into office. This suggests that the country's economy is becoming increasingly less competitive compared with the rest of the world.

When the PNM was elected into Government in 2002, the country was ranked as having the 39th place in the world in terms of competitiveness. That was when the UNC demitted office. I repeat that: When the PNM was elected into Government in 2002, this country was ranked as having the 90th position in the world in terms of competitiveness. By the 2007 general election, the ranking had dropped to 84. According to the 2010 report, by 2009, this country had fallen again to 86 in terms of its economy's competitiveness. With all the money at its disposal and as the Prime Minister continues to dream—asleep at the wheel—about developed country status, the nation's ability to compete on the global scale continues to dwindle. But, as with all things under the PNM, it gets worse.

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While the overall rating of the economy is 86, the country fared much worse in terms of some insightful sub-indices. Under the sub-index measuring public trust of politicians, this country was ranked 100. Under the PNM, Colombia was ranked 12 places above Trinidad and Tobago, at 88. I see some Members smiling on the other side. Do not! There is more to come. How do you think this country ranked in regard to the assessment of the diversion of public funds to companies, individuals and groups? Trinidad was placed at 81, meaning that this country was more corrupt than 61 per cent of the countries in the world that were investigated.

**Mr. Manning:** Perception.

**Mr. B. Panday:** Is often the reality. [*Desk thumping*]

Do you see why the Government cannot account for the millions which it bilked from the Treasury? Do you see why so many projects have been left undone? Do you see why this country's international competitiveness is so low? When the assessment was done on the sub-index, favouritism in decisions of government officials when deciding on policies in the award of contracts, this country was ranked at a sickening 107th of the 133 countries in the study. Every country in the Caribbean ranked above Trinidad and Tobago. Out of a rating of 1 for governments that usually favour well for connected firms and individuals and 7 if corruption of this source never occurs, Trinidad and Tobago scored 2.3, which suggests massive corruption in the award of contracts. We all know that this Government, led by the hon. Patrick Manning, is corrupt to the core—and they have not even heard of the open pillage of the country's Treasury which the Uff Commission of Enquiry is revealing. If you feel sickened now, Mr. Speaker, you should not listen to the next one.

When the wastefulness of Government spending is assessed, it comes as no surprise, given this level of corruption, that Trinidad and Tobago's placement was poor. Of the 134 countries surveyed, it was found that only 44 were guilty of more wasteful spending than the PNM Government. One of the core rationales behind this GCI assessment is to identify factors that inhibit the economy's competitiveness so that the nation could take the relevant action to ensure the development of the economy and the future prosperity of its citizens by extension.

With this in mind and given all that I have just revealed, it is obvious that this Government is a parasite leaching on the life force of this country for the benefit of its friends and families of its friends. In order for Trinidad and Tobago to develop and to achieve its true potential, it is imperative that this PNM Government, those Ministers opposite, must be removed forthwith.

The second index produced by the Global Competitive Report looks at the microeconomic factors which determine an economy's current sustainable levels of productivity and competitiveness called the Business Competitiveness Index. This index is premised on the understanding that while a sound and strong economy provides the opportunity for a country to create wealth, it does not itself create wealth. Instead, it is the quality of the national business environment, the level of productivity that a nation uses, the human capital and natural resources that are available to it to produce human goods and services which in turn create wealth.

When the PNM took office from the UNC in 2002, the Business Competitive Index determined that Trinidad and Tobago was the 39th most competitive environment. One year later, the PNM had taken the ranking to 48. By the time of the last general election, in 2007, the PNM's lack of concern for this country's business environment had pushed Trinidad and Tobago to the 74th place. In the absence of a solid national business environment, it does not mean simply that firms would be placed at a disadvantage on the international market; it also means that new firms would not be inclined to enter the domestic market. The fact that this economy has been able to attract substantial direct foreign investment over the past seven years is not discounted.

You see, the investment that came here only did so after the Government was forced to offer substantial tax concessions, guaranteed subsidized natural gas and so on. In some cases, the Government had to spend billions of dollars in infrastructural development before the investors would look past the country's poor business environment. Once more, this Government failed to develop the national business environment and placed this country at a disadvantage and, to compensate for it, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance has saddled the country with a tax and supply obligation decades into the future. The extent of obligation which future generations have to meet remains a closely-guarded secret by this Government, concealed from those who have to fulfil those obligations.

In this country, under the PNM, the price of gas is such a state secret that the Government refuses to advise how much money we get from gas rents and at what price the country's natural gas is to be sold. Once more, when the hon. Patrick Manning became Prime Minister in 2002, the quality of the country's business environment was ranked 41 in the world. By 2007, Trinidad had fallen by a whopping 34 places to 74.

Despite knowing the damage the PNM has done to this country's global and business competitiveness and the quality of the national business environment, the

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2010 budget does nothing at all to effect change. On the contrary, it repeats the same mistakes and so the predictable worsening of the nation's competitive edge will continue.

In the light of the foregoing, the recently established National Productivity Council is doomed to fail. It appears more likely that, like the Vision 2020 document, the Council is merely a public relations gimmick to give appearance that the Government is doing something. In fact, like the Vision 2020 document, the Government is once more going to squander the good intentions and reputation of those who help serve on the National Productivity Council.

### **12.00 noon**

Mr. Speaker, when I met last week with the business community representatives, they advised that they had again submitted their concerns and proposals to the Minister of Finance, so that she knows what their constraints are. Every business, small, medium and large, cited the same problems and one of those was crime. At the top of their list was crime and the fear of being kidnapped, robbed or killed. Instead of attracting business, our businessmen are leaving the country. They also identified difficulty in accessing foreign exchange as banks were rationing US dollars, problems of the port causing delays and additional cost to importers as the long awaited ASYCUDA computerization appears stillborn. They complain of high electricity charges, inflation and difficulty in accessing labour.

Recently there has also been increased shipping costs. The Minister is aware of these problems and in yet another budget, she has failed miserably to address them. We have now degenerated to Smart Card poverty; "Smart Man Card poverty".

A former American President, Abraham Lincoln, once said: "You may fool all the people some of the time. You can fool some of the people all of the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time." It is in pursuit of this objective that this Government has spent close to \$1.5 billion in the past seven years on public relations and propaganda, \$1.5 billion. How many hospital beds could that have bought? How many people could it have given water? \$1.5 billion on public relations propaganda. Clearly, this Government believes that it could fool all the people all the time and therein lies the danger; the danger of becoming a fool who believes in his own lies.

Last week, the Minister of Social Development, Hon. Dr. Amery Browne, announced that days of the "Smart Man Card" are over, because the Government



had undertaken a comprehensive review of the beneficiary of the card and found that 19 per cent of those who were in receipt of the card were actually ineligible for the card. How did that happen in the first place then? Corruption! The Minister was too quick to point out that it was not his fault that these people who should not have the card did have it. He said it was because the database was wrong to start with. In other words, it was not this PNM Minister to blame; it was the previous PNM Minister to blame. Two years in office and this Minister still has not taken responsibility for his Ministry. In patting himself on the back for cleaning up the mess in the Smart Card programme, the Minister, however, demonstrated what I think is his own insincerity in dealing with the poor.

Hon. Dr. Browne proudly announced that the 5,700 persons who did not qualify for the card but had managed to get one, nonetheless, would not be dropped from the programme. Instead, they will continue to benefit from the developmental component, but not receiving the monthly transfers after the three months. God have mercy. Simply put, this Minister of Social Development will be spending at least \$6,814,000 or as much as \$855,000 in the next three months on people he determined did not qualify for it.

Mr. Speaker, in 2000, this Government said that there were one-quarter of one million people living in poverty. This Government has been in office since 2007. The TT Card reaches a mere 13 per cent of this group, because of corruption. That means that using the Government's figures, although we know that runaway inflation has increased the number of poor in Trinidad and Tobago, there are at least 191,000 persons who need but do not have the TT Card. Knowing this, the Minister of Social Development still prefers to share millions of dollars among people who do not qualify for it. That is how the PNM deals with the poor. What is the logic in that? Why deprive the poor in favour of those who do not need it? Mr. Minister, it is like Robin Hood in reverse, taking from the needy to give to those who do not need it.

But, as with all things under the PNM Government, it gets worse. The issue was raised because the Minister wanted to tell the nation that the cardholders would benefit from significant arrears. Why? Because, last year the Minister of Finance announced that as a result of their concern for the poor and how the inflation rate, and so on, were affecting their ability to survive, they had determined that an increase in the monthly allowance was due.

One year ago, the Government determined \$4.30 per day. That is 400 by three persons by 31 days, which they were expecting a poor person to live on. That was inadequate. This caring PNM Government raised the allocation to \$5.40 per day.

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Last year, we showed that this figure was ridiculous and impractical and should be raised. You will recall that we said that poor persons could not buy two doubles with the money, and yet the Government refused to increase it. What they did do was to make it even worse. Having determined that the poor could not live in 2008, on \$5.40, this shameless PNM Government then teased the poor people, promising them an increase and did not deliver. For one year, the PNM let these poor people struggle for their lives on a stipend that the PNM justified was not enough. While food prices kept going up and up, these politicians on the other side stood quietly by and refused to give the poor \$1.10 more.

As if that is not shameful enough, the Minister now comes and tells the population that these people will now receive arrears and one year later, they will be getting 110 cents more per day. To add insult to injury, he later mentioned that the 5,700 persons he admits do not need the money will also be getting the increase. This is how the Government treats poor people, when the Prime Minister in his 2006/2007 budget speech announced the Smart Card. It is he who coined the term the current Minister does not want the media to use. He said the programme would have targeted 60,000 people. Today, after three years, instead of growing, it has contracted to less than half. The Minister should be ashamed. Does the Minister of Social Development believe he is really helping the poor?

The international benchmark of absolute poverty or indigence is when a person has to survive on a maximum of US \$1 per day. The exchange rate is US \$1 to TT \$6.35 or thereabouts. If the poor eventually receive this amount, even with the increased value promised 12 months ago, you are then talking about the Government having to help 30,000 people to live on \$5.40 per day, leaving them in desperate poverty.

You must remember that this is under the regime that spent \$3.2 million to buy curtains for the Prime Minister's mansion. This is under a regime that is building massive waterfront projects and hosting international forum and the Minister of Social Development actually believes he is doing a good job. The Minister of Finance is convinced that she is doing a good job, but God does not sleep. The scripture warns us that he who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will himself also call and not be heard. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Dumas:** Job advising you?

**Mr. B. Panday:** I suspected you did not know anything about the *Bible*. That is in Proverbs, Chapter 21, verse 13. Madam Minister, be careful what wind you sow now. Soon you will reap the whirlwind.

Today, as the poor get poorer and countless others become poor for the first time, they look to the Government for assistance. Alas, this insensitive Minister of Finance continues to turn her face and avert her eyes and ears to their appeals. Madam Minister, he who shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will himself also call and not be heard.

The Minister speaks of travel and tourism. Travel and tourism sites is an area of diversification of the budget. The Minister of Finance, in her budget speech, confirmed the injection of some \$2.7 million into the tourism industry to be used for the upgrade of hotel rooms in Trinidad and Tobago. This, the Finance Minister, would have us believe, signals her Government's recognition of the importance of the tourism industry in the country, or at least its potential for investment, employment, revenue generation and economic diversification. This money is to be used to improve the quality of rooms of unspecified hotels to a maximum value of \$15,000 and is in keeping with the commitment announced by the Government in July of this year. The justification for using state funds, taxpayers' money, to bolster private assets was:

“...despite the tourism sector enjoying phenomenal growth in the past decade, many establishments had not done repairs, renovations or maintenance to international standards.”

She said that the slowing in the tourist arrivals plus stiff competition from other Caribbean destinations had resulted in the need for the incentive plan. So, according to the logic of this Minister of Finance and her colleague, the Minister of Tourism, hotel owners were too busy making money in the last few years to maintain the quality of their rooms and now that business has slowed down, we must use taxpayers' money to fix the private properties. What nonsense! I refuse to believe that hotel owners have asked for this help. It goes against the very nature of the business cycle and this is especially so, as by all account, the tourism industry was doing very well a mere one year ago.

What makes the Minister's freehandedness even worse is how the Government has treated other people. Every year farmers in this country lose millions to floods. These farmers invest their own money and work hard every day to ensure that the nation is fed. When the Government-induced floods destroy their livelihood, they are expected to wait for months before they are given a pittance from the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. This pittance is never enough even to purchase seedlings for the farmers to restart. Why not invest the \$20.7 million in a farm insurance scheme, so that farmers can have some measure of protection?

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Instead, the Government chooses to fund direct competition to these farmers by heavily supported and equally inefficient mega farms. This is how this Government treats patriots. Instead of padding the pockets of hoteliers, why not use this money that they are so anxious to spend to ensure that these shareholders get a respectable return? What makes hoteliers so special that a government must subsidize them? What makes them different from the thousands of small businesses which have been forced to close down during the last three years and, in particular, the last financial year because of the economic recession? Why have they not benefited from the Government's free-handedness?

I do not believe for one instance that the Government's rationale that hoteliers were too busy making money, and now that business is slow, the Government needs to take money away from schools and hospitals construction to finance them. It is axiomatic that tourism has taken a significant nose dive in recent months. This drastic reduction in tourist arrivals is due to several factors, the most important of which is the global financial crisis and the sickening level of crime in the country, and not because hotel rooms were shabbier in August, 2009 than 12 months before. Such an argument is ludicrous. Which tourist wants to bring his family to a country where the murder rate increases to new record heights as every year passes by and the conviction rate is less than 1 per cent? Which tourist wants to bring his family to a country where robberies, rapes, assaults and burglaries are the highest ever in the history of this country?

Mr. Speaker, the Minister continues to operate in her own little world. The Government's failure to deal with runaway crime has led to other countries branding this country as a high-risk area to visit. Hear what the United States of America Department Travel Agency has to say about Trinidad and Tobago! I quote:

“Violent crimes including assault, kidnapping for ransom, sexual assault and murder have involved foreign residents and tourists including US citizens. The perpetrators of many of these crimes have not been arrested.”

While the TDC has been spending millions of dollars promoting the tourist sites to visit in Trinidad and Tobago, hear what the Canadian Government had to say. I quote:

“Crime levels are high, particularly in Port of Spain, San Fernando and other urban areas in Trinidad. Robberies with violence, including assaults and rape, occur frequently. Cruise ship passengers should take particular care when

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walking around the docks in Port of Spain. Gang and drug-related violence, including shootings and kidnapping, occurs and can affect bystanders. Crimes of opportunity such as petty theft tend to increase during the annual Trinidad Carnival in February or March, and during the Christmas holidays.”

This represents the two peak periods for tourist visitors. The bad news continues. I quote:

“Canadians should be highly vigilant in Laventille and at popular tourist sites such as Fort George and La Brea (Pitch Lake), where crimes targeting foreigners have also been reported. Incidents of gangs following cars leaving Trinidad’s Piarco Airport and robbing travellers once they reach their destination have been reported. Deserted beaches and unpopulated areas (e.g. scenic overlooks) should be avoided, especially after dark. Extra care should be taken when travelling late at night.”

These people should be locked up! Standard and Poor's should read that.

The United Kingdom travel advisory about Trinidad and Tobago is even more to the point. I quote:

“You should be aware that there are high levels of violent crime, especially shootings and kidnappings. British nationals have been victims of violent attacks, particularly in Tobago where the law enforcement is weak...”

There has also been a worrying increase in violent crime, muggings and robberies in all areas in 2009. There have also been attacks, some involving firearms, at tourist sites, including Fort George, the Pitch Lake, Las Cuevas beach and also at car parks of supermarkets, shopping malls, nightclubs, restaurants and business premises, including hairdressers and vegetable stalls.”

Mr. Speaker, you will notice that not a single one of those advisories said to stay away from Trinidad and Tobago because of the state of the hotel rooms. [*Desk thumping*] They said to stay away because of the level of crime. Why then is the Minister spending tens of millions of dollars fixing hotel rooms, which is not her business, instead of addressing the real problem which is affecting tourism which is crime? You can have the most heavenly rooms in the world—the honeymoon suite—but if tourists are afraid of getting murdered, they will simply not come.

It is not that the Minister of Finance does not know what is the problem, everyone knows. The People's National Movement, Tobago House of Assembly

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Chairman, Mr. Orville London, in his recent Independence address message was clear that crime was the key issue facing tourism in Tobago. I quote the newspaper which quoted Mr. London:

London said crime was the enemy of development and there must be a balanced and realistic approach to the response to crime in Tobago.

He weighed heavily on the crime surge in Tobago during his speech saying that the shortage of manpower, vehicles and appropriate equipment was among the factors that determine the crime response initiative on the island. He said although the detection rate for murders on the island remains unsatisfactory, there had been some improvements over the past year.

What does this tell you? It tells me that as usual the Government's view of the problems facing this country is "coki-eye". If you have the wrong idea of what the problem is then your policy solution will be wrong as a result and the result will be predictable failure. [*Desk thumping*]

It should be clearly noted that although the Tobago House of Assembly Chairman did not refer to all the conditions of the hotel rooms—he did not say anything about hotel rooms, but he spoke of crime. There has been and will continue to be much talk about the development of business tourism, and the tourism benefit that will come from the two conferences—and this Government has spent close to \$1 billion of taxpayers' money to host. That is all "ol' talk" and public relations gimmickry to con the population into believing that all is well when nothing could be further from the truth.

How do we compare with the rest of the world? The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) published annually by the World Economic Forum revealed that this Government has been sliding on the major indicators consistently. In last year alone, Trinidad and Tobago dropped 10 places in the world rankings from 74th to 84th out of a total of 133 countries assessed, and it gets worse.

In 2009, on a scale of 1—133, this country ranked 110th in terms of safety and security, but it gets even worse than that. When the reliability of the police service in Trinidad and Tobago was assessed, this country was ranked at a pitiful 124th place out of 133—9th to last. There are only nine countries in the world more dangerous to live in than Trinidad and Tobago. To compound the shame, the index showed that only four countries in the world had a lower ranking than Trinidad and Tobago when it came to business costs of crime and violence. Every other Caribbean country ranked higher than Trinidad and Tobago in terms of

safety for tourists. Crime is the real reason that the tourism sector is in crisis. This is not an Opposition being unpatriotic. These are the facts. This Government continues to mislead the population. The Travel and Tourism Index confirms that the Government's prioritization of the travel and tourism industry ranked 105th out of a class of 133.

The fact that this country has ranked 35th in the world on the basis of spending over 5 per cent of the country's budget on the sector suggests that the money is not the problem. Instead, it is clear that the funds are misspent, poorly allocated or in any case not reaching the eventual destination. This is evidenced by the extremely poor showing of 102nd in terms of the effectiveness of marketing and branding to attract tourists. We are once more behind countries like Uzbekistan, Croatia and Nigeria.

With respect to the quality of ground transport network, we were ranked 125th out of the 133 countries assessed. One particularly worrying statistic is the 109th place showing in regard to the sustainability of travel and the tourism industry. Mr. Speaker, I searched the 2009 Travel and Tourism Index and was unable to come up with any reference to the quality of room affecting tourist arrivals in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, will you permit me to continue after lunch? If you do, then I will suggest that this may be a good time to take the lunch break. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, we will have the luncheon break and we will resume promptly at 1.30 p.m. The sitting of the House is suspended for lunch and we will resume at 1.30 p.m.

**12.28 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**1.30 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**Mr. B. Panday:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had intended in this budget reply to do a comprehensive analysis of the budget, but I have been advised that my time is running out—[*Interruption*] I know most people think in the Parliament, but not in the Parliament—and therefore, I wanted, for example, to address the problem of health; the problem of children, the Judiciary and agriculture. I am sure that my colleagues are capable of dealing with those matters, so I shall deal only with two or three other matters of which I am deeply concerned, and that has to do with the issue of crime, which is so important a matter in the country and which, for the strangest reasons, the distinguished Minister of Finance thought it would be better to leave it alone.

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Mr. Speaker, the problem of crime in this country cannot be solved in one sentence. It is a systemic, organic problem that has to be dealt with in a very comprehensive kind of way. The first thing one has to do to deal with crime in the country is to have a police service that one can trust; a police service that is efficient in every respect.

First of all, there is currently a shortage of police officers in the Port of Spain Magistrates' Court. On several occasions this has resulted in the adjournment of matters, as it takes several minutes for prisoners to be brought into the courtroom, although we have had the private sector to deal with the question of bringing prisoners to the courts. When the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Mr. Gilbert Reyes, was questioned about the shortage, he said that there is a shortage of officers in the entire police service and that the police service was suddenly lacking in manpower. This was corroborated by the Minister of National Security who advised that there is presently a shortage of some 1,000 officers within the service. It is believed that the figure is nearer 1,500 persons.

The low manpower availability is one problem, however, recently a different crisis has emerged where, the reputation of the police service, as a whole, has come into question. This really touches the most fundamental problem about the police service, which is recruitment. We are recruiting the wrong people. For what reason? We must find that out. Whether it is nepotism, working conditions, whatever it is, we must really recruit the best people in the police service if we are going to deal with crime. [*Desk thumping*]

It follows therefore that one has to improve the working conditions and improve the qualifications for people coming into the police service. If that were the case we would not have the kind of headlines we are having these days: November 24, 2008, "Court Officers Conduct Under Probe"; May 21, 2009, "Cop in Court but in Prisoners Docks"; Saturday, June 13, 2009, "Two Police Officers Slapped with Public Misconduct Charges"; August 06, 2009, "Cops in Hot Water"—before I go further, when I say "cops" here I mean the police service—August 2009, "Contraband Hidden in Police Station's Ceiling"; August 11, "40 Cops Moved"; August 13, "DNA Fingerprint Test for Cops"; August 26, "\$75,000 Bail for Cop in SUV Drama"; August 27, "Police Taking Too Long, Drug Exhibit Found in Cop's Home"; September 04, "Six Policemen Facing Charges"; September 02, "Cops Accused of Stealing Money Back in Court"; September 09, "Cops Trying to Burn Exhibit".

These are the kinds of things we have begun to see in the newspapers and surely it has to do with the fact that we are recruiting the wrong people in the police service. The police service is losing credibility in the eyes of the public. In



addition to the perception that the police service is riddled with corrupt officers, there is also the perception that there is one rule for the police and another for ordinary citizens.

Sadly, in recent times these perceptions appear to be founded as had been indicated in the newspapers reports. As a result of drugs and ammunition being found in the ceiling of the police station at St. Joseph, 40 police were transferred out. Another eight officers in Sangre Grande were transferred out after the discovery of narcotics at the Sangre Grande Police Station.

Mr. Speaker, I am convinced that if it were any other citizen and narcotics and ammunition were found in a car or in a house, everyone would be arrested and charged, but because it was found in the police station the officers were transferred out; no one charged to date. It must be that there is something wrong with police regulations. The law must apply equally, regardless of class, race, colour or position in the society.

I want to warn the Minister and all those Members opposite, that the public is looking on and they will judge them. More importantly, I repeat, as I said a little earlier, God does not sleep. The problem regarding the police does not stop there. When a police officer does not come to court, the magistrates are left with no recourse but to dismiss the charges.

In one example earlier this year, Magistrate Quinlan had to discharge six people on offences ranging from possession of marijuana for the purpose of trafficking, possession of a .38 pistol and 10 rounds of ammunition after the officer failed to appear. There was also a case where a trial was aborted because of the disappearance of an official station diary from the Fyzabad Police Station. In this instance, Justice Carmona, sitting in the Third Assizes, aborted the trial of a man in possession of marijuana for the purpose of trafficking. There was no explanation by the senior police for the diary's disappearance and no investigation despite the fact that the case had been aborted.

The police are on the frontline of law and order and over the past years, the Manning administration has turned a blind eye to growing problems within the service, and which adversely affects the administration of justice. Obviously, the problem would get worse, but this is not new. The hon. Minister and her Government have long known about this problem, yet in her second attempt she chose to repeat her failure of last year, to seriously address the problem.

What is required, Mr. Speaker, it is not merely legislation, but implementation. We will again no doubt here, call on the Government to proclaim

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the breathalyzer, to help curb the carnage on the nation's roads. We suggest that they introduce the proceeds of crime legislation to recover moneys paid as ransom; increase the ceiling figure for compensation for victims of crime; introduce a Bill to establish a gun and kidnapping court; amendment to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Act; strengthening of money laundering legislation; protective services compensation legislation. These are but some of the things which I think we can resort to if we are to deal seriously with the problem of crime, because crime is the most urgent issue and it occupied the least place in the budget.

What can I say that has not been said to this Government about the issue of crime? We on this side have done everything we can in an attempt to persuade the Prime Minister to take a serious approach to controlling the spiraling crime scourge that has been terrorizing innocent citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, but like Pharaoh, his heart has been hardened, pacemaker and all. [*Desk thumping*] We have heard—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Mr. B. Panday:** We have heard every possible excuse for their failure to deal with crime. I am convinced that crime will never be addressed by this Government because they are in bed with the criminals. [*Desk thumping*] From the very beginning of this PNM Government's tenure they proved that they were not inclined to clamp down on the criminal element that was unleashed during the 2001 election campaign against the UNC. We saw the PNM failure to condemn Cro Cro's repugnant and atrocious composition entitled "Face Reality", which called on criminals to kidnap wealthy business persons. We saw a Government looking at this, saying nothing, making no comment.

Mr. Speaker, there is a Latin saying *abisus abisun invocat*, which means "hell calls hell". How appropriate in these circumstances when we have an arrogant and heartless Government presiding over the worst reign of terror in the history of this nation. The policy of the Government in the face of every crisis that they have created and exacerbated has been excuses, denial, propaganda and passing blame.

Over the seven years, the Minister of National Security and the Prime Minister have blamed everyone and everything for the spate of crime. They blame the UNC; they blame Venezuela; they blame drugs, the citizenry, television, parenting, gangs, the Commissioner of Police and, to the credit of the Prime Minister, the lack of classical music and so on.

They place blame everywhere except where it belongs, and that is at the feet of the Minister of National Security and his boss, the Prime Minister. [*Desk*

*thumping*] I sat here and cringed when I heard the Minister declare "We will not waive from our zero tolerance posture against crime". [*Interruption*] Wherever. Very nice statement; I am sure she is proud of it, but I ask, what zero tolerance? For the past seven years, the Government has bent over backwards to accommodate the criminal element in the country, elevating them to community leaders and rewarding them with high paying Government contracts and jobs. If that is not giving people money in order to buy drugs and promote crime, I do not know what is.

#### **1.45 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, over the last seven years we had Chin Lee, Martin Joseph, Mastrosfki, Mc Guire, Snipes, John B. Gold, Steve Henry, Cameron Ross, Hilton Guy, Snaggs, Trevor Paul, James Philbert, Anaconda, Bagdad, weed and seed, policing for people, strategic control seminars, community policing, police reform legislation, police service transformation, model stations, community leader through signing, gang suppression, Crime Suppression Unit, Anti-Kidnapping Squad, ABL lock-down, mobile post, Crime and Justice Commission, Inter-Agency Task Force, SAUTT, Scotland Yard, Penn State Justice and Safety Institute, George Mason University, Israeli radar, blimps, eye-in-the-sky, high speed interceptors, helicopters, offshore patrol vessels and fast patrol boats, cars, jeeps, motor bikes, bicycles, body armour, crowd control training and water cannon. We had crime consultations aplenty; we even had an orchestra and so many other initiatives. All failed! That, ma'am, is zero tolerance. That is what you describe as zero tolerance. [*Desk thumping*]

I wonder just who the hon. Minister of Finance thinks that she is fooling. They have been saying since 2003 that Trinidad and Tobago is under siege from the criminal element. Despite the multitude of assurances from the Prime Minister and the Ministry of National Security, I do not think that there is anyone in this country that has not been affected by crime, including Members on the opposite side, but instead of confronting the problem of crime head-on, the Government resorted to public relations, catch phrases and meaningless buzz words.

The *Express* reporting on an address by the Prime Minister to the Brooklyn Polytechnic Colleague in New York City on September 22, 2004, reported that:

“The Prime Minister insisted that there had been improvements in the nation's security situation and that Trinidad and Tobago was not about to collapse under the weight of crime”—he said—“the Government had taken measures to stem the crime rate and was beginning to see the results.”

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Where my God? Where? [*Laughter*] “T&T will fight crime” reported in the *Express*.

In January 2005, the Minister of National Security, Hon. Martin Joseph went into the song and dance routine when he informed the nation that kidnappings were under control and I quote from him:

“We are progressing and as our law enforcement becomes more intelligence driven we will be able to put a handle on those types of crime taking place.”

We have all kinds of equipment here. We are living on 2,000 square miles of land; we have 1.3 million people and we have not been able to catch anybody with ransom. We have not been able to catch anybody asking for ransom. Something has got to be wrong! Under the PNM the number of murders went up from 169 in 2002 to a massive 550 last year and by all indications 2009 will again break the records. With more than billions spent by the Minister of National Security over the past seven years, the number of murders averaged one per day over the period this Government has been in office. With over 130,000 serious crimes including rape, assault, kidnappings, burglaries and so on, over the period, the population is overwhelmed; many have become numb to the gore and mayhem which now characterize daily life in Trinidad and Tobago.

I remind the hon. Minister of National Security of a statement to the media at the post Cabinet briefing on January 22, 2009. I quote what he says:

“What I can assure you is, no way we are going to find ourselves in 2009 in the situation we found ourselves in 2008.”

He was right about that. It is worse! [*Laughter*] He said that his understanding was that there would be a greater focus on gangs. “We had a situation in 2008 that was totally unacceptable in terms of homicide. Not again says Joseph”, *Express* January 22, 2009. Of course we are not going to experience the same situation in 2009, as I said, as we did in 2008 because 2009 is going to be much worse. “Much, much more worse than 2008.”

So where is the evidence of zero tolerance, ma'am? [*Interruption*] I think I have reached zero tolerance with stupid statements. [*Desk thumping*] I am fed up of the promises and the PR gimmickry. I am fed up of this charade and blame game. I am fed up of being scared that when my children go out, that they would be killed, kidnapped or robbed. I am fed up of hearing the same recycled promises and programmes and I am fed up of the insensitivity of the pleas of a desperate population.

Madam Minister, I want to hear no more of zero tolerance. What I want is for you to get off your padded chair and fix the problem. If you cannot, then do the honourable thing. Surely nobody could do worse! Nothing they have done has worked. Not one single plan. Every Monday morning you hear a new plan which is costing taxpayers millions and millions of dollars. Surely there has got to be a time when enough is enough.

Taxpayers in this country have spent over \$30 million to establish a unit called the Special Anti-Crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago (SAUTT); a group of highly-trained personnel with a wide range of high-tech equipment and training available to them. The Minister of National Security has long been in high praise of SAUTT, but the Minister has refused to bring the legislation which would legalize the actions of the unit and allow them to properly and freely execute their duties. Why? [*Desk thumping*] For the simple reason that they want control over the police. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister had promised this legislation on multiple occasions over the past three years. Why has he not legalized the unit? Does that make sense to you, Mr. Speaker? The unit was established because it was thought that they could make a difference in the fight against crime. While people are being slaughtered every day and while women are being raped and children abused with impunity, the Minister of National Security twiddles his thumbs. That is shameful!

The blood of 2,500 murdered victims is on the hands of this Prime Minister, the Minister of National Security, this Government and their colleagues. [*Desk thumping*] The Minister of National Security is all talk and no action. I expect him to waltz into this Chamber and express his concern that crime has escalated beyond his control and in his pitiful voice, promise, like he has done on so many occasions before, that one day things will be better. That fools no one. They have encased themselves in the ivory towers with private security protection. They have overseen the development of the gang subculture in the country.

Mr. Speaker, through you I ask the hon. Minister, what is there in the budget she has proposed here on Monday last which offers some measure of hope to the women out there who are afraid of becoming another rape statistic or to the parent wondering if their son or daughter will be murdered before he or she reaches home from work or from play?

Budget 2010, just like budget 2009 and just like every other PNM budget over the last seven years, offers nothing more than rhetoric. It opens the door for the Minister of National Security to come here later and celebrate the things which

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this Government has done and how much money he has spent. It gives the Minister the opportunity to do everything but explain why, with the billions of dollars spent since 2002, crime has gotten progressively worse.

If in the private service the Minister would have been held guilty for absolute incompetence, under the PNM he continues to eat from a salary paid by taxpayers who receive no services from him. That is forcing people to pay for a service they do not receive, it is fraud, it is a form of corruption and the law should be amended to enable the public to take the Government to court for failing to provide services for which the public must pay. [*Desk thumping*]

I must deal a bit with corruption. Again, I quote from Abe Lincoln who said:

“I see in the near future a crisis approaching that unnerves me and causes me to tremble for the safety of my country, corporations have been enthroned, an era of corruption in high places will follow and the money power of the country will endeavour to prolong its rein by working upon the prejudices of the people until the wealth is aggregated into a few hands and the Republic is destroyed.”

Ask Mr. Calder Hart.

Those words were spoken 200 years ago and they resonate with truth now in regard to Trinidad and Tobago. Under the PNM this country is viewed as becoming increasingly corrupt. The unethical influence of the hand of the Prime Minister in sabotaging the appointment of a Director of Public Prosecutions despite his avowed agreements to do so more than a year ago; the failure to appoint a Solicitor General for several years; the sabotage of the appointment of a Commissioner of Police by the Police Service Commission so that Government could have hand-picked their choice—a man who has failed the polygraph test; the unsubstantiated attacks on a sitting Chief Justice based on frivolous charges and the failure to penalize the Chief Magistrate for his part in the process—he continues to preside; the incestuous involvement of the very Minister of Finance in the multi-billion CL Financial bail out in which the Minister's action was revealed to be at the very least, unethical, and very likely corrupt; the fact that despite this complicity the Minister has up to this day not been subject to any criminal investigation; the refusal of the Government to act on a draft procurement policy; the failure of Ministers to answer questions posed in Parliament; the repeated failure of any numerous special purpose companies established by this Government to report to Parliament on the millions they spend. That is an act of gross corruption!

All these point to a concerted, deliberate and orchestrated plot by persons occupying very high political life in the Government to avoid transparency and accountability. It is now state-sanctioned corruption. The well-known Corruption Perception Index hereinafter referred to as the CPI established by Transparency International, measures the extent of abuse of public office for private gain and therefore the degree to which business and analysts believe that the country is corrupt.

Mr. Speaker, for clarification, the higher the index the more corrupt the country's politicians and public officials are believed to be.

**2.00 p.m.**

In 2001 under a UNC government, the CPI ranked Trinidad and Tobago at 31 in the world. When the PNM assumed office in 2002, they met an index of 33. Within one year of the PNM, the perception of corruption skyrocketed dramatically by 10 places to 43, and it has been rising steadily still, evidencing a public perception internationally and locally that corruption is becoming endemic under the PNM. The data reveals that six years of PNM governance, from 2002 to 2008, during which time this country had the highest ever income, the prevalence of corruption pushed this country's ranking from 33rd under the UNC to a massive 72nd place in 2008. A leap of 39 pegs downward, and this does not take into account the revelations of the Uff enquiry which unearthed evidence of massive corruption in the State sector.

The 2009 corruption perception index is due to be released very soon, and I have no doubt that once more this country's international image will take another beating as PNM corruption pushes this country further down.

Mr. Speaker, the actions of this Government reveal its disdain for the population, its flippancy in dealing with citizen's questions about its expenditure of taxpayers' money. It is as if the Prime Minister and his cohorts believe that the Treasury is their own personal bank account for which they do not need to account to the people. It belongs to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and they have a right to know what you are doing with it, and they have a right to an input in what you spend it on.

Mr. Speaker, delivering the 2005 budget speech in this honourable House, this is what the Prime Minister said and I quote him:

“Mr. Speaker, my Government is committed to good governance. For us, this means putting systems in place to ensure transparency, accountability, the highest level of efficiency and effectiveness, equity and adherence to the rule of law.”

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High sounding phrases meaning exactly nothing and quite frankly, “me thinks he doth protest too much”.

Under the heading “Procurement Reform,” the Prime Minister promised and I quote:

“...to further ensure transparency, accountability and good governance, this Government is undertaking”—a personal—“reform of its procurement process.

The imperative for reform centres on the need for good governance; public confidence in the integrity of the procurement process; conformity with international best practice, and regional and international developments. Prevailing deficiencies in the legal and regulatory framework, human resource limitations and lack of regulatory oversight, further add to the urgency for a new objective, and comprehensive approach to the Government's acquisition of goods and services.”

Urgency? Urgency was the Prime Minister's description. Then with great fanfare he revealed a Green Paper on the Reform of the Government's Procurement Regime, dated June 2004, which was out for public comment and which listed a series of recommendations. With a straight face he told the country, "...implementation of the new procurement regime is targeted for 2006".

Mr. Speaker, he continued:

“The new procurement regime will signal to the local, regional and international community, this Government's commitment to quality of governance that reflects the highest standards of ethics, transparency and accountability in the conduct of the people's business.”

In 2005, a White Paper on the Reform of the Public Sector Procurement Policy was published in keeping with the Government's stated intention for a 2006 implementation of the procurement policy. Then as the price of energy products began to climb to new heights and the potential for corruption loomed large, the Government recognized the limitations which a procurement policy would have on their ability to corruptly award contracts to friends and party hacks, and they threw ethics, transparency, accountability in the conduct of people's business out in the wind.

As Government's revenues increased by 35 per cent in fiscal 2006, and then again by 37 per cent in 2006, the enormity of the boom began to sink in and the need for ethics, transparency and accountability no longer mattered to the Prime Minister and his cohorts. So the reckless expenditure began in frenzy, basic human needs were abandoned by the Government at the altar of mega projects.



Mr. Speaker, they have not turned back yet. The recklessness continues in the current budget and the corruption flourishes.

Frenzied by money, the Patrick Manning regime began ignoring the smaller projects which were desperately needed and promised, and began experimenting in mega constructions. Simultaneously, the Government began finding ways to avoid procurement issues, began pursuing design finance/construct and design build projects and began granting million-dollar contracts to international companies with increasing reliance on Asian companies.

The Minister of Works and the Transport, a former contractor himself, turned his venom against the local contractors against whom he used to compete, and a war of words began between Government and local contractors. But like all things under the PNM, it gets worse. The nation realized that despite the increased revenues, their basic human needs were not being met and the questioning began. Schools in remote areas like Paramin, Rose Hill, Point Cumana and Belmont; hospitals' access roads, drainage, et cetera, all were scarified to the Prime Minister's desire for tall buildings. What is the better? You are a skyscraper climber or something? The people's business was forgotten.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall too, the Prime Minister's ostentatious fantasies blossomed into a fetish for private jet rides and his attempt to join the ranks of the rich sheiks and powerful Presidents of the world, when a multimillion dollar down payment was made to purchase a private jet. That was never announced by the Prime Minister. It was revealed by investigative reporting, when the country had to find out after the supplier made the disclosure.

Recently, we had another similar disclosure of the Government's down payment of the purchase of four special purpose helicopters. As before the Government does not see the need to tell the country when it is committing billions of dollars of taxpayers' money.

Mr. Speaker, when public pressure forced this Government to reconsider the purchase of the private jet, the Minister of "Nothing Works" claimed that the supplier did not want to sign an anti-corruption clause, conveniently ignoring the fact that the Government had already made a down payment of several million dollars to the supplier. [*Desk thumping*] Minister Colm Imbert said then and I quote him:

"We are insisting on the insertion of a standard anti-corruption clause in the contract, where if it is discovered that any person had somehow benefited from this transaction, the contract will be void and the seller will have to refund the money."

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A standard anti-corruption clause, the Minister said.

Mr. Speaker, today I challenge this Government. I challenge Minister Imbert, the Member for Diego Martin North/East. I challenge him to provide copies of every contract issued by this Government and by the agencies of this Government above \$10 million since 2006, and show me the anti-corruption clause. [*Desk thumping*] Show me the anti-corruption clause in the \$368 million contract awarded to UDeCott to an unqualified company CH Development and Construction Limited, and in circumstances which have been revealed to be corrupt. [*Desk thumping*]

The hon. Minister needs to explain to this country what measures were taken by UDeCott to ensure that there was no corruption in the award of the tender, and how it has been found that the contract was improperly awarded. What measures is the Government going to take to effect the retrieval of moneys paid? Show me the multimillion dollar contract awarded by UDeCott to Turner-Alpha Limited for a project without the company having been evaluated, as was required. What has been done to deal with that?

Mr. Speaker, I can go on, but I have decided to cut my speech because it is always said that we on this side stand up and criticize the Government, but we never make suggestions as to what we shall do. We know that this Government has pushed this country down the slippery slope. There is much that needs to be done to pull us back. In the few minutes I have left therefore, I wish to offer some suggestions to the way forward. I am certain that as my colleagues present their various portfolios, these and other recommendations will be offered in the light of Government's obvious inability and their intellectual bankruptcy.

First on crime. We would legalize SAUTT. SAUTT remains the country's premium technology driven crime fighting tool, and much money was spent to establish and equip it. Yet the Government has not seen it fit to enact legislation to legalize the operations of SAUTT, despite multiple assurances over the past two years that the legislation was coming soon.

Secondly, we would appoint more judges, magistrates and support staff. [*Desk thumping*] The Law Association told us that they could not deal with the massive backlog of cases unless there were a greater number of judicial officers to deal with them. This will also expedite cases and prevent justice from being delayed, and the problem of repeat offenders making bail and committing more crimes while awaiting trial; not to mention the cost to the taxpayer of keeping persons awaiting trial in jail.

Thirdly, we would computerize the police, the courts and the licencing divisions, [*Desk thumping*] so that police officers in vehicles could have access to

criminal records, warrants, et cetera, at the touch of a button—perhaps with laptops in police cars as exists in the United States. I know for sure, Dade County in Miami.

Fourthly, we would establish a Victims Counselling Unit. [*Desk thumping*]

Fifthly, establish a central vigilance authority-development of a Central Vigilance Authority to receive complaints, investigate and report to Parliament.

Sixthly, we would establish a gun court for dealing with all firearms related matters. [*Desk thumping*]

Seventhly, we would implement the breathalyzer law. [*Desk thumping*]

Eighthly, we would increase the compensation for victims of crime from the current limit of \$25,000 to \$250,000. [*Desk thumping*]

Ninthly, we shall introduce technology of speed traps, speed guns, traffic lights, cameras, and so on.

### **2.15 p.m.**

Tenthly, we shall ensure existing CC cameras are operating, and include basic centres on the East-West Corridor, not only on the highway. [*Desk thumping*]

We will ensure that there are more policemen. There are currently 1,250 shortfall in the complement of 7,500 established many years ago; there is, therefore, need for increased appointment of police officers with better screening of applicants and better terms and conditions of work.

We shall provide adequate funding for the EOC, the Equal Opportunity Commission. [*Desk thumping*] We shall implement it; we shall force the President to appoint the persons he must appoint. We shall establish a proper Witness Protection Programme and, of course, we shall ensure the appointment of a Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) and a Solicitor General, without interference.

Mr. Speaker, it is not only business that needs to be attended to. There is the labour movement, the poor, the working people. We shall increase the minimum wage from \$15 to \$20, which we think is a living wage, for the time being. We shall increase the old age grant, the Senior Citizens Grant, to \$3,000 and index it to inflation.

We shall increase the payments of disability grants.

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** You want to bankrupt the Treasury!

**Mr. B. Panday:** Bankrupt the Treasury? [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Member:** "You bankrupt it already!"

**Mr. B. Panday:** We shall ensure the enforcement of OSHA and include foreign contractors and workers. We shall ensure compliance and an even playing field with minimum wages terms and conditions of employment; employ CEPEP in more productive endeavours, including the agricultural and manufacturing sector. As a matter of fact, it is also an idea to convert CEPEP into permanent employees of the local government bodies, so that they too can enjoy a pension when they get old. [*Desk thumping*]

We shall increase the allowance for approved deferred annuity; increase the limit on pensions to \$5,000, to allow pensioners to access their old age Senior Citizens Grant and national insurance pensions.

In the Department of Works and Transport—listen boy [*Laughter*—we shall prioritize projects on a need basis and particularly we shall put a stop to new projects which have been assigned to foreign contractors. [*Desk thumping*] We shall demand cost benefit analyses which must justify every new project to be started. We shall stop the rapid rail project until a feasibility study can prove its value. Quite frankly, I understand that there is a feasibility study which you are hiding.

We shall investigate, with the intent to pursue criminal charges, based on the current revelation of the Uff Commission. There is no reason to wait until the commission submits the report, as the information and allegations are already in the public domain. The Director of Public Prosecutions and the Assistant Director of Public Prosecutions should act now.

We shall ensure that a comprehensive bridge assessment and maintenance programme is required. You know, it can get very simple sometimes. When the UNC was in office, in order to deal with potholes, when there was not enough money to build all the roads and so on, we actually established something called a "Pothole Gang", and a truck would go and fix the potholes when they were small, so that they do not envelop the road eventually. That was how we began to deal with people's problems, by fixing the potholes in their roads, but it takes a little—[*Mr. Panday points to his head*]

Right now bridges are crumbling all over the East-West Corridor. [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Member:** Which bridge?

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Mr. B. Panday:** We will develop a logical approach to road repair. The highway between the Beetham and the overpass is being paved again for the umpteenth time in the last five years, but many roads in this country are in complete disrepair causing protests by residents. We shall embark upon a comprehensive drainage plan which is required to address flooding and to take into account existing and proposed development.

There will also be a true attempt to introduce CNG stations and facilities.

On the economy—There is need to stimulate the economy, and the best way to do this is to stimulate local industry, including the construction and manufacturing sectors. This necessitates local contractors to be employed, the importance of internal circulation of the investment, as opposed to external migration of the resources assigned to stimulate the economy.

The Exim Bank and the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB)—We will increase the allocation and reorient to facilitate easier and less expensive access to funding for local exporters and importers with heavy local content. We shall direct tax concessions to investment in agriculture, to stimulate greater private sector involvement.

We shall institute 24/7 operations of the port and have the establishment of Point Lisas as a fully operational port; listing of profitable state enterprises on the stock exchange, as a way of increasing the rate of equity available.

We shall balance the budget by reducing projects that are not critically necessary at this time. [*Desk thumping*] I answer the question you asked a little earlier: Where do you get the money? You cut out the fluff; you cut out the unnecessary expenditure.

We shall reduce the non-energy deficit.

On health—the Point Fortin Hospital, the Chaguanas Hospital and the Couva health facility will be upgraded, given the development level taking place at Point Lisas.

In agriculture and the environment, we shall embark upon a proper land distribution scheme to genuine farmers. We shall stop using agricultural land for housing. We shall stop the smelter project and convert to more environmentally sound projects, including light manufacture and agriculture in the areas already graded. Tax incentives for environmentally friendly projects and investments will be introduced and the promotion of recycling as a major business, giving them concession to recycle our waste.

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We shall release for public examination the National Transportation Plan, which has been completed since 2000. We shall introduce an enhanced praedial larceny unit within the police service. We shall link the programme of the alleviation of flooding with the plan to irrigate for farming. That is something you never thought of. You deal with flooding at the same time that you deal with irrigation for farming.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity and for extending the time so that I could have been able to present a critique of this budget to the best of my ability. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order! Before you continue, I would want each Member of Parliament to show the same respect that you showed to the Leader of the Opposition, while he was on his feet. So if any Member of Parliament intends to get rowdy, may I advise you not to, please.

**The Minister of Information (Hon. Neil Parsanlal):** Mr. Speaker, I thank you and hon. Members of this House for the opportunity to contribute to the 2009/2010 budget debate. As I do so, I too wish to add my voice to the chorus of support emanating from so many quarters, raised in praise of my colleague, the Minister of Finance, for eloquently presenting what was clearly a budget rooted in sound sustainable development philosophy and principles, a budget which speaks to ameliorating the plight of our currently economically disadvantaged citizens, through the provision of job opportunities and the creation of an appropriate social and economic climate, where all sectors of society benefit.

When my colleague stood here a year ago to present her first budget, one could have detected, perhaps, her nervousness and apprehension. One year later, however, she has made this House her own, [*Desk thumping*] delivering a presentation that was almost flawless, but with all the poise and grace of a seasoned politician.

Similarly, I wish to thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for his contribution today. I proffer those thanks for a number of reasons, albeit completely opposite to the Finance Minister. It is his first budget response since 2005 and so I welcome him back to role. But after listening to his contribution and all that he had to say about the PNM Government, I think it is important for the national community to be reminded why the Opposition Leader has not been able to respond to a budget since 2005.

According to today's *Express* newspaper, he was out in 2006 and 2007 because of a two-year jail sentence imposed for his failure to declare a London

bank account to the Integrity Commission. Having returned to the Parliament in 2007, after the 2007 general election, he was suspended in February 2008 by the House for gross disrespect of the Chair. And he comes today, behaving like Caesar's wife, accusing this Government of being criminal in all manner of things. [*Crosstalk*]

He made the dangerous assertion, dangerous because it implicates him and others on his side, in no small measure, that the Corruption Perception Index, which he spent a lot of time dealing with, increased substantially under the PNM watch; that from the time the UNC left office in 2001, to the time of the PNM, while we were in power, the perception of corruption in the Government increased substantially. But there is a reason for that; it was only after the UNC demitted office and UNC politicians and their financiers started parading before the courts every Monday morning, having been charged, that the perception of corruption would have increased. [*Desk thumping*] That is the reason.

In fact, the parade continues, and for some of them, if you want to make an appointment, they have to first check their court diary.

### **2.30 p.m.**

You cannot come to this House and talk about the PNM Government in such disparaging terms; you cannot do it when you are not like Caesar's wife. The corruption perception index began to increase after the UNC demitted office, in fact, after they were booted out of office.

Mr. Speaker, the goodly Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Couva North, spent much time on the global competitive report, and one could understand why he would do that in some senses, but the same report they have is the same one we have. It is the same report that we have, and very little of what the Opposition Leader said was true. In fact, in attempting to call the hon. Prime Minister stranger to the truth, he was only pointing at himself.

The same Global Competitiveness Report says that Trinidad and Tobago's position on the global competitive index in fact moved from 92 in 2008/2009 to 86 in the latest report, 2009/2010, and on practically every one of the sub-indices we have improved. And for the benefit of the national community so that what the Opposition Leader says does not stay on the record unchallenged, let me state the facts.

When he spoke of crime and theft in the sub-indices; in 2008/2009 it was 21.9; in 2009/2010, it is 17.9, a decrease. Inflation in 2008/2009, it was 15.3; in 2009/2010, it is 14.4. It decreased.

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Corruption, their favourite bogey: In 2008/2009, it was 13.2. Mr. Speaker, the corruption on this report in 2009/2010, has dropped dramatically to 9.1. [*Desk thumping*] I have no doubt that when the corruption perception index is released later on this year that we would have continued the trend of doing substantially better, and we can go on and on about the global competitive index.

Mr. Speaker, what is interesting—and that is why as politicians and I tell those with whom I come into contact that politicians must always be very careful of what they say and they must have long memories.

When the Member for Couva North delivered his last budget response in 2005, this is what he said:

"Mr. Speaker, this may very well be the last budget reply I shall deliver to this honourable House in this capacity... The time has come for me to move on to other things and other places, where the world is not collapsing around me, where the air is rare, where men can hold their heads high, where duty is pure and its performance is not hindered by the desire for the trappings of office, where the desire for worldly things gives way to peace and bliss. This is my wish."

Mr. Speaker, he should have heeded his own counsel and not returned to this House for another budget reply, because his rustiness—what he gave from morning to afternoon was a rusty reply and it showed from the time he began. It was manifest from the time he began. He offered this country absolutely nothing that had not been said since he lost office in 2001. There is nothing that he said today that we had not heard before, it was a presentation that lacked thought; it was vacuous; it was bereft of any real solutions, insight, or any directions. So much so that no one listening to him today for the three hours and more that he spoke could have actually deemed him a credible alternative to the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I began to write when he got to the point of his recommendations and then I realized this is sounding familiar, these recommendations sound very familiar and then it dawned on me that among his readings was the PNM Manifesto. It had to be. All the recommendations that he has put forward this afternoon are already part of PNM's policy, and that is plagiarism, that is intellectual dishonesty. [*Desk thumping*] Because everything he said, the 20-something plus recommendations are all part of PNM's policy already, including the praedial larceny squad and the legislation for SAUTT, the computerization of the police and the courts and Licensing Division; the



establishing of a victim's counselling unit; the Gun Court; implementation of the breathalyser; the increased compensation. All of that, in fact, I have to conclude like my colleague, my friend Benjai: "Ah fed up ah de same thing over and over and over."

Nothing he said today—three hours and 17 minutes of pure fluff, because if he thought the Finance Minister did not say anything, well, come and say something, but you did absolutely nothing, you come to this House and regaled us with everything that we have heard before.

Mr. Speaker, it was a speech—and I am almost saddened that the Member for Siparia, or the erstwhile Member for St. Augustine had not presented a response, because we might have gotten something with a little more intelligence, something with a little more substance in it.

Mr. Speaker, because what we heard this morning into this afternoon was a speech that could have been written by one of the most junior officers in any ministry.

**Hon. Member:** Nigel.

**Hon. N. Parsanlal:** By Nigel, but what it did—you see Nigel is no longer there. It certainly demonstrated the vacuum that has been created in the office of the Leader of the Opposition, and it was created by the desertion of so many staff to the other faction of the UNC, he has nobody else to write for him now; any new idea he gets now, he will get a headache. There is nothing new coming from there.

Mr. Speaker, the presentation demonstrated what some might prefer to call versatility, what others might however refer to as a volatility on the Opposition Bench. For the last three years we heard the Member for Siparia, this year we heard the Member for Couva North. Who knows, next year it might be the Member for Tabaquite, it might be the Member for Chaguanas West, or even the Member for Mayaro. [*Desk thumping*] But, Mr. Speaker, whether Front Bench, Back Bench, whether Ram, Jack or G, the only place they will ever be able to deliver that budget response is on that side of the House, [*Desk thumping*] because they are consigned there for the rest of their political life for the bankruptcy of ideas that pervade that side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, but I wish to thank him for his presentation because in a debate like this, it gives the Government the opportunity to place on the public record the true facts about our performance. So when the Member for Couva North speaks about the Government's inability to implement its projects, making heavy weather

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about the proposed amendments to the Road Traffic and Motor Vehicles Act and the absence of police officers on the highways, I want to jog his memory a little bit. I want to jog his memory back to the time when he was Prime Minister, and I want to mention two words to him "traffic wardens".

Mr. Speaker, Cabinet by Minute No. 3070 dated November 28, 1996. Let me repeat the date; November 28, 1996, the UNC was in office at that time for those who have missed it. The Cabinet then agreed inter alia to the establishment and implementation of a traffic warden system in Trinidad and Tobago, which system would use traffic wardens to enforce certain minimal functions related to traffic flow and designated offences like illegal parking.

The Cabinet agreed then to provide funding in the 1997 estimates under the Ministry of Works and Transport to meet the estimated start-up cost of the traffic warden system in Port of Spain and San Fernando.

Mr. Speaker, the UNC administration never implemented this, and they cannot stand in this House and offer the excuse that they demitted office soon after. This was 1996; they were kicked out of office in 2001.

Mr. Speaker, the Opposition Leader speaks of the blood of the citizens on the hands of the PNM. The blood of so many of this country's citizens could have been saved, could have been spared had they implemented the system. And no amount of hand ringing, no amount of finger pointing at this stage will absolve them from the fact that they had an opportunity to do it and they failed to serve the country when they had that opportunity. They cannot be absolved.

Mr. Speaker, this Government will revisit every single strategy, every single idea to ensure that we get the maximum out of our police officers. We will do everything to ensure that police officers do police work and leave other tasks like traffic management and agriculture protection to specially created squads as already articulated by the Finance Minister. And when the Opposition Leader spoke about the new police service, the new type of police officers, that has already been done, that is why we have expended considerable funds to improve the infrastructure and curriculum at the Police Academy in St. James to ensure that all recruits now undergo polygraph and psychometric testing; that is being done as we speak, and to train increasing numbers of police officers and to properly outfit and equip them.

Mr. Speaker, there is another point that has to be made; police officers, soldiers, coast guard officers are all our sons and daughters, they did not drop from the sky; they are all our brothers and sisters and all of us in the society have

to share the responsibility for the type of persons who offers themselves now for service as a member of the protective services, we cannot escape that.

Much has been made in the Opposition Leader's discourse on the measures being taken on crime fighting and the apparent lack of success; and the Opposition Leader, true to form went to town on that.

Mr. Speaker, none of us in this House is happy with the level of criminality in Trinidad and Tobago, none. We cannot be happy by it, but even as we express our dissatisfaction, some people are making light of the penalties that have been proposed for imposition on motor vehicle offenders and the Opposition Leader was there. While we try to get the thing right, it is as though nothing else should be done.

Mr. Speaker, I want to share with this honourable House an interesting research finding from the early 1980s. In 1982, George Kelling and James Wilson wrote an article entitled "The Broken Windows" in the Atlantic monthly journal.

#### **2.45 p.m.**

In the article they postulated that most major crimes increased because the law enforcement agencies turn a blind eye to small crimes which, over the period of time, build up into a significant problems and eventually get out of hand. For instance, the authors found that where there was a neglected building with broken windows, for example, vandals tended to break more windows; they would go and they would break more windows, and soon they broke into the building and began using it for various nefarious activities. Eventually, this led to that neighbourhood becoming infested with criminals and gang leaders. But the theory did not only apply to abandoned buildings. According to Kelling and Wilson, littering, loitering, traffic offences, indecent language, all start off as a minor offence and end up as a major epidemic causing many neighbourhoods and towns to lose their respectable citizens.

The relationship between petty crimes and major offences was illustrated by the New York Transit Authority when they conducted a study and started prosecuting turnstile offenders. The turnstile offenders are those who jump over the turnstile to get away from paying for a ticket. The Authority found that nearly 60 per cent of the offenders were already on a wanted list for some other more serious crime. Therefore, by focusing on what seemed to be a minor offence, law enforcement agencies began to set a norm which then led to a law-abiding society.

It is in this context that in addition to everything else that the Government will do and is doing; in addition to all the major initiatives to fight crime aggressively, we propose, as Government, to transform this society back into a law-abiding

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society and we will start with the roads of our nation. [*Desk thumping*] We believe if you fix the roads, you fix the country; we believe that if there is discipline and respect for each other on the roads, there will be discipline and respect for each other in the wider society. That is why we will go after the roads, and those who do not want to come willingly, will have to come kicking and screaming, because this will be implemented.

The Opposition Leader's response to all of that, represents a level of myopia that is so evident in so much that comes out from that other side. It is a myopia that says everything must be right in one place before you could move on to something else, as though two things cannot happen at the same time. So until we have our specialist courts, until we have the gun court, until we have the traffic court, until we have the night court, it makes no sense doing anything at all; just rock back and do nothing.

But we are confident that the measures proposed in this budget with respect to dealing with traffic offenders are far-reaching; they are progressive and they would have the desired effect. If these measures help to save one life, then they would have served their purpose.

Mr. Speaker, you and I know, and all of us in this House know—we have been in ministries already—every government experiences challenges in implementation of its programmes and policies and we understand that. But we also recognize that we are in government and we have a responsibility to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and that is why the theme of this year's budget is "Strengthening Efficiency and Addressing the Challenges", and it is a theme that has been chosen very, very carefully.

It is our desire to strengthen the efficiencies in housing and education, for example, and to address the challenges in the small and micro business sectors and agriculture and that is what has led us to prescribe the medicine contained in the budget presented by the Finance Minister earlier this week.

It is our desire to strengthen the efficiencies in Finance and Community Development and to address the challenges in National Security and Public Utilities that have led us to ensure that there are adequate provisions in this budget for these crucial sectors of our economy.

It is our desire to strengthen the efficiencies in tourism and public administration, for example, and to address challenges in health and the manufacturing sector, that have led us to place such great emphasis on them in the national budget. It is because this Government is mindful of the fact that we have

to do more with less, that we have a responsibility to make what is bad, good, and what is good even better, that we have adopted the course we have. It is a course that is already bearing good fruit and fruit that we are sure will last.

Certainly, at the Ministry of Information we have moved to ensure greater efficiency in our operations and the agencies that come under our purview. Every year the Member for Siparia regales us with her stories of the propaganda vote, Head 62 of the various ministries that deal with promotions, publicity and printing. Well, I want to save her some trouble this year and I am sure she will be disappointed, since as a result of very deliberate action and the better utilization of our resources at the Government Information Services Limited, we have been able to effect significant reductions in the cost of Government advertising by renegotiating rates with advertising agencies, for instance. [*Desk thumping*] Therefore, while in 2007, the actual expenditure—and this is actual expenditure—was \$139.5 million, and in 2008 the actual figure was \$140.4 million, up to July 2009 this year, the figure is \$90.6 million—[*Desk thumping*]—a reduction of close to \$50 million; strengthening efficiencies and addressing the challenges that we face.

Similarly, in another move to strengthen our efficiency, the Government transferred the assets of the National Carnival Commission Television, Channels 4 and 16 to the Government Information Services Limited. The transfer of the assets and the integration of the operations of GISL and NCC TV facilitate for us the establishment of a production house. Hon. Members would have received this morning when they came to the House, a package, a booklet produced by GISL—this booklet—a booklet which chronicles the 40 years of our national awards and this was possible because of the wiser and more efficient use of our vast storehouse of archival material. This will be followed by the creation of an integrated public broadcasting organization through the ensuing merger of CNMG and GISL.

As my friend, the Member for Chaguanas West, has walked in—I do not like to disagree with you publicly; you are one of my favourite constituents; we go back a long way, but when I get press releases saying that the Government has shut down the websites of various ministries so as to sabotage the Opposition's preparation for the debate—it must have really affected the Leader of the Opposition; it must have, given what we saw passing for a contribution today—we have no desire to do that, hon. Member. The Government Information Services Limited and all the ministries, our websites are up; we are available to the public and to the Opposition Leader to do with as you will, and we give you that assurance. The Minister of Information has no desire to sabotage anything on that side. I think you are quite capable of doing it on your own.

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GISL will soon re-launch Channels 4 and 16 as a public broadcasting service aimed at increasing production by local film and other content producers. I made the point that if someone produces a film locally; a documentary locally, they have to pay to get it aired. Having paid to produce it and incurred all the expenses to produce it, they must now pay the television stations to get it aired. There is something fundamentally wrong with that. What we are saying to the local film producers and other content producers, is that through the merger with GISL and the creation of this production house, you are now guaranteed a place for local content on local television. [*Desk thumping*] We will ensure that it gets aired and GISL will lead this initiative by rolling out its information repository, because we have all the Government archives; the film; the books, all the material. What we will do is ensure that all the documentaries and mini features are made available and if anyone wants to use the Government archival material, well then we could engage in discussions for that. So it will be housed in one place, not in many disparate areas now.

This initiative is a huge step. It is strengthening efficiency and addressing the challenges, because if you look at the booklet you have in front of you—any one of you—you would realize that there is footage; there are photographs in that booklet that you would never have seen before. There is historical material in those documents that you would not have seen before and that is what is being made available, or it is now possible, through the merger that we have engaged in.

This is a huge step towards the rationalization of the Government's media assets, with the intent of achieving economies of scale in terms of optimization of Government media assets; economies of scope in terms of content management and audience share, and economies of scope in terms of optimizing the use of skills we now have. Again—and especially for the Members opposite—we are about strengthening efficiency.

Already the dividends are beginning to pay off, because based on the last MFO surveys, CNMG is now the fastest growing television station in the country; the Government station. [*Desk thumping*] And commercial media must ask themselves why, that the Government station is the fastest growing station in the country, surpassing the two other commercial entities.

Not only that. There is a new project produced by GISL called “The Inside Story” and “The Inside Story” is the 5<sup>th</sup> ranked watched programme on national television now, and the top locally produced programme and that is being done because we have strengthened the efficiencies in Government state media and addressed the challenges that we faced, so much so, that if you compare year on year with at least one other

television station, CNC 3, CNMG far surpasses what CNC 3 is doing in terms of audience share. I say this with the greatest of pride, because much maligned they have been, but now they are beginning to hold their own. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, construction of the new library at Chancery Lane in San Fernando is all but completed and we are now in the process of outfitting that library. Tenders went out last week—and I am sure the Member for Chaguanas West will be quite happy to hear that—for the construction of the new Chaguanas Public Library and so far we have had at least 26 persons, companies, who have expressed an interest in constructing that Chaguanas Public Library.

**3.00 p.m.**

The Arima Public Library has also moved into more spacious and albeit rented surroundings but we have also identified a permanent site for the new Arima Public Library. I know my friend, the Member for Mayaro is waiting with bated breath for what will happen in Mayaro and Rio Claro but we have dealt with you as well and we are coming to ensure that that library is expanded properly. It is about strengthening our efficiencies and addressing the challenges that my friend would have faced in Mayaro. That is in addition to the five community centres he has gotten.

Last year we opened a new library at the Youth Training Centre in Golden Grove. In the next two weeks, we will open an additional library at the Women's Prison in Golden Grove. [*Desk thumping*] We have also acquired two digital mobile libraries and are moving to introduce containerized libraries to better and more efficiently serve our rural communities. All of this is intended to create the knowledge-based society that we are intent on doing and all this because at the Ministry of Information we recognize that information is the new currency and we intend to spread that wealth around to as many people as possible.

One of the unsung heroes of the government service is the Government Printery. It also falls under the Ministry of Information. All our budget documents and election documents are printed by the hardworking staff of the Government Printery. Today, I pay tribute to them because they are the unsung heroes for us. [*Desk thumping*] I pay tribute to them for ensuring that budget after budget and election after election, we have the documents that are necessary to keep our democracy flourishing. The good news is not only at the Ministry of Information, but at every ministry in the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

All my colleagues will spell out in greater detail how their ministries have touched and impacted on the lives of ordinary citizens of Trinidad and Tobago,

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from Mohan Dindial who, because of the opening of the interchange at Uriah Butler now has a lot more time to spend with his family; to Mrs. Sergeant who lives in San Fernando and who takes the water taxi to and from Port of Spain every day; from Mr. Thomas who is now able to register his business online because of initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of Legal Affairs to Ma Procope who does not have to travel into Port of Spain to make an appointment to get a passport; from old man Naz on the Old Road in Arouca who is able to get his medication free and Mrs. Mohammed for whom we are able to get the wheelchair courtesy the Ministry of Health; to young Sasha who is able to get her heart surgery done free to the thousands of scholars benefiting from GATE or the 1,100 plus families who received keys to their new homes during the last fiscal year. [*Desk thumping*] From my good friends Redman and Najah in the barber shop by Kantac, to John and Dell at the watering holes in the constituency of Lopinot/Bon Air West who can now access increased funding through NEDCO to properly capitalize their business; to young Jai whose dream of owning his farm is now made possible through increased financing with the ADB.

It is these people, the silent but hard-working majority who make our economy turn. It is those people who are testimony to the efforts and results of the policies of the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] It is those persons for whom our policies have delivered the quality of life that they deserve.

When the Opposition Leader stands and asks rhetorically perhaps, where the money gone, I want to tell him where the money has gone. I want him to ask for instance, the more than 100,000 persons who have already used the water taxi to go from San Fernando to Port of Spain, ask them where the money gone. [*Desk thumping*] I want him to ask the more than 250,000 students who benefit from GATE, where the money gone. [*Desk thumping*] I want him to ask the thousands who are benefiting from their attendance at the early childhood centres. I want him to ask them where the money gone. [*Desk thumping*] I want him to ask the thousands who benefit from government housing, where the money gone. They will tell him where the money gone. [*Desk thumping*]

I want him to ask all the thousands of persons who get CDAP where the money gone. Hundreds of thousands of persons. [*Desk thumping*] Ask them where the money gone. I want him to ask the thousands who travel daily on the new PTSC buses where the money gone. Ask them where the money gone; they will tell him. I want him to ask all the commuters who travel on the overpass and who get to San Fernando in record time including nearly half the Opposition, where the money gone and they will tell him where the money gone. I want him to ask all



the senior citizens who travel free on the ferry to and from Tobago and when they get to Tobago they could jump on a bus with their free bus pass, where the money gone.

It is one thing to stand in this House and talk and talk empty rhetoric. Ask the thousands of scholars who are studying abroad. Ask the 200-plus scholarship winners announced last week by the Minister of Education where the money gone. Ask our PhD students who for the first time can go straight from their first degree to the PhD level courtesy the Government of Trinidad and Tobago where the money gone. [*Desk thumping*] Ask the thousands who can log on to the government websites every day, whose lives have become so much easier as a result of that, by the infrastructure and investments that have been made in those areas. I want the Leader of the Opposition to ask them where the money gone. [*Desk thumping*]

We could ask a similar question. We could ask him a similar question. Where the money went in the airport? That is just one. [*Desk thumping*] Where the money went in the airport? When we came into Government in 1995 or when we demitted office rather in 1995, the debt at WASA was zero. The debt at WASA had been completely wiped out. When we returned to power in 2001, the debt at WASA was \$4 billion plus. "Where de money gone?" And they say water for all. It was not water for all. Up to now the country is still demanding answers for that. How come you could increase debt from zero in 1995 to four point odd billion in 2001 and then talk about how much water costs and up to now people still waiting for water? Where the money gone? What did the UNC do with that money? I leave that for my colleague, the Minister of Public Utilities to deal with.

After listening to the Leader of the Opposition's response today, it is a response we have heard ad nauseam. I could understand why other Members would not have wanted to stay in the House for that. After listening to the response of the Leader of the Opposition one can come away very easily with the opinion that nothing good can come from this Galilee. There is ample, independent and tangible evidence to prove otherwise, but it does not suit their needs to speak about it.

Imagine the Leader of the Opposition has in his possession the very same reports we have on the global competitive index and chooses to studiously ignore the fact that Trinidad and Tobago is doing much better than we were before. Cherry-picking. Somehow or the other he goes away with the impression that they have research that we do not have. I want to tell him that I have some crack-shot research officers in the Ministry of Information, Agents 15 and 16. I will not name them. Crack-shot and they will produce for us the research we need.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Information has expired.

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. N. Parsanlal:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the Leader of Government Business and my other colleagues for the extension, especially my Leader of Government Business. [*Laughter*] The report very clearly states that Trinidad and Tobago is now ranked 86th. This is an improvement from last year. One of the persons who have commented very favourably on this report is Dr. Rolph Balgobin, a good son of the soil, former principal of the UWI IOB. Dr. Balgobin says that Trinidad and Tobago is actually doing rather well on some dimensions. It is Dr. Balgobin, independent. In fact he sits at times as a temporary Independent Senator. He says financial market sophistication looks almost developed-nation ready. We ranked 34<sup>th</sup> when it came to financial market sophistication. [*Desk thumping*] Higher education and training ranks 63<sup>rd</sup> as the UTT finds traction for its programmes and UWI expands further. Technological readiness and Internet proliferation are also improving, scoring 67<sup>th</sup>. The pièce de résistance, our macroeconomic stability scored a stellar 23<sup>rd</sup> which is an excellent sign for our country.

This is not the PNM saying this. It is not the Minister of Finance saying this. This is not some report produced by the Ministry of Information or a government information service. This is independent data. This is a world recognized body using independent interpretive data saying to the world that Trinidad and Tobago is doing well in these areas. Out of 133, countries Trinidad and Tobago ranks 23<sup>rd</sup> when it comes to our macroeconomic study. When the Minister of Finance talks about the stability of our macroeconomic fundamentals, she is on very solid ground. It is ground supported by the international agencies.

When the Leader of the Opposition speaks about the mismanagement of our economy, I want to ask him which economy he is talking about. It is certainly not the economy that Standard and Poor's and the others have rated. As we say Standard and Poor's, I want to express my real disappointment in the behaviour of Members of the Opposition. If ever there was a case of fast, footloose and out of place, it was this. None of them could stand in this House and claim to have the country's interest at heart. You cannot have the country's interest at heart when you tell an international rating agency which collects its data independently, "you are collecting your data wrong. In fact, you are supposed to rate Trinidad and

Tobago lower.” Treacherous! Treacherous! That is the only word to describe it. Treacherous is the only way and had they been successful in their treachery, this country and its people would have suffered irreparable harm.

**3.15 p.m.**

I continue to believe that my children and their children must be products of an age when the joy and nobility of politics prevent differences of party and philosophy from becoming barriers to cooperation and—mutual respect. That is the legacy I want for my children—a time when adversaries will still see each other as patriots—and I pray the day will come when Members opposite will share my view.

Mr. Speaker, economic cycles, as we are going through, are an inevitable part of life, and, just as night follows day an economic slowdown is a natural characteristic of a strong and vibrant economy. It is cyclical. So, as a responsible administration, our objective for the budget of 2009/2010, was to ensure that we continue to manage the economy in a manner that ensures that such periods of economic slowdown are firstly short lived and perhaps, more importantly, ensures that it has minimal impact on the vulnerable in the society.

We are very aware of the implications of the economic challenges to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, especially those who are most likely to be affected by this slowdown. It is because of that the budget identified a number of measures specifically targeted to ensure that the common man is cushioned as best as possible from the negative effects of the challenging economic period.

During the course of this debate, the Minister of Public Administration, the Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment, all our Ministers, everyone on this side, will articulate Government's policies and how they will impact the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

It is our assurance to this national community that the road is long. There are times when we will make mistakes. None of us in this House is the sole repository of knowledge; none of us in this House is the sole repository of expertise. What we know is that there is no other political organization in this country, present, to come or otherwise, that could take Trinidad and Tobago to the place where we could match strides with the best and brightest in the world. There is none other that can do it and we are confident of that.

Our work as a political party and as government is not to champion those with wealth or power or special connections. Our job is to give a voice to those who are not heard. Our job as politicians is to add a rung to the ladder of opportunity

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to those who call this country home. Our job is to make real the dream of our founding fathers. That is our job as politicians. We in the PNM and in the Government know it is possible and we believe we can do it because, as my old primary school teacher would have reminded me, the heights of great men reached and kept—the heights of great countries reached and kept—were not attained by sudden flight, but they, while their adversaries—their opponents—fought and fight, kept toiling upwards in the night.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

**Dr. Tim Gopeesingh** (*Caroni East*): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon we want warmly to congratulate the Leader of the Opposition on his magnificent and incisive contribution on the Budget 2010 and his incisive analysis, making recommendations for the benefit of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. He has put forward solutions and recommendations that we as the alternate government, when given the opportunity again by the people, would implement.

It has been quite clear, over the last eight years, that this Government has been incapable of implementing anything that they said in their manifesto. The problems in this country are well known to everyone. In their manifesto they want to speak about crime and public utilities and have 20 recommendations. The difference is that when we have 20 recommendations we are able to implement what we say we will do. They are unable to implement what they have been promising since 2001.

They cannot answer the important proposals and recommendations made by the Leader of the Opposition, issues which touch and concern all the people, to improve their quality of life and well-being. This is what the Leader of the Opposition did this afternoon, first of all with his deep, incisive analysis, followed by serious recommendations for improvement.

It is unfortunate that my colleague, the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West came this afternoon, taking example from his political leader, when he called people guttersnipe, and made guttersnipe remarks about a distinguished Caribbean and Western Hemispheric scholar and gentleman, our Leader of the Opposition. I do not think the hon. Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West knows anything about politics. He is a political neophyte and must understand and respect that his core competence is communications. It was the United National Congress that gave him a job in the South West Regional Health Authority first and this is the same person who wants to come and attack a Caribbean scholar, a distinguished gentleman, a man who is well recognized in the Western Hemisphere, a man who

has been given an honorary doctorate in law and one whom the Caribbean and Latin American leaders look to for guidance for maintaining democracy in the Western Hemisphere. It is sad and unfortunate that a neophyte would seek to attack our political leader. I say no more on that.

I want to deal with him right away and dismiss him. He spoke about the Perception Corruption Index and he compares last year's figures of 2008 with 2009 and speaks about an improvement. What the Leader of the Opposition gave to this House was what has happened to all the indices between 2001 and 2009, the eight-year period, and each one has fallen dramatically and has worsened. He did not seek to compare what happened in 2008 and 2009. The Member is trying to say that it has been reduced from 2008 to 2009, but it has worsened significantly over the last years. All the BCI and CPI have worsened under this PNM administration. For him to say this afternoon that the Leader of the Opposition was giving wrong figures is not so. He has to go back and learn to analyze statements in Parliament and not interpret them wrongly. The rest of it was of no substance, but we will deal with whatever little he said later.

As I listened to the Minister of Finance present this budget on Monday last, I want to repeat a quote the Leader of the Opposition made earlier this afternoon, the words of the great American President Abraham Lincoln came to mind. I paraphrase what he said.

I see in the near future a crisis approaching that unnerves me and causes me to tremble for the safety of my country. Tyranny has been enthroned; an era of corruption in high places is the order of the day and these corrupt forces of the country will endeavour to prolong their reign by working upon the prejudices of the people until the wealth is aggregated in a few hands and the country is destroyed.

These words are so applicable, so descriptive of our beloved Trinidad and Tobago today that it is frightening. It is unnerving and it is horrific. I repeat it.

Tyranny has been enthroned; an era of corruption in high places is the order of the day and corrupt forces of this country will endeavour to prolong their reign until the wealth is aggregated in a few hands and the country is destroyed.

What was said there by Abraham Lincoln almost two centuries ago is so apt to Trinidad and Tobago 200 years later under this PNM administration.

Despite the bombardment of developed countries by the international financial crisis that rocked this world in the late 2008, the Government continued to engender misplaced optimism. You said that the international economy will have

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little effect in Trinidad and Tobago, so despite the fact that the economic environment changed dramatically, the worst financial global situation in 60 years, Trinidad and Tobago's economic policy remained fixed. This Government simply does not know how its economic futures are determined. They believe that once the US resumed growth in 2010, Trinidad and Tobago just has a short lag time.

The truth in Trinidad and Tobago is that we experienced a boom which arose from one commodity, which is gas. When we examine the history of our economy in 1980, we had an oil boom which moved the price of oil from \$3 to \$12. From 2005, we experienced a gas boom. We experienced also high commodity prices in 2005 to 2008. Our fiscal packages moved from \$13 billion in 2003 to \$18 billion in 2004 and, in one fell swoop in 2005, it jumped to \$32 billion. In one year, in 2005, the fiscal package dropped from \$18 billion to \$32 billion because the Government was now seeing money flowing for them because of the increase in the price of gas and commodities. So you have plenty, you spend plenty. So their economic thinking has been skewed from day one and this is the type of profligate spending we see from year to year under this Government.

In 2007, a guy by the name of Nouriel Roubini, another one Raghuram Rajan of the IMF and Paul Krugman indicated that there was an impending crisis in 2007. In September 2008, we knew that the economy would be bombarded by shocks. I am sure the Minister of Finance knew that. We were well aware of the stock market crash of 1987, the Asian crash of 1997 and the Argentinian crisis, so we do not have to be told about anything. It is not necessary for us to predict this calamity for us to be aware that we can be bombarded by financial shocks. This Government, the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister have all failed to realize that we are in a vulnerable state. You had one year to adjust and you did not adjust and we will pay the price of this. They seem to hold on to the view that the price of oil and gas will disappear in 2010. It is not going to disappear.

How does this Minister come to the position of a 2 per cent increase in the GDP in 2010? Does she not know that there are major gas cartels and players which have emerged in increasing the supply of gas in Russia, Iran, Qatar, Norway; Norway, which has over \$200 billion stashed away in a fund from their oil and gas, and Russia needing to sell all the gas that they are making so that they can move up financially?

### **3.30 p.m.**

Does she not know that the United States is looking at recovering its own supplies? China and India are utilizing clean coal and the demand for gas is at an all-time low at this moment. The price of gas is undoubtedly going to remain low

for a while and we predict that by 2010, the price of gas will remain the same as it is today or even less. When that optimism that they have comes forward—we do not share that optimism that they have. We would like to share it with them for the benefit of the people of the country, but unfortunately we cannot because of the reality facing us at the moment.

The United States is sitting on a bed of coal and they are actively pursuing renewable energy of wind, solar and wave energy. We are predicting, therefore, that the price of gas will remain as low in 2010 and if this Government does not adjust, we are going to run another massive fiscal deficit. We estimate that the deficit at the end of fiscal 2009, was approximately \$9 billion. We are now seeing another decline in the real GDP. Our income is falling. There is a slow down in the domestic economy and inflationary pressures are easing, but outlook is tenuous.

When we look at the broader indicators that are around us, they show a recession. I am sure the Minister of Finance knows that there is a recession. I want to quote some figures. Consumer spending has contracted by over 7 per cent in the first quarter of 2009; local sales of cement fell by 7 per cent in the first six months of 2009, reflecting on the construction industry. If cement sales have fallen, construction will fall. Construction falls, therefore, cement price demand is decreased. Median house prices fell by 6.9 per cent in the second quarter of 2009. New motor vehicle sales declined by over 40 per cent in the first half of 2009, compared to that similar period in 2008. By the end of March 2009, the unemployment rate had risen to 5 per cent. Close to 10,000 persons received retrenchment notices between April and mid-July 2009.

We have already had one year into recession. Everyone knows that the real GDP fell by minus 1 per cent in the last quarter of 2008 and in the first quarter of 2009, it fell by a further 3 per cent. Global recession is hitting our Caribbean neighbours. Some are seeking IMF financial support. Just right next door to us, we have Jamaica seeking a US \$1.2 billion for a 24-month standby arrangement. When we look at our Caribbean market for export they are not going to be there anymore. Our Caribbean markets for exports will be dwindling; therefore our monopoly will not be secure.

In fiscal 2009, we have close to a \$2 billion deficit. In fiscal 2010, they projected a \$7.7 billion deficit. In two years, \$16.7 billion deficit ran up by this Government in 2009 and fiscal 2010, which will come. Where is this coming from? It is coming from borrowing and Government revenue is adversely affected. Value added is decreasing and investment is also decreasing. We are in the era of negative growth in the medium term.

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You have always boasted on that side, whenever we raise the question of debt to GDP ratio, that you have a low debt to GDP ratio. I want to give the real facts this afternoon. As at September 2009, the domestic debt was \$14.8 billion. The external debt was \$14.3 billion; contingent liabilities and letters of comfort, \$19 billion; and BOLT and leases, \$0.8 billion. Open market operations, that is securities issued by the Central Bank was \$21 billion. The total public debt is approximately \$69.9 billion as at September 2009, which is \$70 billion. The sum of \$70 billion, you can say, is the total debt for this country by September; about 48 per cent of debt to GDP. If we project further budget deficit for fiscal 2011, we will be close to 55 per cent and that is a very serious situation, which I am sure my colleague, the Member for St. Augustine, will deal with when he makes his presentation. We plan to collect \$51 billion in fiscal 2009. We collected \$35 billion, \$16 billion less. Revenue from the past fell by half. Fifty per cent of foreign exchange in our country is from gas and 60 per cent of the revenue comes from energy.

Budget fiscal 2010, is ignorant to the downside risk of the global economy and is another example of inadequate thinking. It sends the wrong message of complacency, when the Prime Minister says loosen the belt, rather than put the strong sobering message of prudence and restraint. The Government continues to fail to address the major socio-economic challenges facing Trinidad and Tobago. This budget is a rehash and reiteration of unfulfilled old and aged year in, year out promises; some from as early as 2001. People have been baffled as to why, in a period when this country has experienced the greatest wealth and prosperity through the windfall of high oil and gas prices, at a time when we are the wealthiest we have ever been in our history, the question now comes: How is it this nation in the Caribbean finds it so hard to keep its promise and faith with its weakest citizens? People have been baffled as to why—*[Interruption]* you read for three and one-half hours—it is that a government which says it is going to achieve developed country status by 2020, continues to prove, by its actions, that the fulfilment of a country and a nation as a people seems to be always within grasp, but forever out of reach?

I want to go on to what the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West was speaking about earlier on about “where de money gone”. I want to talk about “where de money gone”. This afternoon I want to tell you “where de money gone”. I have noticed that, despite the fact that for the past seven years the issue of government corruption has been a burning issue facing this country, but for seven years the Minister of Finance, nor the Prime Minister, nor anyone sought at any time to address the issue of corruption or bring it to a frontline debate, because they are timid to discuss that. Corruption is arguably the single most powerful influence in the economy of any country.



I want to give some theoretical statements about corruption before going into the actual issue. Regression analysis shows that the amount of corruption in a given country is negatively linked to the level of investment and growth, that is, the more the corruption, the less the investment on economic growth. Further, going by the results of regression analysis, if the corruption improves by one standard deviation, the investment rate goes up by more than 4 percentage points and the annual growth rate of the GDP by over half the percentage.

Two International Monetary Fund economists in the Fiscal Affairs Division of the IMF, Vito Tanzi and Hamid Davoodi in their paper on how corruption and public investment hurts growth, noted that in some countries like Trinidad and Tobago, corrupt politicians appear to choose investment projects, not on the basis of the intrinsic economic worth, but in the opportunity for bribes and kickbacks, which these projects present. It comes to the forefront: Brian Lara/Tarouba Stadium; EMBD; UTT; UDeCott; eTecK; Palo Seco Enterprises; NGC; NEC; URP; CEPEP; EFCI; Nidco; Nedco; T&TEC; WASA, Petrotrin and BWIA. These are all the companies which are plundering the Treasury and going into the hands and pockets of the PNM party supporters, PNM groups and PNM people. “Where de money gone”? “De money gone” from all these companies into the hands of PNM friends, party supporters and PNM families. That is where the money has gone to. The money has gone to EMBD; UTT; UDeCott; eTecK, et cetera.

There are five bagmen for people of high positions in this country. There are five bagmen operating in different state enterprises and parastatal agencies. One has had to leave recently. I understand he was sent away on a private jet. [*Interruption*]

**Dr. Moonilal:** He fled.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** But we will speak about that a little more. These two IMF analysts and economists state that corruption increases the number of capital projects undertaken and tends to enlarge their size and complexity. These two IMF economists say corruption increases the number of capital projects. So this is why we see a proliferation of capital projects under the PNM. It tends to enlarge their size and complexity. We see the Waterfront Project; Hyatt Regency; the International Financial Centre and Tarouba Stadium; large size complex and things. [*Interruption*]

**Dr. Moonilal:** “Oh God, give de man ah chance!”

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Go ahead. [*Interruption*]

**Dr. Moonilal:** “Yuh start already?”

**Mr. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for Caroni East for giving way. I am wondering if the Member is saying that as long as the project is large then, by definition, according to him, there is corruption associated with it? Is that what you are saying?

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** I am quoting what the two IMF economists have been saying and they would have done their studies and brought empirical data to substantiate their conclusion. Their conclusion is that corruption increases the number of capital projects, from which this Government seems to take example and it tends to enlarge their size and complexity. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Dumas:** What is the study?

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** I will quote the name of the guys, Vito Tanzi and Hamid Davoodi in their paper on how corruption in public investment hurts growth. Tanzi and Davoodi also argued that corruption adversely affects the rate of return that an economy gets from the existing infrastructure. What can the Minister of Finance tell us today about the rate of return on any infrastructural project which the Government has undertaken and implemented in this country? There are so few. There is one or two that they have undertaken and completed. Can you tell us what sort of rate of return you have gotten from the investment and the massive expenditure you have made? [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Bharath:** Minus 1,000 per cent.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** My colleague is saying minus 1,000 per cent because, obviously, we are still paying on investments we have made and we have no profit.

I went into this academic assessment of institutionalized corruption and the simple economic consequences to show this Parliament and this country how the PNM Government has embarked in every governmental incarnation from Williams, to Chambers, to Manning in the 1990s, to Prime Minister Manning in this decade in institutionalized corruption as a policy. Where has the money gone to? The money has gone to institutionalized corruption. This explains why, despite the IMF since 2004, the IMF was telling this country and your own Central Bank Governor was warning you about this mass spending on mega billion dollar projects that never seem to be completed. You continued on this path and are still continuing on this path. It is plain and simple, because they have embarked on a policy of corruption and defrauding the citizens of this country their just due.

It is this policy of institutionalized corruption, which this Government, under Prime Minister Patrick Manning, has hugged, which has now become part and

parcel enshrined in the PNM budget. What they did not put in their manifesto about the institutionalized corruption was silent. It is silent, so they could have as much as they want, and their manifesto they cannot implement. What they can implement is the institutionalized corruption. That has characterized this country for the past seven years. Everyone speaks about it and it is this policy which has the Government of the day so wantonly divorced from the reality of the citizens of this country. Prime Minister Patrick Manning has spent nearly \$300 million during the last seven years and citizens expect the Government to safeguard its people from the ill of unjust enrichment by public officials and you are one who said that if anybody has done anything wrong you will apprehend them. Let us see.

### **3.45 p.m.**

People expect soundness and they demand soundness in public life. Prevention of the use of public office for gains, the people do not want to see that. They want to see the maintaining of ethical standards in governance with confidence to the integrity in Government.

I want to quote from Bertrand de Speville in a recent report on the fight against corruption in Trinidad and Tobago. The headline was “Some Issues Arising”. He said:

“Corruption seems to affect every aspect of the country's life—public sector, private, business sector.”

This is what Bertrand de Speville spoke about in 2004. He said corruption seems to affect every aspect of political affairs, the justice system, civil society and community organization in Trinidad and Tobago. This is what he quoted in his study.

Prime Minister Manning's Government over the last two years, in addition to the previous six years between 2002—2007, has corruptly spent close to \$50 billion in the parastatal agencies of 36 state enterprises, statutory authorities and 14 special purpose enterprise companies. Your corruption has eroded every aspect of life in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

The social and economic developments have been held back by corruption. The political life is poisoned by corruption. Even the rule of law is undermined by PNM's corruption. The country's reputation is damaged.

The Corruption Perception Index was 32 in 2001, and it went to 79 in 2009. We should have never been in this serious financial economic and social decay with debt increasing by \$18 billion in fiscal 2009/2010. That is as a result of the

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profligate spending and the massive corruption in all these parastatal agencies, special purposes companies, state enterprises and statutory authorities.

This Government is guilty of flagrant, blatant, open nepotism, corruption and lack of integrity and morality in public affairs. Everyone of our citizens is so psychologically shattered—they are bewildered and utterly dismayed by this reign of PNM's terror, supreme dictatorship and organized, sophisticated, widespread institutionalized corruption. Mr. Speaker, we are being sucked disconcertingly into a precarious maelstrom of anomic internal conflicts with instability and insecurity. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Moonilal:** Well said!

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Mr. Speaker, this Government has poisoned this society and corroded every aspect of public life of what we once knew as independent institutions.

I want to go now to the Auditor General's Report of 2008 for the financial year October 31, 2007—September 30, 2008. On page 25, “Loans or credit guaranteed by the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago as at September 30, 2008”. Mr. Speaker, the maximum guaranteed is a total \$17.126 billion; actual contingent liability of \$12.275 billion, a total of \$30 billion. This is 25 out of 104 statutory authorities and state enterprises and 14 special purpose companies. The guarantees and contingent liabilities on these 25 are close to \$30 billion.

In developed countries, people are moving away from state ownership of enterprises. Developed countries have gone into privatization and they have sold out their state enterprises into private hands, because state enterprises are a drain on the Treasury anywhere you go. This Government and Prime Minister Patrick Manning have decided that he wants more and more state enterprises and special purpose companies. There will be two more; the Roads Authority and the Revenue Authority. There will be 16 special purpose companies.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to talk about a few of them. Taurus Services which wrote off a \$22 million loan for a senior government Minister owes \$2.7 billion. For what? Taurus Services is a branch of First Citizens Bank. What do they owe \$2.7 billion for? We want to know! The Government has signed a guarantee for Taurus Services for \$2.7 billion; \$373 million for PTSC for buses. Who brought these buses into Trinidad? Who was the middleman? Who was the man who brought the buses and they found out that the air-conditioning units were not there? Who brought the bus that split into two on the highway? And you want to boast that you have signed a guarantee for \$373 million! One of the bagmen brought the buses. Everybody knows that. [*Interruption*] I do not want to know

who travels on the buses. Do you want to know where the money gone? The money went into the hands of PNM friends. [*Desk thumping*] There is where the money gone; the First Citizens Bank.

The Government has signed a guarantee for First Citizens Holding of \$515 million. The First Citizens Bank has been removed from the Freedom of Information Act. You cannot get any information from First Citizens Bank. They are now managing all CMMB and Clico accounts, and the Government has signed a guarantee for them for \$500 million. So, what are they going to pay the people with? They said that they are going to pay the \$5 billion for Clico. The Government signed a guarantee for them for half a billion dollars, but where are they getting the money from to pay the people from Clico? This is the reality.

Mr. Speaker, \$1.39 billion guarantee was signed for T&TEC. Was there a statement in this House about a questionable \$600 million for the Street Lighting Programme and questions were asked about it? Who is the person involved in bringing down the street lights into Trinidad and Tobago and the companies involved? The son of a senior public official was obviously involved in that street lighting programme. The country knows it. Nobody has to tell them who it is. I think I have the file here. This is the file. [*File in hand*] I do not have enough time to go into the information.

The name of the person was called. He has left this country. He has resigned as the chairman of the board of T&TEC. So, this Government has signed a guarantee of \$1.3 billion for T&TEC with a questionable \$600 million in contract for the Street Lighting Programme. This is the file. This is the file that was spoken about publicly, and this is the chairman of the authority that I know is operating now from outside Trinidad and Tobago. He has resigned. We want to know which senior official has been in conspiracy with him to defraud the people of Trinidad and Tobago of that amount of money. Where did the money go? The money went to the people who were managing T&TEC; friends and senior officials of this country. There is where the money gone.

Trinidad and Tobago signed a guarantee of \$2.5 billion to the Housing Development Corporation. The Housing Development Corporation is constructing homes where there is unquestionable—Mr. Speaker, I will not use those words—massive discrimination in the allocation of homes against one sector of the society, and a proliferation of corrupt deals with contractors. This Government has stood guarantee for \$2.5 billion for HDC.

There are many more in this Auditor General's Report. Tidco, \$887 million; the Port Authority, \$911 million; the Airports Authority, \$1.43 billion—they are

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talking about a \$1.2 billion at the airport and they have signed a guarantee for the Airports Authority of \$1.43 billion. What the Airports Authority wants \$1.43 billion for? What are they doing? The Airports Authority is supposed to be generating revenue for Trinidad and Tobago and they are giving the Airports Authority \$1.43 billion. It is here in the Auditor General's Report. It is a shame and disgrace! [*Desk thumping*] This is what state enterprises have come to.

The Prime Minister should not sit there and feel comfortable when you have to sign guarantees of \$17 billion and actual contingent liabilities of nearly \$13 billion for state enterprises which are losing money. How can you feel comfortable about that?

With respect to MTS, \$179 million; the Agricultural Development Bank, \$62 million; and WASA, \$3.6 billion. When the hon. Minister of Public Utilities gets up to speak, we hope he will be able to tell this country why the Government has to sign a guarantee of \$3.6 billion for WASA.

So, these are some of the state enterprises and statutory boards guarantees totalling \$17.126 billion. Letters of comfort have been issued by the Government for Nipdec, \$567 million—Calder Hart.

They have signed another letter of comfort of \$1 billion for WASA. So, in addition to the \$3.63 billion, there is another \$1 billion. That is \$4.63 billion for WASA. Where the money gone? There is where the money gone, and our political leader said this morning that it cost nearly half a billion dollars for them to make a transformation to put water in one household.

There are letters of comfort for HDC again, \$450 million. So, HDC had \$2.1 billion and now another \$450 million which is \$2.55 billion.

BWIA, \$178 million. They are still signing guarantee for BWIA when BWIA was supposed to be restructured and divested in 2007. Mr. Speaker, I will return to BWIA.

With respect to UDeCott, they have signed a guarantee for \$1.22 billion. The entire country, the entire Caribbean and the rest of the world know that UDeCott is one of the most corrupted agencies in Trinidad and Tobago. The Prime Minister is still saying that the chairman of UDeCott has done a good job. He has congratulated the chairman. His name should have been removed from UDeCott long ago. [*Desk thumping*] He has no moral authority to be looking after 74 projects in this country totalling close to \$30 billion. You have Mr. Calder Hart still managing these companies throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

Nidco has \$75 million in letters of comfort. So, they have a total of \$5.47 billion. So, approximately \$23 billion in guarantees and contingent liabilities are owed to this Government. Has this Government ever told this country about these guarantees? You never heard about them. They are hidden. All these guarantees and contingent liabilities are hidden. You have to search in the Auditor General's Report to get that information, but this country must be told where the money is going.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Squandermania!

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Massive Squandermania! Nipdec, \$567 million. Mr. Speaker, BWIA cost this country \$1.5 billion in the restructuring to bring it to Caribbean Airlines. What restructuring has been done with BWIA? Is it putting a change on the tail of the aircraft to a bird—

**Mr. Manning:** No, Sir.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:**—and firing hundreds from BWIA? Is that the restructuring? We want answers. Do you know what is a shame and disgrace? Caribbean Airlines comes under the Ministry of Works and Transport and they are supposed to bring a yearly audited account and lay it in Parliament, and for two years there has been no account as to what they have said is the restructured Caribbean Airlines.

**4.00 p.m.**

Then they want to offer the minority shareholders 22 cents per share and the same Caribbean Airlines wants to buy out a losing Air Jamaica. When we made noise that we understand that Caribbean Airlines was going to buy out Air Jamaica, I do not know what caused them to retract, but obviously here is a company losing over \$300 million and you want to go and take over Air Jamaica.

**Mr. Manning:** Who said that?

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** What is it?

**Mr. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, you know, I do not mind the hon. Member for Caroni East making a contribution. This is a Parliament, he is free to speak, but deliberate falsehoods should form no part of the conduct of the business of the House. Who said that we are going to take over Air Jamaica? Who said that? Nobody said anything like that, and in fact, no proposal was made to take over Air Jamaica. Look at the thing carefully. If you do not know ask us, we will tell you what the facts are.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Mr. Speaker, this was on the Business Weekly of one of the newspapers. I do not have it here with me but I will bring it and give it to the

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Prime Minister. There was contemplation and Caribbean Airlines went to do an assessment of Air Jamaica and there was another airline that wanted to take it over as well. The other airline took over Air Jamaica in the end. *[Interruption]* Mr. Prime Minister, you would have your time to respond. It is the same BWIA that this Government, under Prime Minister Patrick Manning, in 1991 to 1995, sold out 25 per cent of shares of BWIA to Air Dakar for \$10 million. You could remember that?

So, where this money gone? It is jumping up; people are losing their money in this country. Now, who are the major players in Caribbean Airlines? Everybody knows the major players, it is not for me to call any names here this afternoon, but the same major players are with WASA and Clico. This Government is fostering an interlocking type of directorship in all these things and it is the same two players in all of this: players who do work for the Government and players who are helping them to build their Vision 2020. Everybody knows who these players are, and that is where the money is going. This country's money is being manipulated in the hands of a few, and allowed to continue by this Government under Prime Minister Patrick Manning.

I think hon. Prime Minister Patrick Manning should feel very guilty about what is happening in this country. You are supposed to bring an annual report to Parliament, not one has come to Parliament. Another \$50 billion in mega blitz; from new roads to stadia—I do not know where the roads are—to schools and even the distribution of farming lands. The tentacles of these special purpose enterprise companies, now numbering 14, reach deep into the country's coffers, with serious questionable returns to show for their intrusion.

Has the Minister of Finance said anything about these expenditures in her budget speech? Not at all. They were conspicuously absent. The most visible has been the UDeCott, specifically set up to bypass the Central Tenders Board, by Prime Minister Patrick Manning. He was not comfortable with the Central Tenders Board, which had checks and balances; he could not accept the checks and balances and he made the statement that the bureaucracy is hindering progress and implementation, but he has moved it from the Central Tenders Board and put it to the special purpose enterprises companies.

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

*Motion made,* That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. *[Dr. R. Moonilal]*

*Question put and agreed to.*



**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the Members because this is one of the rare opportunities I get with the extension of my time, because it is so customary that my time is always curtailed, but I think it is one of your nice magnanimous gestures. Do not look so angry, Prime Minister. You are looking very angry.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** He said no.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** You said no? You did not want me to speak?

**Mr. Manning:** No.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** All right. I find you are getting angry a little too easily. Sit, relax and get back your little poise and so on.

**Mr. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, it is quite clear that my distinguished friend from Caroni East has not been reading the polls, because had he been looking at them he would certainly have come to an entirely different conclusion. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** I am gratified to know that the Prime Minister is very calm in the midst of all this onslaught. I was making the point that you tried to get away from the bureaucracy in setting up these special purpose companies, but they have proven to be disastrous to you and they have all proliferated under you and for which there are serious questionable practices.

The Port of Spain Waterfront project was originally estimated to cost \$2.2 billion and is now costing \$3.4 billion; \$1.2 billion more. We came into this Parliament and had to vote for a semi-annual expenditure item of a certain amount of money for 17 years. When you calculate that amount of money for the year, multiplied by 17, it came up to \$3.4 billion. So, that waterfront project is \$3.4 billion.

What about the Government Campus Plaza? The Brian Lara Tarouba Stadium? Now, \$700 million spent and the Minister is unable to say where they have reached, what they spent it for and when is the completion date.

**Mr. Manning:** Who said that? There you go again.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Your Minister behind you; he said so. This must be considered a shame and disgrace.

**Dr. Moonilal:** It is a shame! He said that.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** It is a shame and disgrace and you have insulted the people and should really apologize for that. You have a multi-million dollar project and you do not know how far you have reached, where you are going and when you are going to complete, and then you associate the name Brian Lara.

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This morning the Opposition Leader asked that you consider the removal of one of our world's citizens, the distinguished Brian Lara's name from that, because I am sure he feels in his own heart when his name is associated with that and so much corruption around that, he would not want to have his name associated with it.

I go on to Nidco. Nidco was registered as a liability company on January 11, 2005. It is providing procurement project and contract management services. Nidco is now overseeing a plan, \$25 billion road network, which we understand would see \$12 billion worth of Government financing pumped into that project, expected to last eight years. It is from one of your documents. Nidco has been charged with the rapid rail project, originally budgeted at \$20 billion. The Opposition Leader asked this morning; we want to hear about the rapid rail project and what has been the feasibility study for that rapid rail project. What about the \$250 million water taxi project?

Nidco was operating without a board for two years. These water taxis were bought during the time when Nidco did not have a board. We do not know who purchased these water taxis, under what tender, from which company, when were they purchased, how were they purchased. [*Interruption*] No, what were the prices? You must come and tell the people of this country openly who were the purchasers, the tenderers and who got it.

Mr. Speaker, we understand that one of the bagmen said he did not make an easier \$10 million in his life, as he made with the purchase of these water taxis. Prove me wrong. [*Crosstalk*] Well, we saw the \$321 million Uriah Butler exchange, but what about the proposed \$125 million Mamoral dam? This Government had said "dam the damn Mamoral dam". [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*]

In 2008, the Education Facilities Company Limited expended \$508 million in construction projects. They spent \$272 million in 2006/2007; they said for school repairs and refurbishment. We heard from the Minister of Education of the completion of secondary schools. We have been asking for two to three years now, where are these secondary schools completed? They cannot tell us where the schools are. Have they been occupied? Have teachers been put there? Have students been put there? But for years we have been hearing about the completion of secondary schools. We cannot see them; we cannot find them. We have to come and say that they in Mars; probably they constructed them in Mars.

This is a Government that said they want to build 600 early childhood education centres by 2012. At one time they said that they were going to build 50.

In seven years they built 17 early childhood education centres. Now, they want to build 50; they have gone and borrowed money from the Inter American Development Bank (IADB); \$3 million for each one of these early childhood education centres. So, imagine this country had so much money. They had money to build all the schools that you needed but you now have to go to the IADB to borrow \$150 million to build early childhood education centres. Grandiose ideas, 600 early childhood centres by 2012 and you built 17 in seven years.

Evolving TecKnologies (eTeck) formed in June 2003—the Prime Minister's friends—is led by Khalid Hassanali, its President, who reports to its Chairman, Ken Julien. They are now constructing a nearly \$1 billion complex at Wallerfield, whose contractor is China Jiangsu. eTeck has also renovated Hilton at the cost of \$300 million plus. eTeck is an independent entity formed via Cabinet proposal to divest the assets of PIDCOTT from Tidco. It owns and manages various real estate holdings, including 17 industrial parks across the country. VHL Tobago Golf and Spa Resort, formerly Hilton Tobago, which Government purchased, as I understand, at \$214 million.

Mr. Speaker, what is the Government doing in hotel business? You spend \$300 million in Hilton in Port of Spain; \$214 million for VHL Tobago Hilton in Tobago; you build the Hyatt Regency Hotel, it is under the full ownership of the Government. This is the new business of Government, to be in the hotel business?

**Mr. Manning:** The role of the State.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** The role of the State? Generally around the world when we speak about this Government is cock-eyed—

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** “Coki-eye”.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Mr. Panday spoke about it this morning and we say it is "coki-eye". This Government spending \$3 billion down on the waterfront, \$300 million in Hilton, another \$250 billion in hotels in Tobago; nearly \$3.5 billion in hotels. What is the point of doing it? What you expect as the return? What is the return on your investment?

You put \$3.5 billion in hotels. Is it that they are investing in hotels just for two meetings? The CHOGM and the Summit of the Americas? For two meetings for the year you want hotel rooms? The country cannot understand the rationale for having these hotels and these investments in hotels.

EMBD, you know what that is? Estate Management Business Development Company. They spent \$1.2 billion in developing former Caroni lands for plots.

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They never tendered on any sort of contract; four people made the decisions in EMBD, headed by the chairman and the other three just went along with the chairman in making these decisions. Contracts were given for \$30 billion, \$60 billion, \$70 billion, et cetera for development of these plots throughout Trinidad and Tobago; that is a shame.

You know what has happened? There is so much alleged corruption with EMBD, that the chairman of EMBD has left this country. Why has he left this country? We understand he was put on a private aircraft and he was sent out, because the Integrity Commission, which is collapsed, has a file on this. This is a deliberate attempt by this Government to collapse the Integrity Commission in its own way.

I heard the hon. Prime Minister speaking about the whole Integrity Commission issue having to be looked at again, and you remember is this same Government that came to this House—this is the file on the EMBD; this is the file that went to the Integrity Commission on Mr. Rao. The file is here for anybody to see. We wrote the Chairman of the Integrity Commission, the Director of Public Prosecutions and the police commissioner on EMBD and somebody ran as a result of that.

**4.15 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, UDeCott's involvement in another project again. UDeCott has been involved in the North and South Academies of Performing Arts. That budget has climbed from the initial budget of \$216 million to \$864 million as at December 2008. [*Interruption*] These are the answers to questions that we asked in Parliament and this is one of the answers that came out of UDeCott. The Academies for the Performing Arts budget was originally \$2,864 million and now it is projected to cost \$1.2 billion—two centres.

**Mr. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, just for the record, both of the Academies for the Performing Arts Centres were priced at US \$100 million; US \$60 million for the one in North Trinidad and US \$40 million for the one in South Trinidad. Those are the figures.

**Mr. Imbert:** Your figures are all wrong.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Hon. Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker, through you, this was an answer to a question, that is why I brought it here. I would not file it here, but it is in this pile of documents that I have brought and I will try—

**Hon. Member:** Pull it out.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** I do not have the time to pull that now. [*Crosstalk*] It was said, Mr. Speaker, and I want to quote:

“These figures do not include cost for the installation of fixtures and fittings”—for both academies—“and cost of utilities and landscaping. These additional costs will push the project cost from \$260 million to \$1.2 billion for both academies.”

This is UDeCott.

So, Mr. Speaker, when corruption is king there is no accountability of leadership and no trust in authority. Who trusts anyone in authority in this country? Society devolves to the basic instincts of getting what you can, when you can, because you do not believe anything better will ever come along and when the only horizon is tomorrow. How can you care about the kind of nation you are building for your children and your grandchildren? How can you call on your government to address what ails society and build stronger institutions? Sadly, that is the reality of our country and how our citizens think and behave today, because in Trinidad and Tobago corruption is king.

All we in the Opposition wanted, and indeed the rest of the country, was a budget that was a solid balanced plan that allowed us to make real sustainable progress and provided the revenue necessary to fund our priorities. Instead, what we have heard in this budget is really underwhelming. The budget smacks of short-term political opportunism instead of long-term solutions for the country's problems. It gives a short end of the stick to a country in serious social, economic and political trouble. Its policies are of half hearted and inadequate responses to an immediate and urgent financial crisis. This is a budget that does not protect the vulnerable; it does not protect the jobs of today and it does not create the jobs that we need for tomorrow. There is nothing in this budget to obtain our support. The people are crying out for social justice and integrity, equality and probity from this Government, but these are remarkably just dreams of our people.

This Government must be brought to account for this illicit waste of the nation's resources through corruption. The Opposition and the people have caused this Government to back away from reducing the number of joint select committees from three to two. You wanted two joint select committees, you backed away. The Opposition pushed you into that and you had to back away from two and go back to three. [*Desk thumping*] You backed away from Prime Minister Patrick Manning's attempt to buy a private jet costing \$400 million; you had to back away from the attempt to have real public scrutiny of UDeCott; you

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wanted a Joint Select Committee of Parliament and you were pushed by the people of Trinidad and Tobago and by the Opposition and you were forced, screaming and cuffing; you had to appoint the Uff Commission of Enquiry.

**Hon. Member:** Screaming and kicking.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Screaming and kicking.

**Dr. Moonilal:** And cuffing too.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Cuffing too. [*Laughter*] What is worse, they tried to appoint one of their friends. They wanted one of their friends to head the commission of enquiry. [*Crosstalk*] It is not nice to call people's name. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** I am sure you have always told me it is a nice thing to be very decent in Parliament and do not call—

**Dr. Moonilal:** Who said that?

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** The Speaker. I listen to the Speaker although he sent me to the Privileges Committee. [*Laughter*]

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** That was an aside thing?

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Yes. So, Mr. Speaker, three areas they had to back away from because the United National Congress sent them back.

I want to go into the health aspect with whatever little time I have. [*Interruption*] This is the report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Operation and Delivery of Public Health Care Services in Trinidad and Tobago. This commission of enquiry took three years to come to fruition and to send recommendations and bring out their report. Up to today this commission of enquiry report is not public. No members of the public have any copies of this commission of enquiry report.

**Hon. Member:** But you have one.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** But I have one because it was laid in Parliament. This report made serious recommendations—half of them were not even here in Parliament. They were not even here in Parliament that time. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** When the Prime Minister came and said to this country, the findings of this report of the commission of enquiry are going to be sent to the Integrity Commission, the Commissioner of Police and the Director of Public

Prosecutions—because they found that there was malfeasance and misconduct in the conduct of officials in the health sector—up to today, two years and four months later, this country has heard nothing about what has happened to those issues of malfeasance and misconduct in the health sector. That happened almost five years ago and the report was brought out two years and four months ago. Where is it? Perhaps when the Prime Minister gets up to speak he can say what has happened.

Mr. Speaker, it does not take any rocket scientist to tell you in this country what is wrong with the health sector. It is all here! It is all here in the Gladys Gafoor Commission of Enquiry report, the summary of the findings:

- Inefficient and ineffective management;
- problems related to the health sector reform programme;
- poor quality service; and
- outdated legislation.

Under inefficient and ineffective management, there are at least 10 areas about problems related to the Health Sector Reform Programme. Another 11 areas about poor quality service. Several factors have contributed to the poor quality of health care, examples as follows: the long-standing shortage of nurses, specialists, medical officers, dietitians and nutritionists is a major challenge. While hypertension is the most prevalent medical condition, there has been no systematic attempt to deal with the problem. Heart disease is the leading cause of death but there is no adherence to internationally recognized standards of care and it goes on.

Cancer cases have been increasing over the years yet there is ad hoc unregulated screening or none at all. It goes on and on. All the findings are there. More than 100 findings in this commission of enquiry and the recommendations are there for improvement. The recommendations are also there, so if a Minister is really worth his or her salt—and we have had three Ministers of Health under Prime Minister Patrick Manning’s regime; all have failed this country! All a good Minister of Health has to do is to look at the recommendations from this report and begin to implement them. [*Interruption*] They are there! [*Desk thumping*]

Common problems are inclusive, acute shortage of human resource; inadequate infrastructure; a shortage of equipment, drugs and other supplies; a need for more education and training; a need to review the policies and legislation governing key areas; a greater emphasis is needed in areas of quality; a need for improved maternal and child health; a need for improvement in the health

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services; a need to improve the ambulance service, pharmaceutical services, national blood supply, public health inspectors and insect vector division, dental service, mental health service, differently-abled, medical institutions, Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, cancer care and the elderly. It is all there. All there, just to implement, but the Prime Minister has not even sought to make this document public because he is afraid that if it goes out publicly what the people in this country already have been speaking about—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Mr. Manning:** Was the document laid in the House?

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** It was laid in the House. Where are the copies? The general public cannot have copies of this.

Mr. Speaker, I have brought three folders of what people have been complaining about in this health sector. One, Health Sector General Articles, Children's problems—I just want to quote one or two of what people have been saying about the health sector. This is what the people have been saying. This is just one of the files: “Please fix health care system”; “Painful wait for surgery”.

**Mr. Manning:** “Who write that”?

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Yeah, “who write that”? Dian Nanansingh from Mayaro and hear what she had to say:

“The Honourable Minister of Health, Mr. Jerry Narace.

Sir, it is with sheer disgust and frustration with the health system in this country that I wish to draw your attention to the lack of basic health care at the San Fernando General Hospital.”

It went on:

“My 22-year-old son has cerebral palsy and is both mentally and physically challenged, also wheel-chair bound. That means that he can neither walk nor talk and has the mind of a child.

Now I’m faced with yet another challenge—to obtain a prescription for my son who is also epileptic and dependent on his medication. My next appointment is now due in another six months by which time I hope that clinic will resume.

How can anyone survive on so little with the cost of living on the rise? Madam Minister, I kindly ask that you also consider cerebral palsy children...”



They were appealing to the Ministry of social services and for the Minister of Finance to get his help.

“Please let us not only hear of what you intend to do, we want to see implementation of your plans.”

“Painful wait for surgery

My 78-year-old mother fell and broke her leg on May 31. She was taken to the Mt. Hope Hospital. Two weeks later she is lying on a bed in pain, awaiting the very elusive surgery which has already been postponed once and not because she is in bad shape or any such medical problem.

Customer services seem quite helpless, no one seems to care. Who can we turn to? How long must an old lady with a broken bone supposed to wait. Is this part of the great vision 20/20, that our elderly must take the jamming while the powers that be couldn't care less?

If we were rich, I guess we could have had her bone repaired privately or oh yes, we could have flown her to Cuba.”

Express Editorial: “Trust and the health sector”. They speak about the Gafoor Commission of Enquiry and all that. “Help, headache ruining my life”. Here is what a young one said, S. De Coteau from *Newsday*, Friday, August 28, 2009:

“THE EDITOR: I am 19 years old and in 2006 I was stabbed in my head in an attempted robbery.

When I went to the hospital, I was simply given some iron tablets, a few stitches and sent on my way. No one ever suggested a CT scan or MRI to be done on my head. Since then I have had severe headaches daily. Many times I went to the hospital and told them about this and all they gave me were pain killers and sent me home but they didn't work...haven't seen a neurosurgeon.

I have just finished A levels and have plans of attending UWI but with concerns about my academic performance because of the intense pain I have daily. After waiting so long and suffering so much, I finally got another call informing me that my new appointment date is in October, 2010.

I cannot continue like this much longer. I don't have money to seek help at a private health facility so what am I to do now? My life is hanging in the balance and I don't know what to do or where to turn. This is Trinidad and this is what poor citizens have to face. If we survive, we are lucky! Mr. Narace I am appealing to you to please look into my case.”

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Mr. Speaker, “Baby Justin still suffers”, Lara Pickford-Gordon writes in the *Newsday*, Friday, February 27, 2009. “NCRHA probing death of baby”; *Express*, Wednesday, August 26, 2009. This is about 17-month-old Kevin Brown who died at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex:

“The child reportedly died three days after undergoing open heart surgery at the hospital.”

“Burnt baby Faith to have skin graft”. “Baby Joshua laid to rest”. They are all here!

“Calls for Narace to resign

BROKENHEARTED Trinidadians are saddened by the death of ten-month-old Marissa Ramlal and are calling on Health Minister Jerry Narace to resign.”

Because he offered \$60,000 for a patient who needed \$1.2 million to correct biliary atresia. “Mom blames Gov’t, minister for baby Maurisa’s death”. It goes on:

“Mom, baby die before Divali.

When a Hindu couple found out their baby was due to be born on Divali day, they could not be happier.

But in a cruel twist of fate”—that is close to Dr. Moonilal's constituency — “the 28-year-old mother and her unborn baby did not live to see the lights of Divali.

Meera Kissoon, 28, went into induced labour at the San Fernando General Hospital on Saturday.

The baby never made it out of the womb alive. Meera then slipped into a coma and died...”

This is the type of health care we have in Trinidad and Tobago.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the sitting of the House is suspended for tea and will be resumed at 5.00 p.m., after which Dr. Gopeesingh, the Member for Caroni East has four minutes.

**4.30 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**5.00 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Madam Deputy Speaker, you look very professorial and regal. [*Desk thumping*] In the four minutes that I have left to complete my

contribution, there are a few things I want to say. Many people consider this as a 1 per cent budget with a 1 per cent statement on health. To exemplify what I am saying, this budget has eight paragraphs on health, and eight paragraphs are the same thing that have been repeated from 2001 to 2008 and they are as follows: accessible health care; healthy lifestyle; HIV/AIDS; primary health care facilities; Point Fortin, Arima, Sangre Grande and Scarborough hospitals; the National Oncology Project; National Health Information System; and National Health Insurance System.

Madam Deputy Speaker, these are the same things that are being repeated from year to year. It is a rehash, a reiteration of the same promises that they want to make, from 2001. The Point Fortin Hospital, the Scarborough Hospital, the Burns Centre, the ICU Unit at the San Fernando General Hospital and the Mental Health Plan, all these have been promised from year to year since 2001. Seven years later, nothing has been implemented. The Scarborough Hospital is still floundering and most likely they feel that the completion will be next year. They said that the National Oncology Centre will be finished by 2011 and that was supposed to have started in 2001. The Mental Health Plan should have been introduced.

Madam Deputy Speaker, from the UNC's perspective, what we would do as an alternative government—all the recommendations here on the Gafoor Commission of Enquiry are quite relevant, quite pertinent despite the fact that it is two years ago—we would analyze the primary health sector, the secondary health care sector, the tertiary health care sector. We would look at infrastructure and human resource development, and we would make sure that there is accountability and transparency in everything that we do. I would like to support all the recommendations of the Gafoor Commission of Enquiry, and indicate that the United National Congress would have implemented many of these recommendations in our pursuit for good health care.

So in closing, in conclusion, I wish to reiterate that this is a budget that we on this side cannot support under any circumstance, for it is one that enshrines corruption as a policy and betrays the trust of the people. I want to leave the wider public with these words of advice. If Trinidadians and Tobagonians wish to preserve a democracy in this country, then the first step is to recognize the enemy. The enemy is crime; the enemy is overspending; the enemy is corruption; the enemy is non-transparency and lack of accountability in public state enterprises; the enemy is dictatorship; the enemy is defined as any organization or person, including the Government, which is attacking our principles of democracy and

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freedom, and we must be united to take a stand against this enemy and will continue to chant that. And the chant is: "Waste mismanagement and corruption are running the land; crooked politicians betray the workingman, pocketing the profits and treating us like sheep; and we are tired of hearing promises we know they will never keep."

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

**The Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development (Hon. Rennie Dumas):** Madam Deputy Speaker, the enemy of the people of Trinidad and Tobago sits across from this honourable Government. [*Desk thumping*] It is made up of people who produced no coherent policy, whose pathway to the future cannot be followed, is not determined, and presents no institution which carries forward the aspirations of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in this honourable House today, to contribute to the 2009/2010 budget debate. Budget time provides an opportunity for Government to report on the stewardship of the resources approved by Parliament and allocated to the various government programmes. It is also an occasion to report on the state of the national economy, government finances, and progress the Government has made towards achieving the key national goals identified in our Vision 2020 National Strategic Plan, identified as having at its fundamental aim, improving the quality of life of our citizens in Trinidad and Tobago.

Allow me, Madam Deputy Speaker, to begin by placing on record my highest appreciation to my distinguished colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance, Mrs. Karen Nunez-Tesheira, [*Desk thumping*] for so ably presenting the country with a comprehensive statement of economic and development policy and its derivative, the Trinidad and Tobago budget for 2010, on behalf of the Patrick Manning administration earlier this week.

To every listener, it was evident from her presentation, that at the core of the Government's economic and development endeavour and management of our country's public finances, is the interest of our citizens. All this effort as identified in detail in the presentation, is premised on Vision 2020 development plot for our "pillar of nurturing a caring society", which ultimately aims at the total well-being of our people, illustrated by the apt theme, 'Strengthening Efficiency, Addressing the Challenges'—Vision 2020.

Fiscal 2008/2009, in hindsight has proved, by the challenges disposed, to be a period of opportunity, a period for innovation and creativity, and a period for increasingly pushing forward the development of the new Trinidad and Tobago. Indeed, the challenges included the global financial crisis which impacted the

financial markets of the developed world and quickly spread to other countries. Trinidad and Tobago, as part of the global realism of mankind—and it is here that we have to play our part. But we want to note that despite these challenges, the economy grew by an overall 2.3 per cent as a whole in 2008, and in fact, it is expected that that growth path, though temporarily suspended, is going to be resumed with the expectations and the projections that the Minister has laid before us in the proposals, that she has laid in budget 2010.

We have seen some of the effects of the financial crisis. For example, the discussion of the impact on finance, on FDIs, on trade and export demands, on tourism receipts and certainly on remittances. More particularly, the economy of Trinidad and Tobago was directly affected by the rapid fallout in global commodity prices, energy pricing, decline in oil prices, decline in taxation revenues, and certainly, the inflation in the first quarter of the fiscal 2008/2009.

Despite all of this, the situation was met by quick and decisive action by the Government. Such actions involved among other measures, a review of the budget for fiscal 2008/2009, as well as a closer examination and prioritization of fiscal and ongoing infrastructural programmes and projects. Noteworthy among these, was the Government's action in treating with the threat posed by the collapse of Clico and other issues. We are certainly in a position despite the statements of the last two speakers opposite, one, the best way we can describe it, as a failed leader of a failed institution and the other, a gentleman who somehow cannot put his information together within a coherence—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Coherent.

**Hon. R. Dumas:** You cannot tell me how to speak, Sir—or certainly with no right attitude.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I wonder at the end of the contributions that I heard, whether these two gentlemen in fact represented people, continue to ask people to represent them, and that the people who they are asking to represent them are of the country of Trinidad and Tobago. Because what we heard is—you have a country whose leadership should be working hard to bring the country together, to face a shift in tides in the rest of the world's economy and we seem to have only attacks on the leadership, attacks on institution, attacks on the confidence of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, with absolutely no mitigating provisions and proposals for assisting the people in this development.

The statistics tell us—and we must find means of measurement—even when they take excursions into research in the statistics, they come back to some

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irrefutable information, irrefutable data that says—for example, Trinidad and Tobago had a growth of 2.3 per cent in 2008. You had a decline of 1 per cent in the last quarter of 2008 and that continued into the first quarter of 2009. But if you compare that experience with what is happening in the rest of the world, then certainly, we have to conclude that something right is happening in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, they purport to speak on behalf of the working people. Unemployment in Trinidad and Tobago continues to be less than 5 per cent, less full employment in any other measure. Something has to be happening right in the governance of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] The inflation rate is 5 per cent. I remember these same people saying when the inflation rate was different, that it was the fault and the responsibility of the Government. If inflation has fallen, then certainly, it has to be something right is happening in the governance of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, sometimes for verification, I have seen them go on to some obscure writers who they will want to present—I thought that one would want to honour one's classroom, or one's area of study, or one's area of activity with honourable distinguished writers, distinguished researchers, distinguished scholars, but these men are dragging all sorts of people with all sorts of scripts, and try to put that as expert opinion in the Chamber of the House of Representatives.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is Ernest & Young—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** Ernst.

**Hon. R. Dumas:** Ernst. Well, I am not a German—"Focus on Trinidad and Tobago Budget 2010." You know, in the executive overview, they have pointed out—and I do not think you can doubt that they are a reputable firm—that the balance sheet of the country remains strong.

"...the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund stands at US \$2.9 billion, import cover at US \$8.6 billion remains at 11 months and public sector debt is projected at 39 per cent of GDP...unemployment although growing, remains at historical lows."

Madam Deputy Speaker, something has to be right in the governance of Trinidad and Tobago.

**5.15 p.m.**

They then go on to speak to the issue of some of the proposals of the Government. It speaks to targeted spending being earmarked for affordable housing, infrastructure spending and construction incentives that speak to private

sector confidence and increased private sector spending. These are exemplary aspirations and achievements of any government. Certainly, when the reputation of a firm like this is put behind an analysis that says this, then certainly something has to be right in the governance of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

But more than that, the commentators go on to point to the fact that the Point Lisas model of development has given way and given credence to the fact that the Government has a leadership and implementation capacity and history that would have built the Point Lisas project, therefore, the development of LNG in the State, gives credence to the fact that this is a government that has the capacity for macro level programme management in a country like this.

They have asked, as we have agreed, that this capacity could be put behind the development of new industry and the expenditure and management of new investment in agriculture, in housing, in the construction sector, et cetera. That speaks to confidence in the future of this country, once it is managed by this leadership team; therefore, something is right in the confidence that the people have placed in us.

The discussion goes on. Somebody over there, using another set of spurious projections and analysis that says what is happening with this question of diversification. They are saying, yes people are urging you to move away from gas and gas based activity, but then it points out that if you look at the lobby going on internationally, gas continues to be a credible alternative source of financing, because the expectation is that whatever is happening in the rest of the world would push up the need for gas and, therefore, push the prices for gas upwards. Therefore, with confidence, the Government can depend on gas as a source of financing of its expenditure. That is there.

I think that the analyses of the Opposition should be abandoned and they should take some classes from the PNM. [*Desk thumping*]

I think the greatest insult to the business sector of Trinidad and Tobago, came from the analysis of the Leader of the Opposition, who claims to have met with them and claimed to be now representing them to the Government. By any definition, the Trinidad and Tobago private sector remains the most entrepreneurial and innovative in the Caribbean region; they have demonstrated that. Those features are what we depend on in terms of working with the State in carrying Trinidad and Tobago forward. I think when we seek to treat with the private sector and make representation, we should give them the credit that is due to them.

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Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to take the liberty of you giving me a minute to extend on my own behalf and that of my family and the families of the people of Tobago East, condolences to former President Robinson and his family on the death of his dear wife, Mrs. Patricia Robinson. Tobago East extends condolences and acknowledges that a debt to the life of Mrs. Robinson would have played out in the service that her husband would have given to Tobago East. I could not help but think that the aspirations of the hon. Member for Couva North could never have been realized, aspirations to government and governance, without the contribution of that family. One would have thought that somewhere in his angst he would have found the time and the mood to, at least, pay a bit of tribute, a little condolence to a family which has done so much for his development.

**Hon. Members:** No class! [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. R. Dumas:** Tobago East acknowledges its debt. [*Interruption*]

**Dr. Moonilal:** Madam Deputy Speaker, for the record only, I just wanted to inform the Member for Tobago East and the House, that the Leader of the Opposition this morning in the mass media did extend condolences on behalf of himself and the Opposition.

**Hon. R. Dumas:** It gives us hope; thank you for the information.

But I have to put that in context, because, again, I heard a tirade being unleashed on the tourism sector. Tobago depends critically on the tourism sector for its development and, certainly, its continuance; development of its economy, the development of its people and, certainly, the security of the family incomes of a number of individuals. When I heard the attack on the tourism sector, hotel owners and tourism as a measure for development in the country, I could not help but join the two things. It is a continuation of the UNC attack on Tobago that has not stopped. [*Crosstalk*]

Let me finish what I am saying; you spoke.

We can twist things and put them in context, but the attacks started—and you can check the record—by condemning the stimulus action for tourism and the hotel industry that supports tourism. If you take sectoral arguments and posit them, which you do not have to do, because there are mechanisms for investing in both tourism and agriculture, if we are building a development plan, we do not have to attack one or choose between them, but we can certainly invest in both.

When I hear such an attack, I am suggesting it is a direct attack on the constituents of Tobago East, on the population of Tobago and on the earnings and



development of the Tobago economy. It is my responsibility to respond to that. Therefore, I making no bones in saying that I see it as a gross attack on the industry. I see it as a statement of an organization which is the enemy of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and, in particular, Tobago East's development. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, in all that is happening, with all the pressure, all the arguments about whether we have a decline in income, et cetera, this Government has put forward a programme that has at its base a lot of mitigated action. I think I need to say this; I am trying my best to behave myself, but sometimes you have to say what you have to say.

I heard the Leader of the Opposition speak of the ideological moorings of the party. You know what I could not help but acknowledge? The last time that party was in government, it rode to government on basically one phrase: "the parasitic oligarchy". The "parasitic oligarchy" marked all that was negative for Trinidad and Tobago. Do you know what I remember? The parasitic oligarchy became the owners of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago under the UNC. That is what happened. Therefore, when I heard this thing coming up again about ideological basis, I am saying that here you are presenting yourself one more time to fool the country that any activity which has to do with business, investment and development, has to be anti-people, anti-worker, et cetera.

I want to remind all of us, even Members opposite, that when that phrase became legitimate, and it carried that organization into government, that is what we ended up with: a very small group of individuals almost owning Trinidad and Tobago.

What are these ideological moorings of the UNC? I heard another statement which said: You must restrict spending to stimulate the economy. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Bharath:** Who said that?

**Hon. R. Dumas:** Go read the *Hansard*.

You had the Leader of the Opposition saying "to restrict spending is to stimulate the economy". Having presented this argument—and the Member for Caroni East took up the argument—that you have spent these millions of dollars, and these millions of dollars have not stimulated the economy, so the economy was still in a developing stage and you need now to come up with this wish list, you rush out in five minutes at the end of a three and a half hour presentation, saying, "These are the things we will do to stimulate the economy", more than half of those items, in fact, constituting the programme that is put before you by the able Minister of Finance.

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I want to suggest that you have to make up your mind. Restrict the spending, what does that mean? Stimulate the economy; what does that mean? Are the two things reconcilable? I think you owe it to us to straighten that out.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I then heard a thesis—I would not call it that; I want to say an essay from an A level student, pointing out what is budgeted, what is a budget, and all of that. I am quite grateful for the memory, but I do not think that is how Parliament time is used for three hours.

**Mr. Abdul-Hamid:** That is POB.

**Hon. R. Dumas:** The discussions began, and I heard that the budget should be an annual plan; so every year you should start over with the projects which started on January 01, maybe, or October 01, and the projects would finish on the last day of the financial year. The difference between the UNC's view of budgeting and the PNM's view of budgeting is that the PNM is suggesting you have a 12-year programme which is now down to 10 years remaining. You have identified the projects and programmes you want to do and they are identified. If you are consistent in your statement, that the HELP programme should have these dimensions, the highway programmes should have these dimensions, the port development programmes should have these dimensions, all you are doing is being faithful to your plans.

The question of execution may arise, but that is exactly what the Minister is addressing when she said, "Let us treat with efficiency and let us treat with our challenges." To come and complain that you have heard these projects before and you will hear them next year, that is your struggle: To bring the programmes to fruition.

If, as an example, the argument is used that the Tobago hospital was not finished last year, we can use in our argument that this year the Tobago hospital is significantly advanced and can be credibly expected to be completed over the next year. Similarly that goes for a number of projects and programmes under the list you had.

Do you know what I consider to be, somehow, either a matter of ignorance, a matter of laziness or a matter of deceitfulness? When we are told that we do not tell you what we are doing, I pick up this document and see the Social Sector Investment Programme 2010, I go to page 79 and I see a list of projects with what the programmes cost, et cetera, then you cannot tell me that we did not give you the information.

**5.30 p.m.**

I go to the Vision 2020 Operational Plan 2007—2010, 2008—2009 Progress Report and I see an exposition of programme after programme, project after project. You cannot tell me that we have not told you what we are doing.

We come to the Public Sector Investment Programme 2010 and it is outlined, and if you want pretty pictures you have that to show you the pictures clearly what we are doing, and then you have graphs, and exposition of the programme in matrix at the back. You cannot say you do not know what the plan is.

Then you say we do not tell you—the organization outside of the ministries is there and I see the Supplementary Public Sector Investment Programme 2010 again laying out the whole programme at the back, then I am suggesting to you that either you are being lazy, incompetent, or deliberately seeking to mislead the Parliament and the population. I suggest that you have never had a better accounting than under this Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, we are told about the issue of taxation and so on, that you should not treat with tax and the issue comes up about some places that were traditionally agricultural and rural now being required to pay a tax. The very Member for Couva North and Leader of the Opposition in his exposition explained to himself and to us that these places are no longer what they used to be. They are now urban and semi urban, and are now holders of significant infrastructure being used by individuals who now own property of very significant proportion, and in that context he then says that you should pay no tax. You are limiting the authority of the Government to impose the tax and on the other hand, you are laying claims to a whole heap of things which you want to see in those very same areas.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I believe that some reconciliation has to go on in their mind; which is it that you require; more expenditure and, therefore no taxation? That is acceptable. Some taxation and some development, maybe that is acceptable, but you have to find out where are the instances that you find it acceptable to place a tax.

Then on one hand, the Leader of the Opposition, supported again by the Member for Caroni East, speaks to the need for the use of ICT in new ways and to bring new legislation and more recruits into the police system and so forth, demonstrated that he might not have a full grasp of it, but he certainly understands that these are all elements of a system that could be used together and, therefore, he can conceive as the rest of the Opposition that this is a system you have to build from the institutional framework as well as whatever technology you are going to use, as well as whatever is the legislative framework and certainly that must be part of it.

Somebody then goes on to say that the legislative cannot form part of the budget, but again, you demonstrate another misnomer and another misunderstanding in that if the statement which was made was not just the budget,

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it was the budget as well as a comprehensive development and economic policy framework laid out. And, therefore, the legislative activity that will carry forward the taxation policy, et cetera, must be part of that statement and rightly so.

The irresponsibility continues. The Leader of the Opposition, the ex-Prime Minister, ably supported by the Member for Caroni East then launches an attack on the foreign exchange rate. The argument is there posited in this Parliament, broadcast to the world that there is trouble with the foreign exchange rate and, therefore, rationing is going on and all of that. They are so clearly undependable in terms of supporting the confidence factor in the country and the building of social capital that one could understand. But certainly, even as one understands it, one has to treat it as a responsibility. One has to treat it as an attack on good husbandry and stewardship and, therefore, an attack that you need to react to date and I am sure the rest of the population will recognize it for what it is and will ignore that statement. Pure sabotage, continuing along with all that has gone before.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there are two other areas that one needs to put on the table. The Leader of the Opposition then goes on to attack the Government's position in terms of labour and then goes on to say that the minimum wage is too low, the people in CEPEP should be put to work agriculture, and on farms and so forth. I was wondering whether the mechanics are worked out in his mind. There is a saying that slavery is over and indentured servants are all free and I do not know that you have the right to sit here and determine, without explaining, by what methods are you going to put CEPEP workers to work on private farms, and by what methods are you going to put them to work in the areas that you choose to.

But you know what I remember? I will tell you what I remember—*[Interruption]* I will tell you the difference Member for Oropouche East. The difference is if you are starting a programme on which you are starting people on farms, then you are doing that with them voluntarily, then that might be correct.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Okay.

**Hon. R. Dumas:** But you cannot tell me that somebody signs on for one thing and you are sending them over there, and that is where the difference is. I was confused until I went back into my memory and I remember when the same classical worker defender was part of absolutely ignoring all the good industrial practices and went into people's salary willy-nilly as part of another government. I remember that. So I was able to reconcile the position in my mind—*[Interruption]*

Yes, the Prime Minister was Mr. Robinson ,yes, and he was so struck by the trouble he was giving, that he fainted into the arms of then Mr. Basdeo Panday

who was there cleaning up his brows with his handkerchief. I remember that. I remember that this same paragon of labour support can in fact so compromise himself that he can, in fact, conceive and execute programmes that are totally anti-labour.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development is seeking very hard to contribute to the establishment of full employment in Trinidad and Tobago under the best possible working conditions, and in terms of preserving the terms and conditions of the workers of Trinidad and Tobago as well as we can.

In that context, Madam Deputy Speaker, we note that there is a correlation between productivity and wage rate and we know that the productivity of the country carries forward the earning capacity of the country and, therefore, what is available for distribution within the labour force.

**Mr. Imbert:** You are talking too high for them, they cannot understand the terms.

**Mr. Abdul-Hamid:** "Gopeesingh change he course yuh know."

**Hon. R. Dumas:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I noted therefore with consternation, when the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Couva North, then launched an attack on what has to be a noble, national effort in terms of the development of the productivity council [*Desk thumping*] it is totally shocking. On one hand, he has in his hand the competitive index that outlines all these different issues that comprises our productivity level and our competitiveness and so forth ranked with the rest of the world, the ways in which we can feed ourselves by competing with the rest of the world, and then he launches an attack on it saying it will not work. He launches an attack on it, and on the people who have also volunteered to work in the productivity council.

I am suggesting you cannot do that; you cannot on one hand say that the productivity council could have our hopes in its hands, will be dealing with bringing us up-to-date on where we go and on the other hand, seeking to destroy it before it starts. That is civil disobedience all over again. You cannot have that. It is civil disobedience.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you see it destroys the credibility of all the things you say you will do and support. Because if you will not support an activity, an entity which is the product of dialogue between the Government, the workers, and the business community and you attack that activity, you do not support it, then on what basis can we expect you to support any other activity that requires that same social dialogue?

**Mr. Abdul-Hamid:** Ideologically schizophrenic.

**Hon. R. Dumas:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I heard some things about OSHA. I just want to put it on record that OSHA is no longer a baby; it is now a full agency that is in the middle of transformation and going forward in terms of its policy, its programming, et cetera, and I know that the Member for Oropouche East likes to ask me where the regulations are. They are all drafted, all 12 of them. The consultations have started with this particular interest group and the public exposition is in progress.

We can add to that, that the ministry is in the process of building itself out both in terms of different departments in creating access and certainly in making itself available to all the workers/employers in the country. Critical to all of this, is the underpinning of the social dialogue required.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I heard the Leader of the Opposition speak to retrenchment; that is ongoing. Let me give you these three figures. The unemployment rate moved up to 5.3 per cent and then down to 5 per cent. So in other words, the unemployment rate dropped. The labour force participation which constitutes the prime indicator of the level of labour market activity increased from 63 per cent to 63.6 per cent. The number of persons employed increased from 588,400 in the first quarter of 2008 to 598,200 in the first quarter of 2009 which tells us that an additional 9,800 persons were able to find jobs in the first quarter of 2009 compared to the first quarter of 2008.

Reported to us in terms of retrenchment in the first quarter of 2008 it was 257 persons, up from 229 persons in the comparative first quarter of those two years. In other words, we are keeping pace with any rate of retrenchment, and in fact, having more people employed than before.

**5.45 p.m.**

The National Employment Service is, in fact, serving people across the country, matching employers with potential employees and that is ongoing. The Labour Market Information System—I saw that somebody who had something to do with labour had put their hand on the master's speech but, unfortunately, they are not aware of all the information. The Labour Market Information System is being developed. In fact, the first set of baseline surveys have started and you may be interested to know that that process is expected to continue with the development of a full National Labour Market Information System, which we hope to be rolling out this year.

All the institutions in labour and microenterprise development, as a ministry, are in development, are working and in improvement, including the question of the Minimum Wages Order and, in fact, working for compliance with the group. The last success we could report is that we had the security sector, which is one of the more difficult sectors; we have had the leaders of that sector, in terms of the business activity come in. We put them to sit down and made sure they understood and we have an agreement that all parts of the sector will seek to bring themselves into compliance as quickly as possible.

That leaves me only to suggest—one needs to say a little bit about Tobago. You remember that the population of Tobago continues to place its confidence in the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Abdul-Hamid:** With justification.

**Hon. R. Dumas:** Of course. Therefore, since that election in January, the development of Tobago has continued, and if you were to take the time—I know the UNC is not normally interested in Tobago news, but if you see the front page, you will see—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, you cannot say that. We always spend time in Tobago.

**Hon. R. Dumas:** You mean you will go and make mischief with Mr. Jack. Not you this time, Member for Chaguanas West; the other Jack.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we want to make the point that this budget in the Tobago PSIP laid out a number of initiatives that the Government follows. It spoke to tourism sector support; it spoke to business infrastructure, speaking to the activities in Cove, Castara, in Les Coteaux; it spoke to the administrative infrastructure that is being put in place; it spoke to the development of the social infrastructure, cultural infrastructure; road infrastructure; certainly the water development that the public utilities is engaged in; it spoke to sporting infrastructure that is being developed; new electrical plants which we are quite grateful for, because remember that this was a sore point all the time. But Government activity, very clear on its development paradigm, is, in fact, moving to remove these hindrances to Tobago's development; the gas and energy infrastructure that is being put in place and, certainly, we just spoke about a Scarborough Hospital.

In other words, every facet of life in Tobago is being changed because of the association with the People's National Movement in the THA and otherwise.

**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. [*Dr. R. Moonilal*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. R. Dumas:** [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I would just keep myself very clearly within the continued accommodation of my colleagues and say thanks very much.

But I think the critical point that I want to make is that the progress continues; the positive changes in the lives of the people as individuals, as families, as communities, continue, whether these communities are in Tobago or in Trinidad. Once they are communities in Trinidad and Tobago, the changes to national access to opportunity continue; that even in these times where the Government had to treat with some of the falloff in terms of revenue, the governance system continues to go to work.

I want to suggest that the people of Trinidad and Tobago are now enjoying a political dividend by ensuring that they have had and continue to have the People's National Movement in governance.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Winston Peters** (*Mayaro*): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. My colleagues are not going to walk out today. [*Interruption*] And to my colleague from—where is it? Lopinot/Bon Air West—I want to say to you that, indeed, we are not bankrupt of ideas in any way; we just have to have the opportunity to use them. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Imbert:** “Yuh sounding like yuh begging to talk.”

**Mr. W. Peters:** Madam Deputy Speaker, in the midst of a global recession and financial crisis, deficit in revenues, precipitous world gas prices and staggering crude prices, the hallmark of this administration continues to be a deliberate and, what seems to be, a spiteful waste and wastage of our scarce resources. Amidst a plethora of pious platitudes and a fiscal discipline of financial restraint and fiscal discipline from the Minister of Finance and her coach, the Member for San Fernando East who probably gone home and sleep now, the Prime Minister, spending close to \$300 billion over the past seven years with surplus revenue streams over a five-year period, the Heritage and Stabilization Fund only has US \$2.4 billion as it stands today.

The startling and glaring reality of our socio-economic problems today is founded upon the reckless, desperate and wild spending patterns of this



administration. They have been warned time and time again by the Governor of the Central Bank, by senior economists, trade unionists, members of Chambers of Commerce, but at every turn, arrogance and indifference have reigned supreme. You see, it is sad when people think that they know it all.

**Mr. Imbert:** You “doh” really mean that.

**Mr. W. Peters:** I mean it. I mean every single word I say, because I also want you to remember the phrase, “the sky would not fall in”.

**Mr. Imbert:** I said that, Chicken Little.

**Mr. W. Peters:** Apart from that, Chicken Big said it too.

**Mr. Imbert:** Chicken Big?

**Mr. W. Peters:** Mr. Big, yes. That is according to our dear Prime Minister. Since then it has been a race to spend and spend as fast and as much as we can.

**Mr. Imbert:** The sky would not fall.

**Mr. W. Peters:** The sky would not fall, but we are falling. That is all right.

Every year over the past seven years, the obsession has been to create fancy themes for each budget, with excessive articulation and theatrics, pipe dreams and socio-economic fiction; from themes such as: “Ensuring our Future Prosperity; Addressing our Basic Needs, in 2006,” to last year’s, “Shaping Our Future Together”, to this 2009 presentation—2010—

**Mr. Imbert:** You see? You do not know everything.

**Mr. W. Peters:** I never profess to. That resides over there. The 2010 presentation: “Strengthening our Efficiency, Addressing the Challenges.” The budgets, under this regime, according to objective and fair-minded citizens, have become nothing more than PR exercises in virtual regurgitation of the extreme.

Articulation is very, very high, but the level of implementation—and I said that last year as well—this Government is very good at articulating things that should be done but to implement them, they have a problem with that and it remains that way up to now.

To start with, one cannot strengthen efficiency while at the same time increasing waste and mismanagement. The waste, corruption and nepotism is more contaminated and polluted than the spent pot lining from an aluminium smelter. It hemorrhages the psyche of the citizenry and limits the capacity of persons to realize their true potential. We can cite numerous examples of waste,

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unnecessary expenditure and corruption on the part of the State, or should I say corruption on the part of this PNM government, as they like to call themselves.

**Mr. Imbert:** We are not a PNM Government.

**Mr. W. Peters:** That is how you call yourself. I know you are not a PNM Government; you are a government for the people. You do not act that way, though.

Five hundred million dollars was spent on the Summit of the Americas; the Brian Lara Stadium, \$630 million, or so they say, and counting. I do not know if they could really tell us the exact amount—*[Interruption]* Wherever; it is all right.

It was wasted expenditure in spite of the fact that there is the Mannie Ramjohn Stadium just across the highway. If we needed to have a stadium, all we had to do was upgrade that one. But I think if you did that, somebody was not going to get sufficient money from it. So what they did was conjure up something to build a new one.

UDeCott, the flagship corruption cash cow, with numerous bag men; fictitious procedures and convenient procurement guidelines to suit each contract; a free-for-all frolic, I would call it. *[Interruption]* You in it too?

There is adequate and sufficient evidence coming out of the apparent sabotaged commission of enquiry into UDeCott for the Anti-corruption Investigation Bureau, the Fraud Squad and the Director of Public Prosecutions—when we have one—to act with dispatch to arrest, charge and prosecute unscrupulous pillagers of our patrimony. When I look at what is happening in our country today, I have to ask the question: Have all our sacred institutions been politicized and compromised? The wasted billions have been spent on 15 special purpose companies, to date with little value for the battered taxpayers. We want to know, where are the audits and reports on these politically expedient slush funding companies?

**6.00 p.m.**

We have NEDCO with over \$100 million in loans written off and have been exempt from the Freedom of Information Act. They do not want people to know anything about them. That cannot be transparency. We have wasted millions on insignificant foreign-used consultants for every project. We have foreign-used cars, foreign-used bike, foreign-used stove and fridge. We have foreign-used consultants. This Government has become consultancy oriented so they must have foreign consultants in everything they do.

We are about to spend \$300 million on a Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference in November of this year. It might be more than that but

that is the figure that they give us so that is the figure I am going with; I am taking what they say. Any amount that they spend on it is too much. Do we really need to fete more world leaders again? We have just feted, well I agree Obama came; that was all right. We got to see him. *[Interruption]* Not with the amount of money we spent. We are bringing a lot of people here again to spend this kind of money. The point of spending that amount of money is not at all too bad if we could afford it or when everything is well.

The budget is fast becoming irrelevant to the ordinary citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. This Government has shown how insensitive and indifferent it is to the plight of the citizens. It is so very easy to set aside hundreds of millions of dollars for international talk shops but they say that money cannot be found to provide the people of Trinidad and Tobago with the basic amenities. We cannot provide or we have not provided affordable and quality health care. Just check the hospitals. To this day in 2009, in our hospitals we still do not have beds. If somebody wants an MRI and goes to the hospital that person would have to wait for six months. My mother had to do it, so I know. Inadequate medical supply.

We cannot find money to alleviate the flooding in our country or reduce the daily traffic gridlock. We lose many, many man hours with our work force on the road trying to get to work so they are frustrated by the time they get there. Sometimes you have to excuse people when you go to their offices and you get a kind of grumpy response from them because they are frustrated by the time they get there.

We cannot find the money to bring relief to the areas without pipe borne water. People in this country are crying out every day for water. As a matter of fact, when the UNC was in government, the UNC built a desal plant that was maligned by this very Government when they were in opposition. They built a desal plant. At least the one that the UNC built is working. When it is down, the hardship for water even gets worse in this country. They built a desal plant in Moruga. It is not working. *[Interruption]* "How yuh mean? You is de Minister ah Works an askin me wha happenin?" I do not know what it has to do with you. It is your Government and you are the people who are put there to provide the people of Trinidad and Tobago with what they need. They have a desal plant that is not working. We spend millions of dollars on a desal plant that is not working. Apparently, we cannot find money to fix that but we could find money to do everything else.

We cannot find the money to remove the vagrants from our streets. I have been looking carefully at the vagrant population lately. If vagrants in Trinidad and Tobago used to have number plates on them, you would have been seeing, what

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do we have now? PB what? You would have been seeing PCN on them and a whole lot of number plates, new models, everyday you go around the country. There is a migratory pattern. Long time you used to find vagrants in Port of Spain or you might have found one or two in San Fernando and a few in Princes Town or developed parts of the country. Now vagrants are all over the country. That cannot augur right for us. That shows that something is wrong in this country where we have billions and billions of dollars.

Over \$200 million was allocated to four special purpose companies under the Local Government 2009 Rural Development Company Limited, Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited and East Port of Spain Development Company Limited with more money to be dished out to them in 2010. I am asking: Where is the value for our money? Who is monitoring the quality of work of these companies and projects? With many faults and depressions affecting mostly rural areas of the country and mostly Rio Claro, Mayaro, Biche, Tableland, Tabaquite, Princes Town and Moruga, et cetera, I propose the establishment of a landslide and road depression unit to deal specifically with this issue which continues to traumatize both commuters, motorists and homeowners.

In Rio Claro, the landslide situation is so bad that people are losing their houses. Right now I know at least three or four persons who have no houses because of the problems of landslide in the area. Some of this is caused by shoddy work that was done by some of these very companies on some of these roads. These people are not compensated in any way. They are traumatized and we need to address these areas quickly. This unit should be a merging of the resources and technical expertise, man power and equipment of both the Ministry of Works and Transport and the Ministry of Local Government.

I listened to my colleague on the other side speak about CEPEP and apparently he was aggrieved by what the Member for Couva North had to say about CEPEP. I must say that I have to agree with him because I share those sentiments. How will it be done? "When we leave here ah go tell all yuh." I have grown to have great admiration for the hardworking people of CEPEP. [*Desk thumping*] I have seen them work and I have seen them work hard. I know that they are doing good work and I must commend them. CEPEP Limited is now the 16th Special Purpose Company with an expenditure of over more than \$2 billion since its inception. I think that it is time to take CEPEP to another level. Grass cutting will never be an industry nor would it contribute to GDP.

With talk of the revival of the cocoa industry, I am saying to you and I agree with the political leader that they should find some way to inculcate CEPEP into

some more meaningful work in this country. If we are thinking about a cocoa industry, I heard the Minister said that you cannot take people from one place and put them into another, that is not what they signed on to do. We take CEPEP now and put them anywhere. As a matter of fact, we sent them to Grenada and all over the place when something happens. They did not sign on for that. CEPEP workers could be more productive. The time has come for us to do that.

I think that they should pool their resources with the works and regional corporations to clean and maintain drains and water courses so that we can help alleviate flooding in the country. Most importantly, it is time to engage them in establishing and planting agricultural estates and strengthen the food security. I agree with the political leader. It is time that we also cut out this nonsense about bringing people in Trinidad and Tobago to do any mega farm. They cannot make any more mega farm in Trinidad and Tobago than the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We have the capacity and ability to do that. I think that we should do it. It is time that we stop giving away the resources of our country and engage our people in the things that they are capable of doing.

We have to review the contractor system and remuneration package and benefits of the workers based on their added responsibility. In other words, pay them better for the work that they would do so that they would produce for us in this country.

Madam Deputy Speaker, really and truly, I do not want to be long on this thing. I want to ensure that I do not talk for a very long time so I want to cut off some of these things. Recently, I heard the Minister spoke about an internal audit of housing units being carried out by the HDC. I hope that they can sort out the mess which is traumatizing an already tormented population. You just imagine that they have lost count of their housing stock and those that are completed. How can that be? The time has come, I believe, to review the pricing of all housing units, especially those built for low-income earners taking into account their economic challenges and its impact on the cost of living. It is hard for people who can afford it and if we are building low-cost housing for people, there is no way that we can keep the rate that they were at two or three years ago and expect people to access these so-called low-cost houses.

Last year in this House, I raised the issue of the Coconut Grove Housing Project in the constituency in Mayaro. This project is located in Ortoire Mayaro. In January of this year, the HDC handed over 51 units. Only 11 tenants attended the ceremony. Do you know why only 11 tenants attended the ceremony? Because only 11 tenants were there from Mayaro. The houses that are being built

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are not given to the people of Mayaro. In this House when I asked how many people from Mayaro applied for housing they said 2,000 and something but they could not give any names. The people gave me their names so I have many of their names. There are people from Mayaro and they cannot get any houses.

The project took more than six years with a cost of \$81.7 million for 51 what I will call modern boxes because they are nothing but that. \$81.7 million for 57 units. I do not know if they are units in the true sense. I call them boxes because that is what they are. Boxes on stilts. You must drive through Ortoire and look at the houses that these people have to be paying for. One and two bedroom houses. [Interruption] What houses the UNC built is irrelevant at this point. You were there for eight or nine years now. I do not want to hear anything about what the UNC did. That is why you are there. I do not want to hear what the UNC did. When the UNC gets back there you would ask what the UNC did. Do not ask me that now. You are there and the responsibility is on you. The people gave you the responsibility. [Desk thumping] I do not want to hear anything about what the UNC did.

These houses range in price from \$250,000 to \$300,000 with an interest rate of 13 per cent. Which poor people going to get that? They are concrete boxes with a roof that cost \$1 million each. It is \$81 million for 51 houses. You do the Mathematics. "I eh no economist. I eh no mathematician." \$81.7 million for 57 units. I am not concocting this. This is something that came from you so I want you to tell me how much one of those houses cost.

### **6.15 p.m.**

To this date, Madam Deputy Speaker, there is no water whatsoever in Coconut Grove. I have pleaded with the Minister of Public Utilities and he has promised to help since January. These people have to depend on the rain and the occasional truck-borne water that would come by when they beg for it. I dare say that there is a different phenomenon now; they have to pay for truck-borne water.

While I am talking about Mayaro, I want to move away a little because I am a Member of Parliament in Trinidad and Tobago, so I try to represent as many people as I can and people come to me from all over. I had a delegation from the Wallerfield Housing Project and they complained that it is cramped and congested, and are saying that "it is the perfect breeding ground for those with dubious intent". So when the Minister speaks about audit and housing stock, please ensure that these units have all the amenities and infrastructure before they are palmed off on an unsuspecting and desperate population.

I am the representative for Mayaro and I am indeed "Mayarocentric". I was born in that beautiful place and I love it. Even when my mortal remains stay on this earth, that is where it will remain. I have to ensure that Mayaro is well taken care of. I want the opportunity to do something and not just come here and highlight their problems. In the meantime, *[Interruption]* I am debating this. That is all right. Engage me. Madam Deputy Speaker, I will continue to do what I can and if you find that I have a preoccupation with Mayaro, yes, I do. I make no bones about it.

The HDC says that close to 2000 persons from Mayaro are registered on their database, yet most of the houses that are distributed have been given to persons outside of Mayaro. Under the Supplementary Public Sector Investment Programme 2010, I see Mayaro Housing Development. This project is expected to yield 200 units and will comprise a mix of single family units. This project cost is estimated at \$98.4 million. What part of Mayaro are they putting these projects? I guess that is a question that I would have to ask some other time. When will the project commence? I also see, under the same Supplementary Public Sector Investment Programme 2010, 5(1)(p), that the Guayaguayare Housing Development project is an extension of the existing NHA/HDC Housing Development and is expected to yield 60 units estimated to cost \$29.5 million. The others cost eighty something million dollars. I have to work out something there. I guess the price went down.

I would like them to build as many houses as possible in Mayaro, but I would like the houses to be given to the people of Mayaro and not to PNM party hacks and friends to be used as beach houses as they are doing now. They have given out houses on the beach in Mayaro and people have none of them. We see people coming there; some on weekends. *[Interruption]* You are telling me it is not true; you must come to Mayaro and go by one of them. *[Interruption]* I would like the people of Mayaro—I do not care about what they did; I am not here to debate what the UNC did. That is why you are there. If you condemn the UNC for something, why do it now? *[Interruption]* You are building houses and giving it to whom? *[Interruption]* The citizens of where? The citizens of Trinidad and Tobago?

Anyway, I am saying that the people of Mayaro need houses. They have applied and you, by your own acceptance, say that 2,000 have applied. We need houses in Mayaro and we think that they should be given to the people of Mayaro. That is how we feel. *[Interruption]* I will deal with that at another time, but permit me to just say that now.

We talk about the National Highways Programme. For the past three budgets, we have heard about highways from San Fernando to Point Fortin, Wallerfield to

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Manzanilla, Princes Town to Mayaro and San Fernando to Mayaro. In the Budget Statement 2010, the Minister mentioned the commencement of construction of highways from San Fernando to Mayaro along with three other projects.

I want to remind the Minister that when I was a little boy, in 1966 or 1967, there was a project; the same highway project was started from Point Fortin to Mayaro and, to this day, there is not one highway. Now you are proposing another. I commend you for it, but the promises that were made in this august Chamber are never carried out by you when you get out of here. I hope that this time this highway that was supposed to be started since 1963 or 1964 will finally be built. I would appreciate that because it will bring much relief to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and much deserved resources to the people of Mayaro.

Under the same SHARE programme of road upgrade and rehabilitation, I am calling for the Mayaro Guayaguayare Road, which brings most of the wealth we enjoy that is mentioned in this billion dollar budget we are talking about today—the money we are about to spend. I ask for this to be included on that list because there are many segments of the road that are deteriorating rapidly so we need it to be fixed.

We also need the Cunapo Southern Main Road and the Navet, Tarouba, Cuche and Biche Roads to be upgraded. Every Friday, I speak to the Minister of Works and Transport about the Tabaquite Road and all they do—Madam Deputy Speaker, someone is ripping off the country very badly and I would hate to think that the Government is in collusion with them. Nobody can carry out this shoddy work so blatantly without the knowledge or collusion of the Government. I think they are in collusion with these pavers. They would pave the road today and after put down about a quarter inch of bitumen. In three months time, they have to pave it again.

The Naparima Mayaro Road between Rio Claro and Mayaro, since the last election, has been paved no less than four or five times. That cannot be. Something must be radically wrong there. *[Interruption]* You are telling me that it is not true. I am telling you that two nights before the election they were paving the road. I was campaigning on hot, hot pitch. *[Laughter]* Maybe they did not want me to walk to campaign. If you had seen me. I had to dance on the pitch going down the road. They were paving 12 o'clock in the night. When they met a big hole, the first mound of dirt they met, they would put it in the big hole and put the thing over it and "dey gone again" and next week they pave it again. I say we have to do something about it.

I oftentimes have to use the road going through Valencia to Mayaro and it is a nightmare when you try to get on that east/west road from Tumpuna Road to



Santa Rosa through Wallerfield. When you reach before the Valencia Bridge, it takes you about two hours to go from that junction to the Valencia Police Station and it is right around the corner. They do absolutely nothing about it. We have to do something about that. That happens every single day, mornings and evenings and on Sundays it is worse. On Sundays, the traffic jam starts almost from Sangre Grande. This cannot be allowed to continue. We have to do something about this.

While I agree that we must import some foreign nurses, doctors and pharmacists that will add to the public sector, how long can we continue this? We also have to ensure that we build professional quality capacity in our health officers because our health care is in shambles. Like I said before, when you go to these places to get any care, it is abominable.

I make the call once again for the incorporation of a burn unit at the Mayaro District Health Facility to deal with potential accidents and emergencies arising out of the energy sector and related industries of the Mayaro/Guayaguayare region. In fact, I am making the call for all district hospitals in the vicinity of an industrial estate, such as Point Lisas and Point Fortin, whenever and if ever they finish the hospital.

I want to touch a little on agriculture, since my constituency is one that forms part of the food basket of Trinidad and Tobago. Agriculture is still a marginalized sector with an allocation of \$700 million for 2010. [*Interruption*] They are very happy. A drowning man will catch at a straw.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I welcome the approach of the public/private sector participation for the development and rehabilitation of agricultural access roads. It is hoped that this new initiative could clear the decades' backlog of access roads neglect that has contributed to the suppression and other negative fallouts. The fact that approximately 500 kilometres of agriculture road requires urgent rehabilitation means that the public/private sector must move with haste to identify the more critical areas and prioritize the work matching with adequate resources. We must also have good labour and supervision. The megafarms and food baskets of Cuche, Navet, Biche and Rio Claro, Kernahan and Guayaguayare are crying out for these amenities to produce food, in even more abundance, for our security.

### **6.30 p.m.**

The issue of agricultural leases is also a vexing problem for the farmers who desire security of tenure to remain in the sector and to ensure viability. Right now, as I speak, I have a problem with at least 20 farmers at Bristol Village in Mayaro. They have been there for years and years planting. Over the last couple of years,

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they have been in limbo because they have a problem at the moment and are unable to produce because of the standoff between Bristow Caribbean Limited. Bristow has acquired the land or is trying to acquire the land from the Government to build their headquarters and the people are in limbo. If you have to take the people's land, "hurry up" and pay them for their land so that they go ahead and get their lives going. Right now, they are really in limbo and we need to fast track the process of agricultural lease approval. I had many meetings with Bristow and the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and we are still working. It is taking years and the people really do not know what to do. I am asking that we hasten the process.

We have to establish a national agriculture relief fund to mitigate against the losses that farmers suffer as a result of flooding and other natural disasters. They have a meager compensation, which is still paid to the farmers. Imagine some farmers were flooded out and they got \$10. We have to do something about that, because we cannot encourage farming on the one hand and discourage the farmers. I do not know how that is going to work.

For the last three years, the Government spoke of the planned construction of the fishing facility in Guayaguayare to accommodate the needs of the fisherfolk there. Every year we talk about it. I want to know what has become of the project. Are we waiting to build the user port facilities at Galeota before the fishing facilities in Guayaguayare?

I am pleased to hear that, according to the Vision 2020 Operational Plan, Progress Report 2007—2009, the Seafood Industry Development Company is now adding value to its operation by way of developing a commercial agricultural project for tilapia production and is also supporting the Women Fishing Association of Guayaguayare for a fish processing plant. That would be so nice. Oftentimes, we have so much fish which are wasted on the beach because there is no plant. I am happy to know that they are doing this.

The Government has to pay more attention to these progressive job incentives for private persons such as Bertie Als. While we are now talking about a tilapia production, Bertie Als has been producing Tilapia in Guayaguayare on a very large scale. The Government has to pay more attention to these people. I am happy to know that it is in my constituency. These are the things that need to be encouraged.

The Smart Card that is now called the "Smart Man Card", which has been given its right name by the Minister, is an indication of the chickens have come home to roost. It is a fact that most of these social support programmes have been

contaminated with political interference and soaked with patronage. Those who are most in need are bypassed in favour of people who can afford. They can afford to do whatever they want. They are bypassed. The reason they are bypassed is either there are party hacks or there is a big person in the PNM party. People who are really in need of the so-called Smart Card are denied and people who can afford to otherwise do better are given because of who they know. These are facts. I am not here to mislead this House; I am here to give you the facts as they exist. They come to me on a weekly basis. I help them apply for it and they get no reply. Sometimes they say that they are dealing with it for months. These are people who are living in a 10 x 10 with four kids and have to send them to school. These are people, some of whom are working for \$150 per week and they are hungry. We cannot be that insensitive. I know the Minister is not a heartless person. I hope that you would use your good heart to alleviate or look into the problems of these people.

We still need to reduce the processing time for the social welfare grants and minor repairs.

**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. [*Dr. R. Moonilal*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. W. Peters:** Thank you very much. I really and truly did not mislead you. I hope you will continue to believe me, because it was not my intention. As a matter of fact, half of the things I was supposed to have said, I have discarded. If the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East was not interrupting me, I would have finished a long time ago.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the house wiring programme of the Ministry is worthy of commendation, especially as it relates to the professionalism of the staff and the objective of a non-partisan manner of dealing with the applications. I really want to commend the Minister. I wish he was here, because I think as we condemn people when they do not do good, we should commend when they do good. That is a great programme that is working for the people. I am really happy. I am happy anytime I get anything for the people. This is why I am in politics. I am in politics to try to help the people. If I can get anything for them I am happy. If anybody could do things for the people I would commend them and if they are not doing anything for them, I would—[*Interruption*] they could call me whatever they want, I know what I am.

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Most important is the issue of water within my constituency. The sum of \$300 million was allocated to WASA in last year's budget to support the effort of improving operational efficiency in the delivery of water supply. I have not seen any improvement in my constituency. As a matter of fact, as I speak, the areas of Biche, Rio Claro, Union, Bristol, Kernahan, Charuma, Mayaro, Ecclesville and surrounding areas have been reduced to a barrel and communal tank community with empty barrels lining the pavements and the sidewalks, while truck borne water is rationed in a very bad way. For days, people cannot get water. Trinidad and Tobago, for God's sake, is an island and there is no reason we should have any shortage of water. I lived in the US Virgin Islands for a long time and there are no rivers or water supply but the sea and there is no shortage of water. I cannot see why we in Trinidad and Tobago—everybody in every part of Trinidad and Tobago is complaining. It has to be mismanagement in some way.

Why is it that money can be easily sourced and allocated for summits and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference, but none for the basic needs of the citizens? The constituents cannot take it anymore. As you hear from the tone of my voice "I cyah take it anymore". [*Interruption*] We cannot take you; we want you to do something.

Madam Deputy Speaker, permit me to speak a little about culture. The absence of a national strategic plan for culture and creative arts remains as distant and elusive as Vision 2020. Without structures and binding policies, culture will remain disorganized and its true potential and income-generating capacity would be suppressed, in spite of the modern academies and hefty disbursements to cultural groups and artistes. We need a policy to ensure equitable disbursements are made to cultural groups by the State. There is an urgent need for stakeholders to pool their creative resources and expertise to forge ahead and ensure that this policy becomes a reality sooner rather than later.

Since the 2003 budget, I have not heard about the rehabilitation of the panyards programme in collaboration with Pan Trinbago. I have heard nothing of it. Hon. Minister, what has become of that? [*Interruption*]

**Hon. Members:** Pan in the Community!

**Mr. W. Peters:** That is what it is called now? It is called Pan in the Community? [*Interruption*]

**Hon. Members:** It is alive and well.

**Mr. W. Peters:** If it is alive and well, I am happy. Minister of Culture, is that true? "Ah find de Minister ah Culture eh saying nothing." [*Interruption*]

**Miss Mc Donald:** In due course; just wait. Mayaro!

**Mr. W. Peters:** I want everything in Mayaro; as much as I can get. “All de money dat we getting in Trinidad and Tobago come from Mayaro. Whey yuh feel it come from? Mayaro doh get anything.” *[Interruption]*

**Mrs. Gopee-Scoon:** And Point Fortin.

**Mr. W. Peters:** Some come from Point Fortin too; you are right. *[Interruption]*

**Miss Mc Donald:** “How yuh could say dat, when I open three community centres for you?” Three community centres!

**Mr. W. Peters:** You opened three community centres for the people of Mayaro for which I am grateful and thankful, but you have not opened any community centres for me. I do not want a community centre. What I want you to do is to open more. *[Interruption]*

**Miss Mc Donald:** Three community centres. I was in Mayaro when I opened them with you.

**Mr. W. Peters:** With more than 40 radio stations in the country, we need to secure greater airplay for our various indigenous music as a matter of policy. *[Interruption]*

**Miss Mc Donald:** You must say thanks. You are ungrateful.

**Mr. W. Peters:** With more than 40 radio stations in the country, we need to secure greater airplay for our various indigenous music as a matter of policy. The time has come in our country when we must—*[Interruption]*

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** “But ah fine yuh very ungrateful fuh true.”

**Mr. W. Peters:** If we have to legislate how much airplay we get, then that is what we have to do, but if we must revive our dying industry, then we need to have some kind of quota system on these radio stations.

Our airwaves are filled with psychological pollution of foreign influence, especially the gangster nonsense. Even Jamaica recently recognized that the kind of music that was being played on their radio stations was corrupting and polluting the minds of the young people and they have done something to address it. I believe that we too—because we do not make the gangster music here but it encourages our young people to wear their pants under their butt and walk and talk a certain way—have to address this, because we are losing another generation.

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It is time to review the disbursement practices to cultural organizations, especially the main stakeholders like TUCO, Pan Trinbago and the National Carnival Bands Association. We need to address them. If I had my way, I would tell you what I would do. [*Interruption*]

**Hon. Members:** Tell us.

**Mr. W. Peters:** I would tell you another time.

**6.45 p.m.**

Madam Deputy Speaker, the international financial crisis continues to wreak havoc on the tourism sector in Trinidad and Tobago. We are certainly not immune. Our tourism product is fragile, in the context of it being behind the main players in the Caribbean like Barbados, Jamaica and Antigua. Arrivals and airlifts have been declining. I am sure that the Minister of Tourism can attest to that when he gets up to speak. Indeed, I have heard the Chief Secretary allude to the fact that it is indeed happening.

Even the much touted tourism master plan has to be reviewed and restructured. The challenges can become great opportunities once we consolidate the platform for domestic tourism awareness and engage all communities in understanding the potential and value of our diverse sites, attractions and landmarks. Whilst I agree that Maracas needs a facelift, I do not see the need to spend \$233 million to upgrade that facility right now.

**Mr. Imbert:** Are you against Maracas?

**Mr. W. Peters:** No. I am not against Maracas. I am against imprudence. I believe that money should be used to upgrade all the beaches in Trinidad and Tobago that have the potential to bring in revenue. That is what should happen. [*Interruption*] Yes, it should include Mayaro because Mayaro is a famous beach. I want to let you know that Maracas Beach has never been in the top 10 beaches in the Caribbean. I want you to do your research. We have beaches in Tobago, and we need to develop those beaches. If we have to develop a simple thing as our beach facility, why do we have to use Chinese? What is this obsession with the Chinese in Trinidad and Tobago? If we want to use Chinese, let us use the Chinese we have here. There are Chinese who were born in Trinidad. If they have to repair a toilet, they are bringing in Chinese. If they have to build a beach they are bringing in Chinese. If they have to carry water they are bringing in Chinese. What about our people? They need jobs. I have to rush this thing and wrap up, so I may have to curtail some of it.

I look forward to the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs and the Sports Company undertaking the upgrade and refurbishment work of the many grounds in Mayaro, Rio Claro and Biche in the new year. I have had several meetings with them and I have submitted a list of grounds that are in urgent need of refurbishment. *[Interruption]* I have said it from the outset that the Government is good at talking.

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** You have three community centres.

**Mr. W. Peters:** Is that going to be your legacy; three community centres? We need a lot of things. We need to do more with the money that we have in this country.

With respect to crime, I just want to say that the tragic reality is that this Government, unlike any other, is spending more money to increase crime in the country—\$21 billion. *[Desk thumping]* This year, they will be spending another \$4.7 billion on crime. In case you are wondering why I am saying that it is that the Government remains part of the problem and, therefore, they cannot be part of the solution. They have created the criminal network by negotiating peace treaties and accords with the State money flowing freely into the hands of social deviance. The phenomenal rise in the number of crime hotspots, crime and gangsters are all attributed to the efficiency of the Government in ensuring that crime has become a profitable enterprise. Madam Deputy Speaker, the more money you put into the hands of criminals is the more they are going to spend it on crime. They cannot spend it on anything else, because that is all they know. The laws have to be implemented.

In Mayaro and Guayaguayare there are still incidences of piracy and engine thefts with boats and engine being towed away. Fishermen are losing their living. We are asking the Government for more patrols in Mayaro. We need patrols at our beaches. We are citizens of this country and we need to be saved. *[Crosstalk]*

In conclusion, I would just like to say that we are being taken for a ride, and we are being made to look like fools in our country. We pay for water and we receive none. We pay health surcharge and we receive the worst health care for our money. We pay for roads; we pay a direct road tax and that money is supposed to go directly to fix the roads.

**Mr. Imbert:** That is not true.

**Mr. W. Peters:** Have you abolished the road tax?

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** Yes.

**Mr. W. Peters:** So, what do we pay when we buy gas?

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** The gas is subsidized.

**Mr. W. Peters:** That is the people of Trinidad and Tobago money and you are supposed to give it to them. Subsidize what! Do not make the people feel that you all are giving them anything. The Government does not own the money, that is the people's money. You are not subsidizing anything. You are just giving the people it in small increments. We have the worst roads. We pay our taxes, but we are forced to live as prisoners in our homes behind steel bars with as many dogs as we could have and other means of protection. We are not protected by the State.

Madam Deputy Speaker, what is more burdensome is that this Government is introducing a punitive tax for owning a house. It is now a crime to own a house because you are taxed for doing so. People with ambition have worked hard and saved their money and they have purchased a house. I have been working since I was 13 years old. I sold bottles, catch fish and crab and I also picked coconuts and I built a house. Today, when I believe that I could live comfortably in my house, I am being told that I have to pay some kind of punitive tax just for owning it.

**Miss Le Gendre:** When you were in the Virgin Islands, did you not pay tax?

**Mr. W. Peters:** Not like what you are trying to make us pay here. *[Interruption]* I did not have a house then. *[Interruption]* When you are living in New York and you pay tax you get everything. You have water in the pipes, lights and you could walk out on the road and nobody would "lick yuh down". You can walk anywhere—

**Hon. Members:** In New York!

**Mr. W. Peters:** Yes, in New York. The murder rate in New York is lower than the murder rate in Trinidad and Tobago and their population is about 10 million. *[Desk thumping]* With 10 million people the murder rate is lower than a place which has 1.3 million people.

Madam Deputy Speaker, while we are seeing trouble in our country, we are paying for the comforts of other people in their country. I see where it is being proposed to put a terminal aircraft repair maintenance place in Grenada, and that is going to create jobs for Trinidadians. I love Grenada. I am part Grenadian and I am proud of it. I am not against it, but I am saying that we must see about ourselves first. While the people of Mayaro have no water, no lights and no roads, we are doing things somewhere else. How could we do that? Charity begins at home.

In closing, I want to remind everyone in this House that we are all citizens of this beautiful country, and regardless of what political persuasion or what position we now hold, the actions that we take here today in this House, tomorrow the people of Trinidad and Tobago and our country will pay. I thank you very much. *[Desk thumping]*



**The Minister of Public Administration (Hon. Kennedy Swaratsingh):** Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you very much. I, too, rise to make my contribution in this debate, as we encourage all Members in this House to support the fiscal measures for the budget of 2010. Before I start with my own contribution, if my learned friend from Mayaro was in his other profession, and this Parliament was Skinner Park, all now I would be taking out my paper and waving it in the crowd. [*Desk thumping*] My learned friend should be the last person to talk about what the Government wants to spend, when we listened to over an hour of what he wants for Mayaro. How do you expect to get that if the Government does not spend and spend? [*Desk thumping*]

In fact, I wish I could have come here and boasted today that during my time as the Member of Parliament for a constituency that I got three community centres at \$8.5 million each. In fact, I do not know of any PNM Member of Parliament in any PNM-held constituency that got three community centres. Did anybody get three community centres?

**Hon. Members:** No.

**Hon. K. Swaratsingh:** When he said that we are making promises that we cannot keep, I have two more in store for him. I did not even mention the ECCE centres. My very good friend from Mayaro should be the last person to come in this House and ask for anything else. [*Desk thumping*] When we speak about housing—the Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment will talk at some stage during the debate, either here or in the other place, about the number of houses that are being built in Mayaro. Today, the Member mentioned 200 in one place, 50 in another, and then another 60 in another place, and he wants all for the people of Mayaro.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this Government, in everything that we do, we do everything for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] My colleagues are going to deal with the areas that the Member raised in social development and other places. Even today when the Leader of the Opposition was speaking, he made a statement about PNM's Vision 2020.

I want to join with my colleagues in commending the hon. Minister of Finance for the tremendous job that she has done in presenting a budget that underscores the fiscal prudence that is required at this time, as well as satisfying the requirements and the needs of all the people who have put us here to serve them, as we take our country forward and as we continue to strengthen efficiencies and address the challenges of the our country at this time. Persons like the Member for

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Mayaro would have us believe that this Government continues to talk and to exude platitudes, when they themselves are such rich beneficiaries of the Government's implementing machine and when their constituencies continue to benefit from all that we do.

I would wish to spend the time that I have been allocated talking a little about what my ministry has been able to do over the last year and what we intend to do in the coming year.

**7.00 p.m.**

This budget today underscores the indispensable need that we have today, to recognize the responsibility that is ours, as we seek to manage in this time of diminishing revenues. There is a real sense today that in the budget that we just delivered—and we are all in support of, and as we ask the other side to support as well—we need to recognize more and more that this is a time when all the people of our country and all sectors of our community work with the Government to ensure that we continue to build a country where the goals of Vision 2020 are not just that of the PNM but represent that of every person of our country who strive to make our country better each day, by being responsible in what we do, what we say, and by ensuring that as we make our country more efficient and as we overcome our challenges one by one, that we take our country forward and attain the status that we all want on or before the year 2020. And that is why public administration sits at the centre of Government, playing a pivotal role in transforming Government.

It must be said that even as we go around addressing the requirements as we had in the Working Paper, discussing at the PNM political education meetings, about the need to strengthen—[*Interruption*] and soon there would be the university of Oropouche—promoting effective governance, requiring us to recognize the need to assess not just what we do, but how we go about achieving a number of things. There are so many areas of Government that we are required to look at to transform in order to make it more efficient. That is one of the reasons why as we seek to reform the public sector and we seek to bring about a new and enabling environment for us to be able to produce and be efficient. Even this morning, light was made of the Minister of Finance in her presentation, speaking about output budgeting. Some of the things that we have to underscore is that the current way we do the business that we do, does not oftentimes lead to the efficiency that we want, and as we move to output budgeting it will allow us, as Ministers, to account in a much more structured way for the work that we undertake as we go about managing our fiscal resources.

In public administration, we look towards supporting two of the pillars of Vision 2020: one is promoting effective governance, and the other one is investing in sound infrastructure and environment. I really, at this time, would like to say to the national community, it is high time that we start to put the Government's infrastructure agenda in perspective.

In fulfilling our mandate, we have had to look at some of the critical success factors that would lead to a stronger and more productive public sector. One of it has to deal with the spaces in which public officers work. We cannot expect people to be productive while they work in spaces that do not encourage the best output that they can give, and that is one of the reasons why, even as we build the buildings that are around us, looking to develop better places for public officers to work, we still require much more spaces in order to move public officers out of places where it is not as efficient and productive to both work and for the public to access. Also, it would lead to a better customer experience as people go to these places to access Government services.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, all of what we try to do in public service transformation is to create a better connect and an overall better experience for citizens accessing Government services, and that is why today, I want to encourage Members opposite, we have to start to tackle the inefficiencies of the governance arrangement in which we operate. We have to start to look to see how we could make what we do more efficient. Things like output budgeting, ministerial performance management framework; those are things that we have to continue to develop.

They are not pretty things, they are not popular things, but they are necessary as we seek to move the public service forward. Therefore, we have to transform many of our processes, that is why we have to move to a new property tax system and, to the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority. We have to underscore how important it is that we look at where in the public service there is duplication and inefficiencies and try to create a better alignment as we transform, not just the laws and the systems, but as we look at the structures, the procedures and indeed, tackle the mindset of persons as we work in Trinidad and Tobago, to ensure that people themselves are in a place where they too can add value to what we do.

In fact, just a couple of days ago, I met with all the human resource practitioners in the public service. Together with some of my ministerial colleagues, we began to dialogue with them as we seek to move into strategic human resource management across the public sector, looking at how we could partner those who are responsible for ensuring that the public service operates efficiently, as we work with them to find ways in which we can together, move the public service forward.

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Another critical area that we need to focus on is leadership development. Trinidad and Tobago, like so many other Caribbean countries, have to develop our leaders and build capacity in the public service, and I would speak a bit about that as I go along. We are committed to an enhanced human resource management framework that, as I said, would engender, lead or allow persons to take more responsibility as we create efficiencies and effectiveness throughout the service.

A couple of days ago I had interactive discussion with some human resource practitioners, and we underscored with them the importance and the role that they would have to play as we go forward in the public service, but some of the archaic systems that we operate in have to change. We are stymied and that is one of the reasons why in the discussion on the working paper, one of the areas that the Prime Minister spoke about in the public education rallies, is about looking at the Service Commission. We have done it in the police service and we need to strengthen a number of our systems to ensure the public service is one of the places where as a human resource practitioner, the human resource methodologies cannot lead to the efficiencies that we need, and so we have to look at it.

We have to look at the systems in which we operate and deal with it in a proactive way. As a consequence, we are looking to develop a human resource policy for the public service, and as we develop that policy, speak to the kind of legislative changes and regulatory framework that we would have to engender in order to move the public sector forward with strong and enhanced human resource capacity and practitioners.

Also, this morning, the Leader of the Opposition spoke about IHRIS. IHRIS was implemented a couple of years ago and as yet we have not been able to unravel the full potential of IHRIS, but we have just renewed our focus on IHRIS. It has been working quite well in terms of its payroll function, in terms of its human resource support functionalities; we are in the process of revamping it. IHRIS would be one of the programmes that would now be rolled out in all human resource units to ensure that we have an interactive system that will enable human resource practitioners to be of greater value in using an application to help them do their jobs better.

The public service is a place where we manage approximately 83,000 workers at this time; it is a sizeable workforce; it is a significant impact on the operation of Government. So, when we look at operating spaces that would be productive, even what we have constructed now is only a drop of what we require going forward. Persons need to not only be productively employed, they need to be supported; they need to be tooled; they need to be in a place where they can be the

kinds of workers that the citizenry demand of them, and that is why I would like to publicly commend the Personnel Department and the CPO, because they have had to maintain a climate of industrial peace across the public service for these 83,000 workers and all the representative bodies that negotiate on their behalf.

In fact, the Personnel Department has been able to conclude a number of collective agreements and have done remarkably well in ensuring that the public service moves forward in a productive way. Now, they are looking at such frameworks as competency management, ensuring that as the single largest employer, we develop modern techniques and tools in dealing with creating the type of public service we need moving forward.

This is one of the places where, as we manage a public sector, that is steeped in a regulatory framework that oftentimes and in some measures, no longer relevant to what we have to do that they have managed and managed well. So, in the future, in the next fiscal year, they have already developed a TOR that they are going to be sending out, to look for a consultant to come and assist in developing a competency based management policy framework.

As the Minister of Finance announced in a budget speech, pensions—and there was a debate some time ago where the Members for Tabaquite, Oropouche East and Couva South, raised the issue of pensions and pension reform. I think the Minister of Finance has enunciated certain enhanced arrangements for public officers that would make them understand that the Government has been able to introduce new measures that would enable more and more persons in the public service to have a type of arrangement that not even people in the private sector currently have. Public officers have already been expressing their delight in some of those areas.

Portability: If you were to leave the public service you could take your pension arrangements with you. You cannot do that in the private sector. In fact, in most places when you leave in the private sector you have to now pay for your own pension. Accruals: You could accrue beyond your two-thirds. Vesting periods are shorter now; it was five years, it is now two years.

So, public officers understand that their pension arrangements have indeed been enhanced, but more importantly, when we put in the new systems, public officers will be able to receive their pension as they leave the service. It is not now that way, and people have had to suffer for years waiting for their pensions.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, that is why these are not glitzy things, these are workmanlike arrangements that would create the kind of efficiencies that the

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Minister spoke about in her budget presentation. That is why these are things that, as Ministers, would require us to work hard to ensure that as we create a better officer who feels more supported and who feels certainly more enriched by their job experience, will in turn become persons who would provide better services to citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. I really would like to commend the Ministry of Finance in bringing these enhanced pension arrangements for public officers.  
[*Desk thumping*]

As I indicated before, when people ask—and it really irks me when people ask—us to produce a number of things but do not want us to spend to produce it. I do not understand how they expect to get it. Take for example, right now all the buildings that we are putting up: the Government campus, the Waterfront, Chancery Lane, Tobago Financial Complex, when you look as to what we pay now for the lease arrangements for Government, we spend upwards of \$200 million, not to mention the cost of outfitting, currently now a backlog of 120 requests for lease rental spaces, with all that we currently have outside there, and each building we get.

**7.15 p.m.**

We took a couple of buildings recently and each building will cost, sometimes, upwards of \$15 million to \$20 million to outfit. It is therefore more prudent for Government to own its facilities so that we own our infrastructure, and as we fix up these buildings it is money that we could benefit from in a longer vesting and value for money initiative. As a consequence, the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago needs to understand that we need to create structures where public officers can work and operate more efficiently and that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago receive better value for money in its output and in its spending.

Madam Deputy Speaker, to that vein during the next fiscal year the Properties and Real Estate Division will be putting in a system which will allow it to track and to create a better mechanism to underscore how we manage our lease rental and how we are able to create a better value for money proposition going forward. There is one area that I have a get pleasure in reporting to this House and to the national community and that is in the area of our Scholarships and Advanced Training Division, Ministry of Public Administration.

This Government seeks to develop innovative people to build capacity as we take our country forward. In the last budget in fiscal '09 the Minister of Finance indicated that we will be giving scholarships to persons who attain First Class Honours graduating in September '08. I am pleased to report to this House that

currently we have 55 persons on that scholarship. [*Desk thumping*] At this time we have upwards of 3,000 persons in the scholarships system. [*Desk thumping*] We spent approximately \$200 million on scholarships at that time.

In fact, last year we were able to offer six scholarships to persons who were differently-abled. [*Desk thumping*] We have nine persons on scholarships in the area of sport; we have 23 persons in the area of development; we have 25 persons on medical scholarships; we have 15 persons in the area of social work in related areas. So the list, can go on and on. This year we have over 300 scholars returning to take up their place in Trinidad and Tobago to work for the Government in the fulfilment of their obligation, contrary to others who say that most of the scholars do not come back. The majority of them are back, are productive and are employed. [*Desk thumping*] In fact, we went further to create in fiscal '09 an Associate Professionals Programme to ensure that all scholars as they returned are employed in areas relevant to their training and all scholars were employed and are currently in the system working in fulfilment of their obligation.

As I said, our total expenditure for fiscal '09 was approximately \$197 million and it will be upwards of \$200 million for fiscal 2010. There was a media report about some scholars who did not get their moneys in time, as a consequence, in fiscal 2010, the Scholarship and Advanced Training Division has launched a programme where they are now paying scholars directly through a debit card. So, as a consequence, the long process of scholars getting money through the missions abroad have now been circumvented where they are now receiving their moneys directly into an account that they have access to. [*Desk thumping*] We are a Government that listens; that takes action; that implements and gets the job done. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, I can talk on and on about the work at the Ministry because we are now retooling some of our divisions. Our Public Service Academy for example, we are now shaping it to provide more relevant training to today's worker in the public service to ensure that public officers remain at the cutting edge of where they are able to provide efficient service to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, in that regard, I too, wish to pay my respects and express my condolences to a retired public officer, someone who has served this country as an economic advisor, as a retired Permanent Secretary and we pray that eternal rest be granted upon the soul of Mrs. Patricia Robinson.

**Mr. Peters:** You sound better doing that.

**Hon. K. Swaratsingh:** It reminded me of a time when the public service was the preferred place to work. Many eminent persons came out of the public service:

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the late Frank Barsotti; the late Frank Rampersad and others and, of course, the late Patricia Robinson. The public service is full of men and women who everyday, choose to come and work in the public service as opposed to the private sector because their genre, their esprit de corps, their reason for coming is simply because they want to serve and make Trinidad and Tobago a much more productive and efficient society. They love this country and they commit themselves everyday to serve in this country.

That is why, Madam Deputy Speaker, when we think in terms of what is required today in the public sector, we are required to develop the type of persons who could provide leadership of substance, who could provide direction that we are able to talk about customer service excellence, not only as a cliché, but as a way of putting people first and allowing persons to experience what we ourselves want to experience as citizens as we use the very services that we give. To that end, we have created in public administration a suite of services or a suite of service access that will give citizens that direct interface with Government in a much more relaxed and service-centered way.

Many of you listening and those here in the House would know of our ttconnect suite of services where we try to provide a one-stop-shop for persons who want to access Government services. In fact, as the Member for Mayaro was speaking, very soon we will be putting one in the Mayaro Sport Complex—

**Hon. Member:** Mayaro again, “geez”.

**Hon. K. Swaratsingh:** Yes—where citizens of Mayaro or constituents of Mayaro could access Government services in Mayaro so that they do not have to travel far. The whole aim of this is to ensure that persons could access Government services anywhere, anytime and at their convenience. What these centres provide are opportunities for us to have expanded hours of service so that you do not have to go to an 8.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m.—and of course be open on Saturdays as well. We have a centre currently in Princes Town, one in St. James, we have in Tunapuna, we have in Chaguanas and we have in Tobago.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you can also access Government services online. Currently, we have two Bills that are still before a Joint Select Committee and we need to bring one or two more Bills to ensure that we can then move to a full suite of accelerated e-services. So, by next year—during the course of this fiscal year we did a number of projects—you know when the Minister of Finance was making her presentation she underscored the role of ICT and what ICT has done and will continue to do for the Government. In fact, the ICT platforms are



significant enablers that will create an operating framework so that we can have the levels of efficiencies that we could not without it have had in the past.

As a consequence, the Government through its portals have now over 20 ministries connected and are going to be starting in fiscal 2010 some significant ICT projects which will allow the development of technology to support the Smart Card, and it would be remiss of me if I do not really say to my colleagues how important the work that you do to alleviate the difficulties and burdens that citizens have to go through. People make light of it. They look at the Minister of Social Development and tell him it is a “smart man card”, but he and his ministry, time and time again have tried very hard to ensure that the persons who require those services have access to them. That is why technology will continue to make that difference as we create a platform going forward.

**Mr. Sharma:** Minister, it was the hon. Minister who described the card as a “smart man card”. But more than that we would appreciate that Members of the Opposition did indicate this was happening and your Government said it was not happening, so let us be fair.

**Hon. K. Swaratsingh:** As a consequence, we have therefore taken steps to ensure that as you put down these systems that they operate efficiently and effectively and that the people of Trinidad and Tobago who require services such as what we are providing have access to them unfettered and unchallenged.

That is why at this time during the course of fiscal '09 we had indicated that in the Ministry of Public Administration we are moving to establish a solid ICT base so that all of Government could sit on a platform where it can be efficient. We have successfully therefore, moved our whole ICT division into a new company—igovtt—where we are now able to provide enterprise wide service to the ministries and by extension the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Let me just say for a minute that we, not only are satisfied that the ttconnect centre is the right approach, we will expand it to include a number of other approaches. In fact, by the end of this year to the beginning of next year we will be able to access government services via a mobile platform. We are in discussion at this time so that in fiscal 2010 we will have a call centre where citizens and members of the service can now access government services over the telephone. We are also ensuring that we complete phase two of our upgrade of our fast forward strategy so that we are able to provide end to end services online.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we are moving at a pace to ensure that at the end of the day citizens can now access services, and the reason why that is important is:

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think about somebody leaving Cedros to come to San Fernando and Port of Spain to get something done. That person can now stay where he or she is, access government services and have an interaction with government that is not now available or available now only in information—[*Desk thumping*]

We are focused on enhancing the quality of lives of our citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That is why the Minister's budget theme is so apt, because it requires of us therefore that we strengthen efficiencies and address the challenges in creating a more service-centred approach to citizens of Trinidad and Tobago accessing government services. As a consequence, we have signed a couple of MOUs. In December 2008 we have signed an MOU on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago with the Government of Singapore and I am pleased to announce that Cabinet has approved the engagement of IDA International Singapore and they will be in Trinidad and Tobago by the beginning of October to work on a three-year engagement with the ICT company to ensure that we put in and fulfil some of these contracts. In fact, the Minister in her budget statement even went so far to speak to a trade net project together with the ASYCUDA system in customs, together with the immigration system, together with what is happening in legal affairs.

We are streamlining all of our systems and processes so that when we network all of these things, citizens will then be able to access an enhanced service as we begin to bring about a different way of interfacing with the Government.

**7.30 p.m.**

In fact, in the Ministry of Public Administration through the diversity platforms, we would like to work to a point in time in the future, on or before 2012, where citizens therefore will use over-the-counter access in Ministries as the last resort, where their preferred opportunity with Government will be in their communities, it will be online. Think about somebody, who, after they have received their initial passport and new driver's permit, can now renew those instruments online and from anywhere in the world.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**Mr. Taylor:** Very good.

**Hon. Member:** [*Inaudible*]

**Hon. K. Swaratsingh:** Well, the first thing you have to do in WASA is to pay down that \$4 billion debt. Is it \$4 billion? [*Interruption*] That debt is holding back WASA in a big way, but the Minister of Public Utilities will deal with that. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Sharma:** What is the relation with that—*[Inaudible]*

**Hon. K. Swaratsingh:** That debt we inherited from 2001 is from "all yuh."  
*[Interruption]*

**Hon. Member:** From 1995 to zero.

**Hon. K. Swaratsingh:** Mr. Speaker, one of the things that the erstwhile Member for Mayaro spoke about as well, is the amount of radio stations and so on, that have proliferated the airways at this time. That came about as a deliberate strategy undertaken by this Government, and at this time therefore, we have over—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Hon. K. Swaratsingh:**—37 radio stations and a number of television stations. In fact, our mobile penetration rate at this time is about 150 per cent. We have one of the highest mobile penetration rates in the world and as a consequence, we also have one of the lowest rates of payment in the telecoms industry. As a consequence, Mr. Speaker, the liberalization of the telecoms sector has not only worked in the proliferation of what is available in terms of choice, it has also reduced the cost of using services in Trinidad and Tobago.

As we go forward, we currently have before Cabinet some amendments to the Telecommunications Act. We are going to be bringing a broadband strategy, because now that we are putting all infrastructure in place, it is for the persons to now begin the use these new platforms and become comfortable interfacing with the Government.

In fact, in some places in Tobago, Bon Accord, in the Low Lands Mall, Gulf City in San Fernando, we have about four of our self-serve kiosks already outside there for citizens to begin to touch and interface with; to get familiar with seeing a kiosk anywhere, that you have a shopping experience and you can use a kiosk to do a number of Government transactions. So you do not even have to go and interface or have any interaction, you can be in a mall and go in a kiosk and apply for a passport or do any type of government interaction and they have—*[Interruption]*

**Hon. Member:** Kiosk?

**Hon. K. Swaratsingh:** Yes, kiosk and there is a kiosk available at the Piarco Airport, so persons could look at and begin to touch and feel. Now, we cannot conduct those transactions online because again, legislative framework is not in place. But once it is in place, we are beginning to put all the things in place to have a fast roll-out.

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As a consequence, Mr. Speaker, we know that the new population will come into a different way of demanding services from Government. As a consequence, it is important now that we look to see how fast we can finalize our agenda in terms of our legislation, and ensure that we come up with a broadband strategy that would allow persons to interface with Government in a significant way.

In fact, there are a couple of things that I would like to talk about as well. Our new strategy will not only create greater efficiencies, but also would allow persons to choose how they wish to interface with Government. If that is not creating efficiency, then I do not know what is. We are therefore going to try to ensure that in fiscal 2010, our strategies include a process by which people begin to now, what we call, going to uptake and usage, and begin to take some of these new and enhanced provisions and work with them. To that end, one of the arguments that we have been having recently is what is our penetration rate in terms of our Internet and Internet users, and that is why Government—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Sharma:** [*Inaudible*]

**Hon. K. Swaratsingh:** "Boy, you are so sick eh." Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. Member for Fyzabad, please, the hon. Minister is making his contribution. I do not expect you to sit there and heckle him. I expect you to sit there in silence and listen to him.

**Hon. K. Swaratsingh:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and my apologies. At the end of the day, what we have to do is to understand that in bridging a digital divide in Trinidad and Tobago, we would also have to ensure that—in fact, the Minister of Education will speak to it I am sure in her contribution. We now have a number of schools with fully equipped computer labs, with wifi technology. We are now moving to roll out a number of different plans and alternatives for persons to connect with Government, and to access Internet via broadband. We are also moving very quickly to finalize our strategy, to roll out over the next couple of years, one laptop per child programme in conjunction with the Ministry of Education. [*Desk thumping*]

In India, there are programmes like hole-in-the-wall programmes, where children assist senior citizens who are not as computer-savvy in using computers to access and interface with Government. We hope and we feel that by furnishing children with a laptop, that they would take into their homes—and it is a way to fast track bridging the digital divide and ensuring that children will have the use of laptops, not just to do and to interface with the Internet, but also to ensure that we can put content on laptops and we can create curricula where children are able

to use their laptops. They would be able to access their school and stay anywhere in their school, that once the school becomes wifi and we are able to have a wireless system operating, then we are going to move very quickly to ensuring that over the next couple of years, we roll out this plan as we bridge the digital divide and create access to high speed Internet for all citizens in Trinidad and Tobago.

So, Mr. Speaker, in summary, in the Ministry of Public Administration, we will continue to focus in improving the efficiencies of our own Ministry, as well as that of the entire public service geared towards service delivery, geared toward ensuring that citizens have unfettered access and access at their convenience to Government's goods and services.

We have finalized our strategic plan and we will be sharing that plan as we go along, ensuring that we stick to what we have committed ourselves to accomplish in fiscal 2010. During the course of this year, we will be strengthening our HR capacity and systems, and creating a foundation for organizational performance excellence throughout the public sector, as we develop our leadership capacity and the pool of the next wave of leader in the public sector who will lead a cohesive and efficient public service. We will finalize and continue to strengthen our ICT environment which will be a critical enabler for the efficiencies that we want to see engendered in the public service.

Mr. Speaker, in the Ministry of Public Administration (MPA), we are walking the talk. Taking the lead from the Office of the Prime Minister with the initiative for the ministerial performance measurement, where we manage and measure our own performance and look to see where we can increase our efficiency, [*Desk thumping*] where we could do better and where we can use what is allocated to us, using it efficiently and effectively.

Mr. Speaker, with these few words, I wish to commend the Minister of Finance and commend this budget to all in this House. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Nizam Baksh** (*Naparima*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I join this debate at a time when it can be said in local parlance, "We reach. We finally reach." To some it will mean that we are finally at the bottom of the pit.

**Mr. Manning:** What do you mean by that?

**Mr. N. Baksh:** To some, we are at the dead end, brought here by the PNM. To some in the PNM, they will agree that we have reached and they will say very proudly like the hon. Minister of Finance, that this is the part of Vision 2020. They will say we reached the mountain top. We are finally sitting on a city on the

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hilltop and everything is fine in Trinidad and Tobago. But, Mr. Speaker, to the less fortunate and families of those that were murdered under the leadership of the PNM, they say we reached. We have reached to a state that jeopardizes the foundation of families, communities and the national community.

Mr. Speaker, under the PNM government, we have reached a level where traffic violence, homicides, sex crimes, corruption and bribery, criminal gangs, corrupt police service, poor health and education services, disintegration of families, flooding, high food prices, and to the Government that is out of touch with people of this country. Life—people at the order of the daily life in Trinidad and Tobago. This is how far down hill we have reached and are still going fast.

Mr. Speaker, my opening remarks with my theme "We reach" leads me directly to the number one problem of this country, crime. Crime in this country is similar to a raging inferno gone out of control. Crime has instilled fear and has had a demoralizing effect on every member of our society. As of September 09, 2009, the total number of murders in this country has been 362 and still climbing rapidly. Given the trend since last year and the latter part of the year, I could well foresee that this trend will continue and even get higher than last year.

Before I focus on the damages and the debilitating effects of crime on the national community, I would like to say that the entire country is disappointed and dissatisfied with the generalizations and lack of specifics on crime, which the hon. Minister of Finance outlined in her 2010 budget. This is the main issue that the people hoped would have been addressed fundamentally. She has failed to give any assurance to the national community that the PNM could handle the number one fundamental problem in this country.

The Minister treated the most critical problem that we have with utter disdain and neglect. In a very slipshod manner, the Minister seemed to have avoided issues on crime because these will reveal Government's inability to deal with crime. She seemed to have operated on the belief that the less you say on crime, the less you will be criticized. Crime is not only destroying the lives of individuals, families and communities, it has caused a self-imposed curfew. Citizens no longer participate in voluntary group meetings which are convened in the night. Crime has caused our village councils, religious organizations and sport groups to become defunct in the country.

Mr. Speaker, a country must develop its ability to control crime. Crime must be dealt with at the lowest level. Crime must not be allowed to graduate from one level to another or from the simple to the complex areas as we are witnessing.

**7.45 p.m.**

In this simplest form, errant drivers use the shoulders of the highway as lanes to move ahead in traffic. This lawlessness has become a norm on the nation's highways. Law abiding citizens cringe when they obey the highway code and see others flout this same code with impunity. Drivers drive on the shoulders because of a lack of police presence on the nation's roads. With the current spate of crimes in various forms and horrendous fashion, it is feared that the PNM Government is unable to control crime.

Mr. Speaker, in our local print media on July 17, 2009, the hon. Minister of National Security indicated that he was under pressure, but if the hon. Minister cannot handle the heat, why does he not just get out of the kitchen? Within the last few months criminal activities conducted by members of the police service seem to have accelerated considerably. Incidents of these activities include the police officer caught renting his pistol to unauthorized persons to carry out criminal activities; guns and drugs being found hidden in the office of a senior police officer and evidence used in criminal cases, which was supposed to be destroyed, being found in an officer's home.

There are many other blatant examples of police misconduct. In recent times there was the robbery of a casino in Duncan Village by uniformed police officers; the confession of an escaped prisoner that he was freed by a police officer who had accepted a bribe and the unauthorized removal of a police vehicle by a policeman with less than one year's service. A police officer from a special unit in the service is now under investigation after reporting that he was attacked by bandits while driving home and robbed of court documents and his service revolver. An investigation was launched after the stolen gun was taken to the headquarters by a Marabella businessman who said that he had found it in a bar. Mr. Speaker, what do you think of that? He definitely was not sober. Thank God we still have honest citizens. In one of the latest incidents, two police officers were taken into custody on September 08, 2009, after they were reportedly found burning exhibits from a recent court case.

I have quoted these cases to emphasize that something is radically wrong in the police service. Those who were entrusted with the responsibility to protect and serve are themselves engaged in serious crimes. The Acting Commissioner of Police must expedite criminal matters in which police officers are involved, as one measure of getting rid of rogue officers and building the confidence of the public.

The public is left to conclude that there might be organized cliques in the police service under the control of senior officers who provide protection. How

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then could this country expect that crime would be controlled, when we have a corrupt police service? Perhaps the time has come to disband the police service—some say there will be less crime if they do that—and restart the recruiting process. [Laughter] You know there is a saying that leopards cannot change their spots.

Within the last few months the hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs made several announcements about the innovative community centre development programmes. In one instance, on August 13, at a post-Cabinet news conference, the hon. Minister made the following statement, and I quote:

"I have the pleasure to inform that Cabinet today approved an investment of \$272.5 million for construction of community centres in 43 communities across the country, by the year 2010."

She went on further to say that:

"The 92 community centres we are building are well distributed in both Government and Opposition territories."

She went on further to identify the names of the 43 areas where these centres would be constructed. I have perused the entire list and I came up with the figure. Out of 43 communities, only 13 were represented by the UNC. This, in my view, is highly skewed and shows disregard for the non-PNM supporters of this country, which is a routine practice of the PNM. This practice is reflected in almost every sphere of Government activity. It is evident in the distribution and maintenance of roads, the distribution and allocation of social programmes, health and educational services and funding to the local government. Even basic necessities, such as a reliable water supply and homes, are denied to these areas traditionally seen as non-supporters of the PNM.

I am aware of the importance of community centres, as part of a nation's thrust for developed status. The community centre is vital to the environment which surrounds it. As the needs of the people in these areas grow and develop, change and improve, the community centre is expected to undergo changes. Singapore and Trinidad and Tobago commenced community centre development programmes in the same year, or thereabouts, yet Singapore's centres have undergone major transformation, including dozens of sporting arenas, sound proof air-conditioned rooms and the use of various types of classes and special recreational activities for the elderly, while our community centres are lagging behind; and we speak of Vision 2020.

Mr. Speaker, I have been told that there is a total neglect of managerial systems in Government's current thrust toward the community centres development programme. I have been told that management structures are in place to manage and operate



new community centres. We are almost certain that these will become white elephants. Imagine the cost of a new community centre is estimated at over \$5 million, and they do not have management systems in place. All new centres are fully air-conditioned, yet village councils are unable to pay the utilities bills, because systems are not in place. Mr. Speaker, T&TEC has already started to disconnect electricity supply for community centres in different parts of the country. This type of managerial inefficiency could lead to chaos and confusion, with respect to programmes perhaps being conducted at community centres.

The carnage on our nation's roads is of extreme concern to every citizen of this country. Within recent times, multiple deaths from vehicular accidents seemed to have accelerated. The statistics are disturbing and alarming. As of September 02, 2009, there were 139 deaths as a result of vehicular accidents. The recent deaths of five citizens at Mosquito Creek in La Romain, in what can only be described as a sad and unfortunate incident, negatively changed the lives of families affected to such an extent that they may never fully recover or come to terms with their loss.

When driving on the highways especially, one cringes with fear when one experiences the speed at which vehicles drive. Fully loaded trucks, lorries and buses, exceed by far the maximum speed limit. Because of the lack of police presence on the highways, this practice will continue.

The hon. Minister of Finance introduced a 500 per cent increase in traffic offences for speeding, driving on the shoulders of the nation's roads and lack of seat belts in vehicles. These provisions are tantamount to high profile rhetoric, which is intended to hoodwink the citizens of this country. From the outset, these provisions would be plagued with enforcement problems, with the lack of police presence on the nation's roads. Will the dysfunctional blimp be used to catch the offenders?

By the way, what about the eye-in-the-sky and the 360 degrees radar systems? Are they functional? We need to have the CC television cameras installed at traffic light intersections. We need this on the highways to trap the speedsters, and these images must be accepted in the courts as evidence, as practised in developed countries. I anticipate that the practice of driving on the shoulders would continue, because of the lack of police presence on the roads.

Within the last few weeks, two children, one a toddler and the other 11 months old, died in vehicular accidents in which there were multiple deaths. In both instances, the children were not secured in car seats. The Minister of Finance announced in the budget that legislation would be introduced within the 2010 financial year. The lack of consideration, as displayed by this Government, towards the

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amendments and enactment of children legislation, leaves me with no confidence that this promise would ever be fulfilled. While they are fiddling with the children legislation, children are dying, and they do not show any remorse or concern.

To date, the DNA Bill, the Children's Community Residences, Foster Homes and Nurseries Bill, the Children Bill, the Status of Children Bill, and even the Breathalyzer Bill, have not yet been proclaimed. The Government knows that without proclamation this legislation cannot become, and will not be treated, as law. Why the delay? Is it that they do not care for the people of this country, especially our children or is it because of their uncaring attitude and incompetence that these bills cannot see the light of day?

Under transport, I just want to touch on prison transport. While I am on the matter of the carnage on the nation's roads, I want to bring to the attention of this House the question of prison transport in Trinidad and Tobago. Prison transport vehicles leave the Golden Grove compound and transport prisoners to different courts in the country, only for their matters to be postponed. If the expenses related to this waste are estimated, I am sure the figures would run into millions. Could we not stop this wastage of taxpayers' money by establishing a court that could deal with postponement of matters, right there at Golden Grove? To me this is a simple solution to that problem. Could we not curb this waste of taxpayers' money?

Apart from this, the vehicles and police escort which are engaged in the transport of prisoners seem to operate as a law unto themselves. These vehicles exceed the speed limit on the nation's roads and drive recklessly, as they break all the traffic rules. I would like to know if these vehicles are authorized to operate in this manner. The Minister of National Security must explain the reasons prison transport vehicles infringe the traffic regulations on a daily basis. With regard to transport, why are our prisoners being treated like the Prime Minister and other dignitaries?

I want to touch, very briefly, on flooding, as it affects my constituency as well. Year after year, Government announces grandiose flooding mitigation programmes in the annual budget statement, in response to damages and destruction of flooding during the previous year. The budget is no exception in respect of flooding in the 2010 budget presentation. The hon. Minister of Finance said, inter alia, that studies were being conducted in several areas prone to flooding, that works have started in several areas to address flooding and river clearing works are in progress in several areas.

Flooding affects this country during every rainy season. Why are studies on flooding now being mounted? We on this side have grown accustomed to listening to

the PNM's big paper policies, which never materialize. They have many plans of what they propose to do to reduce damage and destruction caused by flooding, from north to south and east to west in Trinidad and Tobago, yet in the dry season, when the weather is amenable to mitigation projects, hardly anything is done.

Year after year Government's lack of initiative to arrest the flooding problem causes a wide range of collateral damage to citizens and property.

We see vivid pictures and read plaintive stories in the media of citizens who have suffered a loss of everything from flooding. Do you know how it feels to regress and to recall the sweat, toil and sacrifice it took to accumulate personal belongings which have been destroyed? Can we empathize with the demoralizing situation which flooding places on some of our hardworking citizens?

**8.00 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, this Government does not care about the hurt it inflicts on the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. What we had been promised in the 2009 budget has not materialized and we anticipate that what will be said in the 2010 budget as well will remain the same. So therefore, citizens will continue to experience flooding we have been experiencing over the years.

It was said that the East-West Corridor was flooded, residents of Caroni were flooded and this has happened in areas of Naparima, Siparia, Oropouche West and East. I recall my colleague, the Member of Parliament for Oropouche East, visited those who suffered from flooding, and in the case of Leela Samaroo and her daughter, Maltie, in Debe, I would like the citizens of this country to be the judge; they must speak out.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to touch on the social programmes. At present, the main social benefits given to citizens are as follows; the Senior Citizens Grant, Public Assistance Grant and Disability Grant. The Senior Citizens Grant is \$1,950 per month and the ceiling for that is \$2,800 per month.

Mr. Speaker, the NIS pension of \$2,000 is exempted for the purposes of income tax; this pension has been earned from personal contributions. It should also be exempted as a measure for a citizen to qualify for the Senior Citizens Grant. So just as we are exempted from the income tax, similarly we should be exempted for purposes of the Senior Citizens Grant, and this is a strong recommendation I would like to make here.

Mr. Speaker, we saw on the newspaper where bandits target \$100 million in TTPost cheques and this is a concern.

**Mr. Speaker:** For the information of all Members, I had, prior to the summer break, indicated to Members that reading of speeches would not be allowed. I hate to do this to the hon. Member for Naparima but I intend to enforce this rule.

I have been criticized for several years for allowing Members to read speeches. The newer Members have had two years in the House, in the case of the Member for Naparima, he has been here longer than that and I intend to enforce the rules.

For the benefit of Members, the rule says:

"Except with the leave of the Speaker, a Member shall not read his speech, but he may read extracts from written or printed papers or books in support of his argument and may refresh his memory by reference to notes."

And in May's it says:

"In principle, a Member is not permitted to read his speech but he may refresh his memory by reference to notes."

It is basically the same thing.

"Similarly, a Member may read extracts from documents but such extracts and quotations should be reasonably short. The purpose of this rule is to maintain the cut and thrust of the debate which depends upon successive speakers meeting in their speeches to some extent the argument of earlier speeches.

Debate is more than a series of set speeches prepared beforehand without reference to each other."

I have been criticized as a Presiding Officer of this House by commentators in the press that I have allowed Members to read speeches.

I have warned Members on several occasions, the last being prior to the summer recess about reading speeches. I intend to enforce the rule and that applies to all Members of this House. So Hon. Member for Naparima, try your best not to read. You would know basically what you have written, obviously you can refresh your memory.

I will allow Members where you have something technical to say that requires reference to notes to make reference to the notes and I have had on certain occasions in the Eighth Parliament, a particular Member making such a request. The rules provide for it.

As I said, I am sorry really to do this to you of all persons, but try your best and see if you can observe the Standing Orders.

**Mr. N. Baksh:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, I will take note of your concern. I was making reference to the social programmes and I made reference to the Senior Citizens Grant and was just about to mention where senior citizens were losing their cheques while the postman is delivering; bandits are robbing them on the way.

I am making this point in the context that when these cheques are lost, it takes six months before the senior citizens could recover that fund. There is a waiting period as you know that cheques cannot be issued to replace those that are missing and this poses hardship on those citizens. So I am suggesting to the Government that we should find a way out to assist these citizens and perhaps another system of getting these payments to them.

Also, I want to raise the issue of disability grants. Those persons between 18 to 65 years receive this grant and there are instances when you reach the age of 65, you are statute barred from receiving this grant. There are persons who fall within that category and are unable to access the Senior Citizens Grant for some reason or the other and there should be a way where these persons should continue to receive their disability grant when they are able to access the Senior Citizens Grant. If they fail to do that, then they have to revert to applying for assistance under the Public Assistance Grant.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make brief mention about the food card and we have heard some information from my own political leader about the food card and we have a concern with this. One year ago, the Minister said they were giving an increase in the food card, but this has failed to materialize.

I understand recently he was on the television indicating that it has not materialized. The point I want to make here is even though he has promised that this arrears will be forthcoming soon, you have to understand that money that was published about a year ago, if you receive it today, it is worth less than it would have been a year ago. So this is something of great concern to the people.

**Dr. Browne:** Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the hon. Member for his generosity in giving way. His concern is noted. If he had followed the programme, I do not know if he saw it, or the many releases that have come out in the last two weeks, he would recognize that a review exercise has been conducted on the programme, that review is comprehensive in nature and now properly eligible cardholders would be receiving the amounts.

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I am sure if the increases were granted before, Members such as yourself will complain that the wrong persons would have been receiving the increases. So I just want to fill in a bit of the blanks in terms of why that announcement was made, and it is properly eligible cardholders who will be receiving the increases as well as arrears.

Thank you.

**Mr. N. Baksh:** Thank you for the information, I am sure that this is helpful to all the Members on this side as well. In your response I would like to find out if everybody who got the card before are going to be beneficiaries of the arrears as well, whether they are going to be eliminated and is there a measure for that?

**Dr. Browne:** Thank you, once again. The answer to your question is yes. Sometimes you quote from newspapers, et cetera, but I wonder if you read all the articles? The reason this review exercise was conducted was to ensure that the right persons receive the increases and the wrong persons do not receive the increases and are moved off the programme.

**Mr. N. Baksh:** Thank you, again. Mr. Speaker, I have a concern there. You know these people are at the lowest rung of the economic ladder and they keep visiting us as Members of Parliament and they expect that we could make some representation on their behalf.

I have learnt that people who go to the office to make enquiries to access this food card, they are told they have to make an appointment and they are given a list with all the requirements and that appointment takes about two months. When they come in and give the information, it takes another two months for the field officer to complete an investigation because they visit the homes to speak to the neighbours and get further information on the applicant.

From that point, I understand it takes another three months before you can get a card if it is approved. So the process takes about seven months, and I would be happy if something can be done to short circuit this timeframe if that is so. I got this from persons who went there, so I take it as authentic.

Mr. Speaker, there is also another concern that I have that not everybody who applies gets approval. So if someone wants to make an appeal, I understand that person has to go back to the Supervisor from that district office who, in the first place, failed or turned down the person's application.

I am suggesting—because it is a case like Caesar onto Caesar—to the hon. Minister if he can put, like in the social welfare office another committee to look

at those who want to make an appeal and I think this will be transparent and fair to those who are aggrieved. This is something that is not difficult to implement.

Mr. Speaker, I understand too that there is a staff shortage in the social welfare office. I have people who say they apply, they go there and the district officers are on leave or no longer there and there is a vacancy and officers do not leave their own district to fill those vacancies and investigate in that area. So there is a backlog in certain districts and this is creating a hardship.

I understand too that there are contract officers and they are at different offices and are not authorized by law to conduct investigations of Senior Citizens Grant, just that particular application. And, therefore, that workload is transferred to the established officers and they are complaining about it as well and they are a disgruntled lot because they produce more, and the contract officers' salary is higher than theirs. Therefore, there is an anomaly.

We feel if they are working in the same office, whether you are on contract or a regular worker, there should not be a disparity like that. So therefore, at the end of the day, it is the people who are going to suffer, and as you see, it is those at the lowest rung of the economic ladder and they need the assistance more than anybody else. So we must do everything within our power to ensure that we give them whatever assistance we can.

The Minister of Public Administration spoke about the efficiencies that he is going to introduce and I think that this type of relationship should be improved so that the people will be satisfied. I have an example here. I want to make one or two recommendations with regard to the Social Welfare Division.

Since we are dealing with poverty, we have not said much with regard to poverty in the 2010 budget and this is an area that is expanding because of the economic situation in this country and people are finding themselves more and more in the poverty trap.

I want to recommend that the Government reduces the age of Senior Citizens Grant from 65 to 60 years. [*Desk thumping*]

### **8.15 p.m.**

They must also completely remove all NIS benefits from senior citizens grants qualifying income, because, you know, when you look at the items in the media, very often in the editorial page, people are complaining that if they are beneficiaries of the NIS, then some of them qualify for only \$150 Senior Citizens Grant or a maximum of \$800, and this cannot meet their cost of living. I am

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saying that if for some reason the Government does not want to remove the NIS benefit as a consideration for the Senior Citizens Grant, alternatively, they could raise the qualifying income ceiling, which is at present \$2,800 to about \$4,000 and this will help those citizens and, perhaps, make it easier and this could be something that could be implemented faster.

I would also suggest that the time in this country has reached, like in other developed countries, for citizens to benefit from a Senior Citizens Grant, in this case, once they attain the age of 60 years. This is something I am sure that we are in a position to do if we are very prudent in managing our affairs in this country. So I want to recommend this as a solution to the poverty trap we have in this country here.

Only recently we have seen some advertisements in the newspapers from T&TEC where they were offering discounts on electricity bills for recipients of Senior Citizens Grants, Disability Grant and public assistance who consume less than 400 units of electricity for two months. They can qualify for a 7 per cent discount on the first hundred units, which amounts to a \$1.82 and a 5 per cent discount on the other 300 units, which amounts to \$3.90, in total a meagre discount of \$5.72 for two months, which will be given to every senior citizen and public assistance recipient. That will amount to a discount of \$2.68 per month. This must be a joke at the expense of those elderly citizens. Two dollars and eighty-six cents cannot even buy a quart of bread. So this is something we have to look at; and all the money they are spending for this advertisement to show the adjustments on the bills and this sort of thing. We need to come better than that to assist the senior citizens.

Only recently in the budget, too, the hon. Minister of Finance increased taxes on alcohol and cigarettes. The hon. Minister indicated the amount of revenue that will be received from this tax they have increased. Cigarettes and alcohol are vices which we should be discouraging our citizens from using. Rather than using this as a tax to receive money into our coffers, we should have programmes in place to educate and advise them and to encourage them to stay away from these vices. [*Desk thumping*]

On the other hand, people who are hooked or are addicted to these substances would look at other avenues to satisfy their needs. I am sure that the illegal production of “babash” and “mountain dew” that we have heard about, would certainly come back; it is something we have to look at. So while we are doing one good to deter something, it creates other avenues. It is something we have to weigh when we are doing these things because you do not want this kind of trade



to flourish. This will also open the doors for contraband trade in illegal alcohol and cigarettes, so that this is something we have got to look at. I am certain that this will reach our shores similarly like the drugs, guns and the Colombians that we find every Monday morning here. It is something we have to be careful about.

I understand, too, that in many places we go to, we can see goods on shelves that do not have English language on them, so it says something; it is coming through the back doors and it is something we have got to look at also. While we are focusing on that, I wonder what happened to the 360 degrees radar system, whether this is helping at all.

I want to touch briefly on gambling, since the Prime Minister and the present Minister of Finance of this country made the following pronouncements on the PNM Government's policy on gambling. I quote here from the 2007 budget statement:

"We also propose to ban the importation and use of all slot machines. These measures will take place with immediate effect."

That was 2007. But slot machines are now found all over the place, in all those corner shops and nooks and crannies. So we want to know whether this is taking any effect at all, or whether the Prime Minister's word meant anything at all. So we need to look at this as well.

In addition to this, the Prime Minister went on to say in the said budget statement:

"As far as online gaming system is concerned, there will be no further expansion in the games offered and the Government is moving to eliminate the entire system."

It is rumoured that the online gaming system is conducted in many roadside cyber cafes and this is something we have to address, because we say that we are addressing something, but just like so many other issues that my colleagues have raised here today, the PNM only speaks about it, but they do nothing to address it. Their implementation record is very, very low.

In the Finance Minister's 2008 budget statement, the hon. Minister of Finance has stated, and I quote here:

"This honourable House and the national community will recall that last year the casino gambling industry was given a moratorium of five years to prepare for its imminent closure. This moratorium will not be extended. In addition, the Government has mandated the NLCB to review its operations with the specific aim of eliminating all its games of chance within the short term."

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She went on further to state:

"The new NLCB legislation will be laid in Parliament during the first quarter of the fiscal year."

With these types of promises, one would expect that gambling places will begin to show a decline in this country, but it is not so. If you drive through the country you will see more and more. There is a proliferation of these gambling places now. In fact, it has reached to the rural communities as well and this is disturbing. Gambling has now become a disease to which citizens are addicted. Gambling is increasing our poverty class in our country. The moratorium is up to 2012 when you check the five years, so we in this Parliament must examine the social implications which arise from gambling in our country.

The hon. Minister of Finance has not informed this House of progress to date in respect of Government's policy to wind down all forms of gambling by 2012. It is evident that gambling houses are increasing. Will the Government use the guillotine treatment as thousands of people will suddenly be on the breadline as they did with Caroni (1975) Limited? So we have to understand that if they are doing something, they must notify the people well beforehand. Do not use the guillotine treatment, and you hear they make a statement today and everything closes tomorrow.

I want to touch on some national insurance issues which, to me, are critical. I have reviewed the Seventh Actuarial Report of the NIB and I have also reviewed the 2008 Financial Report of the NIB presented to Parliament in February this year. I have found a number of critical issues which I would like to raise in this House with regard to the national insurance, but before I go into those issues I just want to set the background on the financial position of the national insurance. I read from the 2008 annual report, the chairman's review and the chairman is a very popular figure, Calder Hart. I quote:

"A strong performance from our investment portfolio resulted in an 18.9 per cent growth in the total funds and reserves, which stood at \$17 billion at the end of the financial year under review. The net average yield of 9.95 per cent over the last five financial years, signals that the NIB is not only well positioned to comfortably sustain the benefit increases implemented in January 2008 into the long term, but could confidently anticipate further increases in benefits as part of the ongoing review and reform of the national insurance system."

And I just want to emphasize that they said:

"...confidently anticipate further increases in benefits..."

I just want to look at one or two areas of concern. It further estimated that the Board has not paid out any moneys from the contributions collected from employers and employees. All they are paying out is from the investment they made, so that there is a lot of money there. This means that the board is either a good manager or that the rates are too high or one could also conclude that the benefits are too low or, alternatively, the contributors are not aware of their entitlements to benefit.

I want to raise the questions here—I am making these points because if we examine the last actuarial review, that is the seventh review for the period, we will see that several vital recommendations from the actuarial report are not implemented and I would just like to mention some of those that came out of the report.

With regard to survivors' benefits, a lump sum is paid to those citizens who do not make their 750 contributions prior to their retirement or death. Their survivors, that is, their spouse, children and parents, do not get a single cent in benefit. The seventh report recommends that 50 highest contributions be used to pay the survivors of a recipient of retirement grant.

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

*Motion made,* That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Dr. R. Moonilal*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Let me, at this juncture, congratulate you, because you should have been doing this thing for the last eight years. Continue.

**Mr. N. Baksh:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and colleagues.

I touch on another critical area here, sickness benefit. The NIB continues to use the 10 in 13 method. This practice deprives URP workers, seasonal and casual workers and all others—[*Interruption*] No, no, I am quoting from the Actuarial Report, just the headings. [*Crosstalk*] The report has recommended 15 weekly contributions in 36 weeks.

Another area I am looking at is the special maternity grant. The contributors who are unemployed are not contributing to this here and at present this is creating some difficulty because they could benefit from the spouse contribution in this regard. As a result, the recommendation has been made that a similar grant should be made available to the spouse on special maternity grant. This grant is

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\$2,500 which is given in a 24 month period, but at present the recommendation is that this grant should be given \$2,500 in 12 months. So that it is something that we have to look at and it should be addressed because this is part of the recommendations from the actuaries.

Then you also have the maternity benefit, in which they are continuing to use the 10 in 13 weeks contributions and that has been changed and the recommendation has been made for the 15 in 36 weeks. We are asking when will this be implemented? Because they are saying that, they have the funding for it.

You also have the funeral grant. At present no funeral grant is paid upon the death of a contributor's spouse or child. The report has recommended a \$5,000 grant be paid upon the death of the spouse or child and we are asking: why is this not being done?

**8.30 p.m.**

There are a number of issues that I am raising here which have been recommended through the actuarial report and the NIB has not taken cognizance of it. I am asking that these be looked at and considered. The board is in a very strong financial position. They admitted this. We should do something about this. There should be education programmes by the NIB to educate the citizens of this country on the benefits to which they are entitled. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to look at the early childhood care and education centres. The Government is embarking on a mammoth programme to build these centres. It is coming a little late, but we are happy that it is coming on board. I have some concerns with regard to the staff. I feel that for a school where you are dealing with little children, the staff should come from people within the community. There is a regional geographical area from where they expect the children to come and I feel that the staff should also come from that area. If you bring people from far there is going to be a problem. They will not be able to bond and socialize with these little children because they are like a mother for the children in that period.

It has also been observed that even though the teachers from the state-owned and state-assisted pre-schools are equipped with the same training opportunities, the teachers at the state-owned schools get a higher salary than those from the state-assisted schools. This is an anomaly as well. They have the same training but the salaries are different in those two situations. This anomaly should be addressed. In the case of the government schools, the teacher-student ratio is different from the government assisted school, where the student ratio is higher than the government school. This is something we need to address. In the government schools you have five teachers whereas in the government assisted

school you have only three teachers. The ratio is certainly different and this creates a problem with the teachers. Some of them complain that they do not have their lunch time to take their lunch because of the demand with the children at the school. I think that both schools have a school population of 50 each. This is something that we need to correct as well.

I am told that the government schools have security. They provide security as part of their programme but the government assisted schools are not provided with security. We know the situation that we are faced with in this country with regard to kidnapping and molestation of children and people taking up other people's children from school. It is critical that if we are doing something like this we must do it across the board, no favouritism or rules to suit so people could benefit. This is a reality. This is something with which we are faced. I am talking about the real issues on the ground and we should address them.

Only recently we had the free medical clinics by the US army personnel. They had these clinics in six areas in Trinidad, three in the North East and three in the South. I had the opportunity to visit two of these, one at Woodland and one at Barrackpore which is bounded to my constituency. I was able to see thousands of people who came to benefit from that free clinic sponsored by the US army doctors. They had areas of cataract surgery, general medicine, dental and optometry. From early morning while the clinic was opened at 8 o'clock, people were lining up from 4 o'clock because there is a demand. Because of the failure of our health system in this country people were turning to the US army doctors to get this treatment. People came out and they were happy. They spoke about the way they were treated when they went to these doctors and nurses, the kindness and politeness. They were comfortable and happy because it was something they never experienced in our health centres and medical institutions. This says something.

The Ministry of Health was part of it. I hope that they could take a leaf out of that and introduce a similar system here, even once in six months. The local health centres in the communities could have a similar clinic like this even on a trial basis to see what response we would get. It is something we have to address so that people will get the kind of service they need when it comes to health care.

I will touch one or two issues with regard to my constituency. It is an opportune moment to do this. One of the situations is not only in Naparima but all over the country and it is the problem of water. We are talking about 2020 vision. The basic needs should be met by the citizens of this country. I am making a strong appeal for the constituents of Naparima. Only recently there was a protest in Woodland in Cedar Hill where people were holding up barrels and buckets and showing they were empty. I

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understand that somebody said that he or she was unable to bathe for a week because there was no water. He or she could not go to the neighbour to get because the neighbour was in the same predicament. We need to address this issue.

I receive complaints, telephone calls and people visit the constituency office on a daily basis about the water situation. In the past we used to call WASA and get some assistance. Today, they are telling us that we should not be calling. The people should be calling because they want to get their bill numbers to see whether they are clients of WASA. Whether or not they are clients they are citizens of this country and they have a right to receive a water supply. This is the problem that we are facing, this kind of discrimination in so many different forms. We have to address this. One of the problems is the turn cocks because we experience it. Today you get water in one area, you complain to WASA and you get it in the areas that you complained about but then another area suffers. We need to do something to address this situation.

I have areas not only Solomon Street but also Realize Road. There is a major water problem in that area. There are some crossroads as Lengua, Borde Narve, Iere Village, Palmyra, Mount Stewart, Williamsville, Ben Lomond, and Reform where people complain on a regular basis. When they do get help you have to call the system. The Minister of Information, the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West spoke about systems they put in place. I would like him to call one of these government offices or agencies and hear the kind of response we get on the telephone. You hold on there for minutes and you seem to be transferred from one person to a next recording messages. Very often you have to leave a message on WASA's telephone to get assistance. This should not be so. We need to give the people the service.

In politics, once you fulfill the basic needs of the people such as road, water, lights and a good health service, after that politicians could do what they want. Once they fail to do this they will continue to get protests and the cries of people. It is not right. They should do something.

I also want to talk about roads. Usually at election time, sometimes I wish that election could come every two years because that is the time you get many of the roads paved. We have some roads that are really bad. They are getting worse on a daily basis. Some of these roads as Realize Road, Hope Road, GP Road, Iere Village Branch Road and Cunjal Road. I have been writing to the Minister of Works and Transport and the Minister of Local Government. We are not seeing results.

This morning when I was coming in a bad area in Lengua, they were taking materials that they dug out from other roads and coming to patch the road there.

This is not what it should be when you talk about 2020 vision. We are talking about world class status. We should really come better than that. I am making a strong appeal. I do not know how I could get this message across to the Minister of Works and Transport. We need to get some assistance in some of these areas. *[Interruption]* No, no, no. I know those roads by memory.

I am coming to the end. Some time ago I placed a question on the Lengua Presbyterian School to the Minister of Education and the response I got was that the school should start in July or thereabouts. We are in September now. I give her a gentle reminder that we are looking forward to the construction of the school. I would not go beyond that. Just a gentle reminder. I said that you have a budgeted allocation of \$35 million for the school and you have also given me a completion date if it starts in July. We are a little behind. Deliver something for the people of Lengua. I could go further but I would not now. I am raising the concerns of my constituents. I think this is the right place to do it.

Sometime ago when the Prime Minister was going around on the hustings, he was talking about how he will beat us in the East; beat us in the West; beat us in the North; beat us in the South and in Central too. I agree with him. The kind of beating that we are getting, he is beating us with a shortage of water; beating us with crime and beating us with the lack of roads. This is the kind of things with which we are faced. These are the kinds of things for which the communities are crying. If we do these then any politician would be in a good position. These are some of the areas in which he has beaten us and continues to beat us. How much further down can we reach when we talk about we reach?

As I close, I recognize that we must all work to improve and build mother Trinidad and Tobago. There is no plan. How are we going to do it together? There is no plan or direction in the budget to give any citizen confidence in the PNM to improve the performance and move Trinidad and Tobago forward together. The only thing this budget guarantees is increased government spending, high interest rate and no economic growth. They continue to spend and spend but the citizens are not the beneficiaries of what they are spending on. We need to rethink and re-look this.

I ask the question as I close: Are we happy with the performance of the Government?

**Members:** Yes.

**Mr. N. Baksh:** Are we satisfied with the quality of service we receive from state agencies and arms of the Government?

**Members:** Yes.

**Mr. N. Baksh:** If the answer to these questions is no then we must speak out.

**Members:** Yes.

**Mr. N. Baksh:** I am not talking to these people here, Mr. Speaker. I will let those people there answer the question. I rest my case with the citizens of this country.

Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs (Hon. Gary Hunt):** Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the budget of this term of governance of the People's National Movement. The Bill is entitled, Appropriation Financial (Year 2010) Bill 2009 in which I fully support. Allow me to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance for her very eloquent, far-reaching and insightful presentation of the national budget financial year 2010. [*Desk thumping*] As I sat on my seat listening to the contributions from our friends on the other side, in particular the Member for Couva North who commented that we have no ideological moorings, nothing could be further from the truth. You see he who knows and knows that he knows is a wise man, but he who thinks he knows and you know that he does not know, leave him alone, he is a fool. You understand. [*Laughter*]

The People's National Movement of 2009 operates from a vision document that is Vision 2020. Vision 2020 is contiguous to the ethos of our founding vision documents of the party from early as 1956, the People's Charter.

**8.45 p.m.**

I want to say to the others that we are not an ordinary party in the accepted narrow sense of the word. We are rather a rally, a convention of all, for all; a mobilization of all the forces in the community, cutting across race and religion, class and colour, with emphasis on united action by all the people in a common sense and cause.

You see, Mr. Speaker, we are not another of those transitory and artificial combinations to which you have grown accustomed in the election years, or another bandwagon of dissident and disappointed politicians each out merely to get a seat in the Legislature. We have a vision and that vision started since 1956. Vision 2020 emanated thereafter from the Chaguaramas Declaration of 1970 and the PNM's perspectives in the world of the 1980s and beyond and by a special convention in the year 2000, Vision 2020 was accepted.



Soon thereafter, in 2001, the PNM set in motion a process to ensure the achievement of Vision 2020. That resulted in a Draft National Strategic Plan, a very comprehensive document. The Member for Naparima did comment that we did not have a plan, so I have to educate him.

The committee that was set together drove a process that was unique in character and driven by hope, a love for country and recognition that we have the will, the means and the opportunity to build a developed Trinidad and Tobago. From the other side, all we hear is negativity, doubt, worry and fear. On this side, we preach a philosophy of faith, trust and confidence. We must have the courage to dream and to support breakthrough thinking and action if we are to realize our vision for Trinidad and Tobago. We can make it if we try and we owe it both to ourselves and to our children. Ensuring a bright future for Trinidad and Tobago is a responsibility we all share, including the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, the process that was initiated in 2001 was an exhaustive analysis of processes and a hybrid model was adopted to achieve Vision 2020. This relied heavily on an inclusive process. In other words, we had consultation throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago that paid close attention to the voice of the society. The model emphasized a collaborative approach to developing the Vision 2020 Draft National Strategic Plan.

To achieve Vision 2020, we operate on five pillars with the outer ring encompassing the will, resources and the skill; with inputs from the public sector, private sector, civil society and individual citizens. At the centre of these five pillars are an innovative people, effective government, sound infrastructure in the environment, competitive business and a caring society.

From the Draft National Strategic Plan, a multi-sector approach was taken where we had 29 sector reports and the one that pertains to the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs is the Youth, Sport and Recreation Multi-Sector Report. From this report, the National Sporting Policy emerged in 2002. The National Youth Policy emerged in 2004 and today I brought a copy of it. Last year, I was explaining to the Member for Oropouche West that we had it digitally, but I brought it today to demonstrate that it does exist.

We undertook a three-year strategic implementation plan for the Draft National Youth Development Policy. The vision for sport in the year 2020 is that sport will be the vehicle for human and national development, ensuring that our lives are enriched through total participation, healthy lifestyles, quality training, excellence and national success in sport. We will be a world-class sporting nation,

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satisfying local, regional and international needs while, at the same time, providing meaningful, sustainable employment and contributing to the national well-being. That is the vision for sport in the year 2020.

Also, we operate from another policy prescription and that is the youth policy. By the year 2020, Trinidad and Tobago will be a society in which young people are empowered to make informed choices so that they could lead meaningful, enjoyable lives and contribute to the sustainable development of Trinidad and Tobago.

After the final draft of the Youth, Sport and Recreation Report was adopted, the Government produced *Vision 2020: An Operational Plan 2007 to 2010*. It exists. It describes all areas of national life. The pillar under which the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs operates is “Nurturing a Caring Society”, which is Goal No. 6. All the goals are laid out in this operational plan.

We have recently produced a report as to where we are with the operational plan and our achievements. Goal No. 6 says that all citizens will have access to and participate in a sporting or recreational activity in keeping with the sport-for-all philosophy. This is the context in which we operate at the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs to achieve Vision 2020.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard from the hon. Minister of Finance that this budget is termed Strengthening Efficiency, Addressing the Challenges, Vision 2020. This speaks to maximizing the use of the country's resources, strengthening capacity, harnessing potential, prioritizing projects and improving the quality of service delivery to our citizens. This implies that we have to become more efficient and employ methods of accountability and transparency in all that we do.

Under the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, this calls for building sustainable and strong partnerships with our stakeholders, in particular our national sporting organizations. Being efficient also calls for the use of technology. The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs recently launched [www.msya.gov.tt](http://www.msya.gov.tt), a portal through which the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago can get information on all the projects, policies and programmes that exist and to be able to access service from the Ministry.

In fact, in 2010, we are moving to computerize most of our grant funding procedures and policies online whereas a person in Toco can log on to [msy.gov.tt](http://msy.gov.tt), put in an application either as an individual, a community sporting organization or a national organization on the sport side or on the youth side; a community youth group or a national youth serving organization. They would be able to enter all their information online; they would be captured at the Ministry and thereafter an interview process would take place where all the source documents would have to

be produced and we can move forward with giving facilities to all of Trinidad and Tobago in a timely and efficient manner.

Mr. Speaker, so the young man in Toco who wants to host a sporting event and is unable to access funding from corporate Trinidad and Tobago and wants to do so from the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs can do so through [msya.gov.tt](http://msya.gov.tt). In 2010, we will partner with the Ministry of Public Administration with [tconnect](http://tconnect) so that we would also offer those services on that IT platform. The person in Toco, Sangre Grande, Couva North and Oropouche West does not have to travel to Port of Spain to access services from the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs.

We are ready to face our challenge. The Ministry will seek to improve efficiency in the delivery of its sport and youth services by prioritizing its services, projects and programmes creating a result-based management culture, accelerating its monitoring and evaluation systems and utilizing a design/build approach as an efficient way of infrastructural implementation.

As Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, I am very pleased to present the key accomplishments of the Government through youth and sport. Our achievement was no easy feat. We have laboured for many long hours at the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs trying to improve our processes and service delivery to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. We have been nurturing the tenets of sound policy prescription, namely the sport policy and the youth policy.

Our youths are the most valuable asset and worthy of investment by the national community since they are our future. Youth development is a mechanism for securing the growth and development of the country. Youth development has been a priority for successive PNM governments since Independence. All of us who sit on this side of the Chamber and, indeed, on the other side have been the beneficiary of the youth policies that have been pursued by successive PNM governments since 1962.

The implementation of the National Youth Policy has, incidentally, 15 courses of action and has been established since 2004. The National Youth Policy and the method employed in its implementation has been identified as an international best practice by a consortium of international agencies, which include UNESCO, the OAS and the CYP. The youth policy has been identified as an international best practice by the rest of the world.

Later this year, in November, we will travel to South America to present the implementation strategies that the Government has been employing in rolling out the National Youth Policy. The world has begun to take notice of the roll out,

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Vision 2020. The other side is saying that we do not have a plan and a vision. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The National Youth Policy is very dynamic since it is informed by global issues and technological change as well as the emergence of the new work organization based on the development of a knowledge and skill-based society. This policy provides significant support for institutions and systems such as the family, the community, the school and religious and other organizations which strengthen and sustain youth development.

Mr. Speaker, the Government is touching and impacting on the lives of our nation's youth on a very grand scale. My heart is always gladdened with the many success stories of youths who were headed in the wrong direction and who took a positive direction because of being exposed to government youth programmes.

Recently, I witnessed a graduation ceremony at the California Youth Development Centre, where we engaged 30 youths who were on the wrong path. They were brought to our centres; they did not perform well in formal education. They were trained in vocational skills at the centre—carpentry, masonry, plumbing and beauty culture. We conducted a graduation ceremony where they were awarded national skill certificates and given tool kits to go out into the world to pursue a course of life that was different to when they started in those youth development centres. To hear the testimonies of the various students in that graduation ceremony was heart-rending. The good work that the Government is pursuing with youth is second to none in this part of the world.

The level of youth programmes that we offer through the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago cannot be matched by other territories in this region. In fact, at the Fifth Summit of The Americas, at the youth forum that preceded the formal summit and the culmination and delivery of the youth declaration, the youth were outlining all of the things that they the youths of the Americas saw as challenges that they had to face and they were asking us to take corrective action.

**9.00 p.m.**

I stood at that forum and was very happy to report that of all the concerns that they had outlined, Trinidad and Tobago is well on the way to addressing all those concerns.

In fact, the Secretary of Labour of the United States of America, who was privy to our HYPE and MuST programmes offered by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education was amazed to see the level of programming that is available to the youth of Trinidad and Tobago, to impact on their lives and create new futures.

One of our hallmark projects for 2009 was the National Youth Month. This year, the theme was: Achieving the Dream. We had 11 projects rolling out of this particular National Youth Month, 2009. I would like to highlight six of the 11 projects. We had a business person forum, which was utilized as a medium for business persons, organizations, as well as small and large companies to share their experience and knowledge with young budding entrepreneurs. In other words, we had business leaders from all sectors of our society sharing their techniques and imparting good, positive values on youth who are desirous of pursuing some aspect of business or entrepreneurship.

We also had faith days. Given the present crime situation in the country, the message emphasized at those faith days was that the youth should use their talents to glorify God, start focusing on positive and put down the gun. At those faith days, we had attendance in excess of 1,500 youths from across Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, they were saying to us that they want to walk the right path and we were making the opportunities available to them.

National Youth Rally: The Government of Trinidad and Tobago understands that the common currency of youth is music. Our National Youth Rally was in recognition of this fact. It was held at the Eastern Regional Sports Arena. We had attendance of over 1,500 people. The rally showcased all genres of music and culture by young persons and showcased a mixture of the strength of youth; another success.

We also had a rediscovery inventory tour, which was held in Arima. In this tour, we had participation in excess of 700 youths. It was an activity that provided an opportunity to work together to discover important historical sites and central government services in the Borough of Arima. The tour was conceptualized to achieve the dream of participation and knowledge.

Roundtable discussions: We also had discussions with leaders and prominent figures throughout Trinidad and Tobago. The figures were chosen by the youth; the important individuals who they wanted to meet. Those included the hon. Prime Minister; the Vice-President of FIFA; the hon. Chief Secretary, the hon. Minister of Local Government and the hon. Minister of Finance. The young people wanted the opportunity to meet face to face with these leaders and to impart, on a one-on-one basis, their concerns and their needs. Again this was very, very successful.

We also had a National Youth Assembly, which seeks to encourage our youth to engage and become more involved in every sphere of life such as politics, social and economics. In other words, what we had done was to create a simulated Parliament-type situation, where we had representatives from all the various

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constituencies of Trinidad and Tobago. They were elected by a ballot process. We held a parliamentary-type debate, where they debated very topical issues of the day. The debate at that time was on regional integration as it impacts on the socio-economic benefits of the youth of Trinidad and Tobago. It was very, very invigorating to see the youth of Trinidad and Tobago in a very healthy debate across the floor from each other, exchanging ideas. Never did their debate descend into personalities. They would have opposing views and they would try to create situations where they would go into policies and always create an alternative. They presented to each side what was, in their view, the alternative idea. They were very mature. They never condemned one another. It was very encouraging to see the future of politics in Trinidad and Tobago right before our eyes.

Youth Month 2009 was a resounding success. Another unique feature of Youth Month 2009 was that a delegation from India came to our shores. They were invited by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. They were also involved in all the activities of Youth Month, sharing and exchanging ideas with the youths of Trinidad and Tobago.

I would also like to take this opportunity to inform this House that the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs had piloted a very innovative programme during Youth Month 2008. It was a film series entitled “Not in ah Dat”, which was broadcast on national media depicting young people reforming themselves from troubled paths. This particular project was showcased at the Caribbean Film Festival in Toronto this year. It was identified as a very effective communication tool for social change. Again, the world is taking notice of the projects that we are doing in the role of our National Youth Policy, which is consistent with our 2020 objective.

National Youth Survey: In an effort to find out what motivates our young people, we need to carry out empirical studies of their moods, needs and wants to be able to design policy prescription to address those situations. This is an ongoing project, as we speak. The data will be forthcoming and from that data, we would be able to design even more innovative projects to address the situation of our youth; a restructured delivery system for our youth service.

Consistent with the National Youth Policy, we are moving towards restructuring the delivery for our youth services, which implies that we need to move towards achieving a National Youth Council of Trinidad and Tobago. In the Budget presentation of 2009, I had articulated that we will be working towards that, we have now achieved that milestone and we move to the next level where we are proposing a possible Youth Company of Trinidad and Tobago; a special purpose vehicle to be able to address the youth situation. The youth is a very fast-

moving sector, which is changing and evolving day by day and is very much in touch with technology. We need something that can address their situation and needs in a very timely manner. That work is ongoing.

We have also updated our youth database. Today, we have over 800 organizations registered in our youth database. This is an important tool for us to be in contact with our youth cohort. As you are aware, the youth cohort consists of approximately 400,000 youth. As per the Youth Policy, a person between the ages of 12—29 is defined as “a youth”. The Ministry can boast of its success in reaching approximately 70 per cent of that cohort and as we seek to employ new and innovative methods, we think we can increase that reach even further.

This year September, we will be launching the Youth Rise Project, another very innovative programme of the Ministry of the Sport and Youth Affairs. This is a programme where we are going to the youth in their very at-risk situation; the youth who sees he has no alternative to access funding from the regular financial institutions such as the banks. He wants to do a little business and he sees no hope or no avenue for help. The only business he can see himself getting into is, possibly, crime. We will go to those youths and engage in high-risk lending to be able to reform their lifestyle. To support that, we will have a very, very strong mentorship component, so that each youth that we engage to access the funding to undertake an entrepreneurial project, will be given assistance with a mentor to ensure that he is given the right guidance. It is a one-on-one basis in which we would be engaging the youth. This project, as a pilot, will start in the district of Maloney.

HIV/AIDS Awareness Youth Health Programme: This is another ongoing project of the Ministry, where we host health caravans throughout Trinidad and Tobago. For 2009, we engaged approximately 6,000 youth, sharing a unique approach and relating information in communities. The Ministry implemented 11 youth health caravans in communities such as El Socorro, Malick, River Estate, Arima, St. James, Carenage, Gonzales and D’Abadie. We even had caravans in Oropouche. We are engaging youth on a massive scale through the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs.

Social projects: The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs presently employs over 30 Youth Development Officers who would be brought back on board with us very soon. They are to go out into communities and engage the communities directly in youth projects.

Recently, I had the pleasure of visiting a grow box project that we did in Techier Terrace in East Port of Spain. It was a massive success. We engaged the youth in that community in positive aspects of agriculture through a grow box project.

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In many communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago, we held Camp Vibe. Approximately 1,000 young persons actively participated in camps held in Couva, Malabar, Toco, Pleasantville, Princes Town, Los Bajos and Malick.

Human Skills and Knowledge: Another innovative project aimed at the transference of social life skills as well as technical and leadership skills. Among these projects was the Leadership Training Project, again held in communities in Matelot, Toco, Valencia, Sangre Grande and the administrative district of St. George West, which includes communities like Laventille, Carenage, Belview and Diego Martin. Coming out of this, I am very happy to report that amidst all the negative messages about the community of Laventille, members from 10 youth groups participated in this programme and the groups, which call themselves: We Are Better Youths (WABY), took up the challenge to utilize their enhanced skills in project planning to implement an Independence Day project in their community.

Additionally, I am happy to report that a one-weekend retreat was also held in Cumana, entitled: A New Beginning. This was organized by 20 young men between the ages of 17—25. These participants came from Belmont; a community plagued by a number of criminal activities. They took a decision to take a different course and engaged themselves in a very positive programme of the Ministry. The end result is that they were exposed to a different way or; as the martial artist would say “Do”. They were able to see a different way in life. “Do” is a Japanese word, meaning “the way”. They were able to see a different way.

Additionally, the Ministry piloted Positive Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATS); a best practice in addressing youth violence among young people. In this project, 75 people participated. They were also involved in situations of negative social behaviour. The project was implemented through a two-day workshop entitled: Responding in a Peaceful and Positive Way. In other words, we were engaging them right in their community and their situation, again on a one-on-one basis showing them a different way or alternative in line with our National Youth Policy. Social and life-oriented project is but another project.

### **9.15 p.m.**

The Skills Enhancement and Social Education Project is another community-based project geared towards personal development undertaken by the Government through the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. The Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centres have been a hallmark activity of successive governments since 1962. We have Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centres which target young men and women between the ages of 15—17 located throughout Trinidad and Tobago; El Dorado, Chatham and Praesto Praesto.



We take in students on a live-in basis, and this is usually on an annual basis. They come in and learn life skills and leave with vocational certificates. In other words, we take them out of their communities and we expose them to positive training and positive lifestyles so at the end of the day we have individuals leaving these Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centres reformed and productive individuals in keeping with our national youth policy.

Mr. Speaker, all these projects that I have outlined are the hallmark of a Government that cares about reducing social inequalities and increasing social inclusion to the vulnerable population in society, especially our youths.

In keeping with our promise of 2007, we continue to deliver because we continue to care. We have a deep love for the youth of Trinidad and Tobago and, indeed, the population of Trinidad and Tobago, but the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs has been moving steadfastly in rolling out and implementing the strategies under Vision 2020.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to sport, our nation continues to shine on the international arena through the achievements of our citizens. Permit me to share with you some of the highlights of these achievements over the past year. We have had tremendous success. Recently, in Berlin, Germany, we have had the best performance as a country to date at the 12th IAAF World Championships.

Mr. Speaker, our boys brought home silver in the 4x100 relay team: Richard Thompson, Emmanuel Callender, Marc Burns and Darrel Brown. We also captured two bronze medals: Mr. Renny Quow, a young man from humble beginnings, who rose out of adversity to capture bronze in the 400 metres hurdles. [*Desk thumping*] Josanne Lucas, another bronze medal with the 400 metres hurdles, a national record of 53.20 seconds. [*Desk thumping*] Creditable performance!

Mr. Speaker, Jehue Gordon, at 17, he is the country's youngest athlete to qualify ever for IAAF's World Championship final and almost beating the world. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, he is a student of Queen's Royal College. Mr. Speaker, Jehue Gordon was awarded the Athlete of the Future by the IAAF. [*Desk thumping*] In other words, the IAAF has seen Mr. Gordon as the future athlete. There was a baton passing from the great Michael Johnson to Jehue Gordon. In other words, the world is saying to Trinidad and Tobago, Jehue Gordon is the future of athletics at 17. That is a record-breaking achievement. Having spoken to Mr. Jehue Gordon, he is just a boy, and he does not even understand the gravity of his achievement and the magnanimity of his achievement. Mr. Speaker, Jehue Gordon is a product of the Cuban coaching initiative that was undertaken by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

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Mr. Speaker, our athletes in all spheres of sport have achieved tremendously in 2009. All of those athletes have been beneficiaries of the Elite Athlete Assistance Programme. Mr. Speaker, the Elite Athlete Assistance Programme is very unique to Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, if you survey the landscape in this hemisphere you will find no other country undertaking such an innovation, including Jamaica. [*Desk thumping*] Over \$20 million has been invested in our athletes.

In keeping with the Minister of Finance's theme for 2009, I must let her know that the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs is ahead of the curve "Strengthening Efficiency, Addressing the Challenges".

I want to outline some of the achievements of the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago. In 2009, the Sports Company is mandated to engage 13 NSOs. Compared to 2008, we had an outlay to national sporting organizations of \$50,270,930, and this year we disbursed \$30,134,201, some \$20,136,729 less than the previous year, and we have achieved a lot more with less output funding. Efficiency! [*Desk thumping*] In all our NSOs—from athletics to cricket to football. For the first time, we have an under-20 team playing at a World Cup in Egypt. We will be playing our first match on Republic Day. [*Desk thumping*] In hockey, we have achieved more, in volleyball we have achieved more; all the 13 NSOs that are under the care of the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago have achieved more.

Mr. Speaker, one of our hallmark achievements in sport is at the total participation of sport of all. That is at the base level of the sport policy. We engaged over 300 communities with an output of \$3.7 million, engaging over 74,915 persons. That is a creditable achievement as compared with the previous year with 90 communities and \$5.5 million, again, achieving a lot more with a lot less money. [*Desk thumping*] Efficiency!

I am sure all Members of this House have heard of our Sport Youth Camps which was a massive success. There were over 2.5 million contact hours for the four-week period of the camp, engaging over 19,000 children; employing 1,475 coaches at 172 locations at a daily cost to engage a child of \$30 per day. The cost to keep a child positively engaged equated to one hour is \$5—happy faces and the unbridled joy of the children and the satisfaction of their parents, priceless. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, we have also undertaken upgrade of our diamond in the chain of facilities. There is no other facility like the Hasley Crawford and the Jean Pierre Complex in this hemisphere. I know you may have passed there recently and you would have seen the beautiful Trinidad and Tobago flag inspiring you as you go by—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** How much did it cost?

**Hon. G. Hunt:** Whatever it cost, national pride, priceless. [*Desk thumping*] If you pass by the Jean Pierre Complex now you are going to see a world class floor on our netball court. Remember, we were champions in 1979 and we intend to be world champions in 2011. We have something in place for that.

We have also brought to world standard Saith Park and Shaw Park in Tobago which are now world class tennis courts. There are four of them. At Saith Park, there is volleyball which is world class.

**Mr. Manning:** Where is Saith Park?

**Hon. G. Hunt:** In Chaguanas. Mr. Speaker, \$1.8 million was spent at Saith Park in Chaguanas. We are doing better and better. In fact, the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs is well on the way to achieving Vision 2020 long before 2020. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, milestone after milestone, we have been achieving. Again, keeping with the Minister of Finance theme “Strengthening Efficiency, Addressing the Challenges.” I would venture to say this year our allocation is \$298 million for recurrent expenses, and I can guarantee you that we will get a lot more and we will be giving back the Minister of Finance some money. [*Desk thumping*]

The staff at the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs together with the staff of the Sports Company have risen to the challenge. They have bought into the vision, and they are well aware of what we have to do to achieve Vision 2020. They are highly motivated, and we look forward to a very exciting year of sport and youth in the year 2010.

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

**Mr. Harry Partap (Cumuto/Manzanilla):** Mr. Speaker, I noticed the euphoria on the other side when the Minister was talking about the achievements of the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago, and I am wondering all the things that they did, where were they done.

In the Cumuto/Manzanilla constituency, efforts were made to get the Sports Company to do some work on the grounds for the poor people in those areas who cannot afford to get to some of the big stadia in the country, and they did not do anything. In North Oropouche, the young people have to use the road for sports and other facilities. We have written the Sports Company, but you do not even get a reply from them. I am at a loss to know about this. You will give them a plan of what you want to do in the area and they do not even respond to you. I do not know where the Sports Company did the work. I am glad to be informed.

I want to commend the distinguished Leader of the Opposition and Member for Couva North, the hon. Basdeo Panday for his clinical analysis of the budget or

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what has passed us for a budget in this country that was delivered on Monday. The Leader of the Opposition exposed the absolute lack of substance, and the now predictable tendency of the PNM to hoodwink the population by repeating unfulfilled budget promises. That was the diet we received on Monday.

Mr. Speaker, it was an attempt to pour old wine in new bottles, and that will not work. [*Interruption*] I am talking about bottles in the days of biblical times it was skins. They want to pour new wine into old bottles and they know what is going to happen. Fermentation will take place and the bottles will crack. That is exactly what was done with the budget. It exposed the budget as just a repeat and a rehash of what had been done three and four years ago.

One thing that the people will remember this budget for is that it blew the myth promoted by the Minister of Finance that this Government had been prudent in its management of the economy. That is one of the good things that came from this budget. It blew the myth.

**9.30 p.m.**

We know now that the Minister of Finance has been misleading the House and the nation by some of her remarks earlier.

**Mr. Speaker:** It is not parliamentary to accuse a Member of misleading the House.

**Mr. H. Partap:** I withdraw it, Mr. Speaker, and I apologize to the Minister, I accept what you are saying. How can the Minister speak about prudential management when the Minister took the finances of this country from a surplus to a deficit? How can the Minister speak of prudential management when the Government blew the gas boom? [*Desk thumping*] How could you talk about prudential management?

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

You cannot speak about prudential management, when you preside over two consecutive deficit budgets. [*Interruption*] I think people would understand what I am saying. [*Interruption*] That might be true, you might be right, because my understanding of a deficit budget is that you are spending more than you are earning; that is what the people outside there understand. [*Desk thumping*] You know what my grandmother used to say?

**Mr. Manning:** What she used to say?

**Mr. H. Partap:** She used to say that you will reach a point or you would put your hat at a point where you would have to take a bamboo rod to pull it down. This prudential management business, the Minister could no longer fool us; she

cannot fool us with that "ol' talk". You cannot talk about prudential management of the economy when you are raking, scraping and introducing all kinds of nuisance taxes on the people of Trinidad and Tobago. You cannot tell me that you have practiced prudential management of the economy.

The UNC, in its term of office removed all the nuisance taxes. [*Desk thumping*] That is what we did. We did it on an oil price of between \$9 and \$18 a barrel, and no new taxes. The then Prime Minister of this country, Mr. Panday, never introduced any new taxes. In fact, one caller on a radio station I was listening to, said if you give the PNM a chance, just now they would bring back dog license and bicycle license, [*Laughter*] and it seems to be the direction in which they are going.

**Mr. Manning:** What is wrong with dog license?

**Mr. H. Partap:** This Government has invested heavily on propaganda. In every ministry, there is an allocation for publicity that has remained high. I think they call it promotion, publicity and printing. You know how much money has been allocated in this 2010 budget for that? It is \$125,734,819, and I will tell you something, I think it was the Minister of Information or the Minister of Public Administration, one of the two of them was saying that they know the Opposition would be talking about promotion, publicity and printing, and he gave a figure.

I want to tell you something, the Ministry of Information, the highest allocation, \$70 million.

**Mr. Imbert:** Why not?

**Mr. H. Partap:** No, I am not saying it is good or bad, I am just telling you. You allocated \$70 million and then you have the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, \$6 million for publicity and you are not getting any returns; you cannot pave access roads. You know I must compliment the Minister of Works and Transport. I do not like to do that, but I see for him, for promotion, publicity and printing, even though they try to hide it, is \$110,000, and of course, the Minister of Community Development, I think only \$150,000 had been allocated and that was good.

You are spending too much money on propaganda. I think that the Minister of Finance has taken this matter of propaganda to an all time high. While speaking to some intelligent and influential business people last Tuesday, you know what she said, she made a comment on property tax, and I am quoting what was quoted in the *Express*. She said:

"The tax is not on you, the tax is on your property."

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That is the Minister of Finance. She said:

"The tax is not on you, the tax is on your property."

I want to tell the Minister, you see the little piece of land that I have, it is neuter gender. It cannot move; it cannot walk; it cannot earn; I have to go and pay the taxes. [*Laughter*]

On the property tax, I am sure that the PNM has already started this propaganda machinery to try to show that that is the best thing since sliced bread. [*Laughter*] I think in today's newspaper somewhere, they try to explain to people, but the Leader of the Opposition put it in direct context, and he tells you, you are taxing wealth.

You know something, I feel sorry for pensioners. I feel sorry for all those people who built their house and saved all their money all these years and now they thought that they would retire in peace, and you are on their back; you want to squeeze every cent from people.

**Mr. Manning:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla for giving way. Is the hon. Member suggesting that properties—and many of them are of relatively high value—ought not to attract any level of taxation by the State? Is that what the suggestion is?

**Mr. H. Partap:** The answer, I would say, you leave it as it is. We are in hard times; people are in very dire straits.

**Mr. Manning:** Are you aware that the level of taxation for properties in some areas are at 10, 8 and 6 per cent and that the new level is 3 per cent? Are you aware of that? [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. H. Partap:** That is the level of the propaganda you will be spreading. What about when they assess your house for rental? Anyway, Mr. Prime Minister, you still have time to withdraw that tax. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*] I am paying \$69 on my piece of land, you know. When you introduce that, you know what will happen to me? You are charging me for a rental on my property that I do not even have a house on. [*Interruption*] No, I am paying \$69; I would be paying \$300. Anyway, I am telling you, you still have time to withdraw and give the people of this country a little ease up.

I want to turn to housing, because it is in the housing sector that the propaganda has become even greater. It would seem to us that the PNM housing bubble has burst—

**Mr. Manning:** Explain.

**Mr. H. Partap:** I would explain as I go on—or is it so consumed by corruption that it is bringing the programme to its knees and we would understand that just now. It would appear as though the PNM housing thrust has frozen since the Member for Diego Martin West was fired as Minister, or maybe the present Minister seems to be out of her depth in this expanded ministry, so that the Minister of Finance had to jump to her rescue with a most disingenuous excuse and hear what the Minister said at page 20 of the budget statement:

"We have reviewed our housing programme, particularly in the context of the mandate given to the Housing Development Corporation and we recognize that the company needs to be revamped and restructured."

Is the Minister telling us that after two years since the HDC came into being, it might be more, that the company now has to be revamped and restructured?

**Mr. Manning:** The answer is yes.

**Mr. H. Partap:** All right, and we agree; I agree with you, but I am saying that the HDC has to be restructured to include fairness and equality in the distribution of houses. [*Desk thumping*]

I am also saying that that restructuring and revamping of the HDC must ensure that houses are not distributed on the basis of political affiliation or discrimination and you know what I mean.

**Mr. Manning:** No.

**Mr. H. Partap:** No, you do not know. I will tell you why, because of whatever ethnicity, whatever race you belong to, you have need for housing. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Manning:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I wonder if the very distinguished Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla has ever gone to Tarodale Gardens in the constituency of San Fernando East, where we have given priority to squatters for relocation to eradicate the squatter problem, following a policy followed by the Government of which he was a part, encouraging people to move from the rural areas in which they live to squat in urban areas, because they saw it as a way of changing the demographics of the country and so, bringing about political change. What we have now done in Tarodale Gardens, as we would be doing in other places, is giving priority to the squatters. Look at the ethnic composition. Look at it if that is what you are saying.

**Dr. Moonilal:** But we "cyar" see it.

**Mr. Manning:** Go and look.

**Mr. H. Partap:** There is a letter here from your constituency, the Victoria Railway Line Corinth Road, San Fernando—that is in your constituency—and they are asking, the promise you made for election, why are you not keeping it.

**Mr. Manning:** Madam Deputy Speaker, they were given a range of options, some have been moved, but the delay has been in the delivery of the houses in Corinth Hills, which are only now becoming available and therefore, in very short order, those who have not been relocated as a consequence of the unavailability of those houses, could look forward to relocation quite early. Simple matter, it is not discrimination. We do not operate so.

**Mr. H. Partap:** It tells me one thing, that you should visit your constituency a little more often, so that you can tell people what you are telling us here in the House. I think people who need houses in this country, they do not really believe what you are saying. I have in my hands as well, a number of complaints about the tardiness of the HDC.

#### 9.45 p.m.

Mr. Arnold Carmichael is 50 years old and he has been waiting on a house since 2003; Ms. Lynelle Gaskin, she is 29 years and she is waiting on a house, she is pretty young; Ms. Althea King, she is 43 years and has been waiting for the past three years; Ms. Dhanmatie Seeraj has been waiting for the past six years for a house; Ms. Judy Thomas applied four years ago, no response; Ms. Margaret Serrette said she has been waiting for 23 years. She applied to the NHA and the HDC and it made no difference. *[Interruption]* No, what I am saying is, try to meet the people's needs and do not get carried away with what people are telling you. You try to find out what are the people's needs—and they write letters to the press complaining and they are not mad.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there also seems to be confusion at the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment and the confusion is over the number of units that had been built by Government. I will explain it, your Vision 2020 Operational Plan 2007—2010 progress report at page 28, that is this book here *[Holds up book]* states that over 32,000 housing units were started since 2003—that is what this says—but the report went on to say that 11,200 homes were distributed since June 2003. So since 2003 you started 32,000 houses but you have only distributed 11,200; but the report also says that 1,058 homes were completed from October 2008 to June 2009. Now is this in addition to the 11,200 units or is it a part of the 11,200 units?



**Mr. Manning:** One is start up and one is completion.

**Mr. H. Partap:** Then at page 135 of that same report we observe that the notation changes to 1,226 homes, and you said these were delivered to new homeowners. So is it 1,226 homes that were delivered or is it 1,058? So something is wrong with the Arithmetic and I think you have to be careful what you are putting in these books. *[Interruption]* You should not use these books as a propaganda tool.

During the 2007 general election campaign the Prime Minister said on several occasions that PNM built 32,000 houses since 2003. I hope you remember that?

**Mr. Manning:** I said 26,000.

**Mr. H. Partap:** No, you said 32,000. I have the clipping. However, one month earlier in August 2007 in friendlier times, the then Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment boasted that 26,000 units were built at a cost of \$3.98 billion. Now as I analyze I am wondering whether the PNM was able to build 6,000 units in one month.

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

**Dr. Moonilal:** Read that again for him.

**Mr. H. Partap:** Let me tell you it again. You said in October 2007 that there were 32,000 units and then your Minister said a month earlier it was 26,000 units, so therefore 6,000 units were built in one month. *[Interruption]* The numbers do not matter with me you know. What I am saying is the propaganda that you spread. *[Laughter]* That is what I am talking about. I do not care about the numbers, it is the propaganda.

So, what that means now—remember again you said that in 2007, now in this report which is a 2008/2009 report, the figure remained at 32,000 units. So it means in that period of time since 2007 to now you did not build any houses.

**Mr. Manning:** There were few starts.

**Mr. H. Partap:** You are trying to confuse people with the start, the finish and the home distribution and so on "eh", but you are not going to fool people you know. You would not fool people! *[Interruption]*

No, I am saying that there is a standstill because your number 32,000 remained the same two years later. *[Interruption]* So it tells me that no houses were built after Dr. Rowley left. That is what it tells me. What is even more interesting you

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know, on August 30 when Dr. Rowley made that statement he quoted from the *Bible*. He quoted St. Luke gospel, Chap. 9, 62.

**Mr. Manning:** Who did that?

**Mr. H. Partap:** Dr. Rowley.

**Mr. Manning:** What he said?

**Mr. H. Partap:** He said:

“No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the Kingdom of God.”

Is the former Minister saying that his successor is unable to put her hand to the plough, and therefore she is not fit for service? Well the figures tell me he is right. That is what the figures tell me. [*Laughter and desk thumping*] Except of course, the Minister is a bit busy trying to find evidence of malfeasance to nail her colleagues, so that she has no time for the job. [*Interruption*] But you know, that is their business eh. I do not want to interfere in their business. Our business is to point out the deceptiveness—

**Hon. Member:** Deception.

**Mr. H. Partap:** The deception of the PNM and the tendency of the PNM to hide lack of performance by expensive public relations. Our business is to find out from the hon. Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment if the housing figures are being dressed up to make the PNM look good while thousands of citizens are in need of housing. [*Interruption*] The Prime Minister promised in 2003 that 10,000 units will be provided every year for 10 years. Do you remember?

**Mr. Manning:** The target was 8,000 constructed by the public sector and 2,000 by the private sector. It is an important distinction.

**Mr. H. Partap:** And if you had 8,000 and 2,000 you get 10,000. [*Laughter*] But let us look at the record.

**Mr. S. Panday:** You are teaching him some mathematics.

**Mr. H. Partap:** Let us look at the record. So, by your admission in 2003, now, at this present time we should have 70,000 units, by your admission and that should be ready for occupancy by the end of this year, 2009.

If we are to believe the vision operational plan, that figure is 32,000, therefore you are short by 38,000, so you still have a few months to build 38,000, before the end of the year. [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

**Mr. Manning:** You know, sometimes I wonder if the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla is beyond redemption. The fact of the matter is that we set ourselves a target and it took some time for us to be able to gear the industry up to be able to construct houses at the contemplated rate. So in 2003 when the announcement was made—according to you—we by no means met the target in that year. It took time for that to happen, but in a subsequent year we did—in fact, yes, not now, it happened up until about 2007, I think it was.

We are doing some significant reorganization at the HDC now, and in fact, the HDC is now ready once again to accelerate the rate of housing construction and we are going back to the 8,000. That is the position.

**Mr. H. Partap:** You know, if I give the Prime Minister a chance he will be making my speech for me, "eh", and I do not want him to make it in my time.

**Mr. Manning:** Especially since you cannot make it for yourself.

**Mr. H. Partap:** Do not use my time to do that, I intend to do that. But I still maintain that there is some confusion in that Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment and somebody is trying to tie up the foot of the nation and I do not think he should do that.

What I am asking for now is that I believe the time has come when we should get a credible report from the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment in relation to your units, because it just does not make sense; especially since there are 105,000 people out there who are in need of housing.

**Mr. Manning:** It is 120,000.

**Mr. H. Partap:** Well the figure I have is 105,000, you went up by 15,000. I know your figures could move. [*Interruption*] So stop playing footsie with housing. Stop playing it! If the lady Minister cannot perform—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Bring back Rowley.

**Mr. H. Partap:** Yes, I have no brief for Dr. Rowley. But if she cannot perform then find somebody who could do it. [*Interruption*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, this Minister said nothing new about housing. She said nothing new! She spoke 1,088 words in the five or six paragraphs in the budget speech, it amounted to 1,088 words and all she did was rehash old programmes. That is what you did.

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** That is ongoing. They are not old, they are current.

**Mr. H. Partap:** In your budget speech you make it appear as though it is something new you all are doing. *[Interruption]* Anyway you rehash the thing, and as such, it gave people a false sense of security.

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** No we do not do that.

**Mr. H. Partap:** Yes, for example when you said that you are having the interest rates for the approved mortgage company programme between 6 per cent to 8 per cent. *[Interruption]* No, it was at 8 per cent and it was reduced to 6 per cent and now you have pushed it back to 8 per cent. You have not helped people. You are not helping people that way.

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** So put them to pay 11 per cent?

**Mr. H. Partap:** No. What I am saying, it was 8 per cent and you brought it down to 6 per cent in 2003—I think it was—and now you have pushed it back again to 8 per cent, so you are not helping people.

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** You want them to go to the bank and pay 13 per cent. You are not helping them.

**Mr. Manning:** "I ain't hear yuh; I ain't hear yuh."

**Mr. H. Partap:** What I am saying is, we are not talking about 11 per cent you know. We are saying that it used to be—*[Interruption]* I think you better take another look at what you wrote.

The Minister skimmed over the critical important matter of regularization. You skimmed over that in your budget presentation. That is a very important thing for squatters. Very important! That Squatter Regularization Programme is moving at a snail space and the Government must do something to speed it up.

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** What did you all do when you were in Government?

**Mr. H. Partap:** The law covers—

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** What did you all do to regularize them?

**Mr. H. Partap:** We brought the law. We did not have time to do what we were supposed to do. *[Crosstalk]* But you are in office now. You are there now and you are telling me that the law covers 5,400 families in 17 settlements *[Interruption]* and at May 31, 2009 you only issued 45 certificates of comfort out of 4,500 and you had about eight years to do it.

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** What did you do for the people in Mamoral?

**Mr. H. Partap:** No man, that does not make sense. It simply does not make sense.

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** You did nothing.

**Mr. H. Partap:** So it is becoming painfully obvious that that regularization process is slowing down. *[Interruption]* But you have given the Land Settlement Agency the power to go and mash up people's houses. *[Interruption]* To break down people houses. *[Interruption]* Yes, to look at the squatters and to dehumanize the squatters. That is what you have done!

**10.00 p.m.**

No, you have to think again. The LSA is using brute force against poor people—*[Interruption]*

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** And we are going to deal with that.

**Mr. H. Partap:**—and you are taking too long to give them their certificate of comfort.

In fact, what you should have been doing, they should have gotten their certificate of comfort first, then you should have given them the 30-year lease and then thirdly, you should have given them a deed of lease.

**Ms. Kangaloo:** They are not entitled to that.

**Mr. H. Partap:** How do you mean they are not entitled to it? There are 5,400 families covered by the law and you only attended to 45 people. You will finish in the next 50 years.

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** In my constituency, 700 new *[Inaudible]* LSA of squatters.

**Mr. H. Partap:** Well, you have a problem and you will solve it. I am telling you that you are moving too slowly. That is what I am saying, you are moving too slowly.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am moving away from housing now. I am moving away from housing and I want to suggest this evening, that the chairman of the board of T&TEC, he too is engaged in this art of deception. One paper quotes him as saying—he is talking about the electricity rates that have been increased:

"The electricity rates have increased only by 1 cent."

The professor is wrong. The increase on a bill is between \$4 and \$24, and not 1 cent. It is not 1 cent. So, I am telling the professor that \$4 or at \$24, means a lot to the poor people in this country. So, I do not know what the Ministry will do, but this is the second increase in rates that we have received and I am saying that

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the electricity consumers must not be asked to pay for corruption and mismanagement in the Government's street lighting programme. I think this is what they are doing. T&TEC owes over a billion dollars to NEC, so do not tell me now that you want to increase rates so that people will have to pay for the corruption and the mismanagement. That is not fair. It is not fair.

While we are on T&TEC, there is a complaint that was referred to the Ministry of Finance, Central Audit Unit and that matter is being investigated, we want to know when that report will be made public. That is what we want to know. We want to know why the report is taking so long to be laid in Parliament, or to be made public. We are wondering if the Ministry is cooking up the audit, so that it will look good at the end of the day. Well, we do not want that. We want you to lay the report as it is, and you are taking too long. So, lay the report of the Central Audit Unit and let the chips fall where they may. Do that and people will respect you for that.

While we are on electricity, I thought by now that the Minister of Finance would have said, "Let us remove the VAT on electricity bills" if she wants to help the poor, the poor in the society. [*Desk thumping*] What I want you to do as well, is, let the electricity bill be done on a one-month cycle. Let it be on a one month cycle because if you have it on a one-month cycle—right now it is on a two-month cycle—it means that the consumers will pay less because you have to go to the second tier if it is a two month cycle. So, help the poor consumers and do it on a one-month cycle. You can do it because T&TEC has introduced what they call "smart meters". They introduced the smart meters. They spent \$240 million on that and they can do it on a one-month cycle, because they can stay from the office, I understand, and they can know how much electricity you consumed. So that is one of the suggestions I want to make to you.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to raise the matter of the Land and Surveys Division, and I think the time has come for the Land and Surveys Division of the Ministry to assume a more proactive role in monitoring private land developers in the country. Private land developers are selling lands in their private housing development based on an outline approval, and this is contrary to the rules of the Land and Surveys Department. As a result, many of the private residential areas do not have paved access roads, proper drainage, connection to electricity and water.

**Mr. Imbert:** Private?

**Mr. H. Partap:** Private, yes.

**Mr. Imbert:** Whose fault is that?

**Mr. H. Partap:** That is what I am saying. I am saying that these people are citizens and I believe that the Land and Surveys Department did not monitor these land developers, and therefore, they go and sell the land to people and they do not have the infrastructure. So, what we are saying is that—you see, if among the functions of the Land and Surveys Department is to monitor, then they could approve or reject an outline plan. They can. But if they do not reject it and the people are allowed to sell the lands and to build houses and then you do not have the infrastructure, what happens? They cannot get it from the regional corporation because it is a private development; they cannot get it from the Ministry of Local Government, it is a private development; and they cannot get it from the Ministry of Works and Transport because it is a private development.

**Mr. Imbert:** What about the developer?

**Mr. H. Partap:** No, the developer has sold and he has gone. You cannot locate him. But what we are saying is, if the Land and Surveys Department had monitored that project, it means that they would have caught the land developer before he sells out and leaves. So right now you have a great deal of citizens who are in private land developments and they do not have roads and water and so on, and I refer to one called Mt Pleasant Drive in Sangre Chiquito where you have about 125 citizens. They have to wade through mud and so on. They have approached the regional corporation, they cannot get any help; Ministry of Works and Transport, no help; Ministry of Local Government, no help. So what they have done is, they have written to the Prime Minister and have asked him if he—it is only 2.5 kilometers of road—*[Interruption]* Yes, if I can get it through. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Imbert:** Are you saying that it is Government's responsibility to make good, the bad work done by private developers in private developments? That is what you are saying?

**Mr. H. Partap:** No. What I am saying is the Government has a responsibility yes, because a government agency that had the power to monitor did not perform the duty, and therefore, the Government has to be liable.

**Mr. Imbert:** But suppose there was some fraud involved on the part of the private developer? Suppose he made representations to the people that everything was in order and that was not so, or he lied to them?

**Mr. H. Partap:** The Land and Surveys Department should have monitored the project and should not have allowed him to sell.

**Mr. Imbert:** Who stopping him *[Inaudible]*

**Mr. H. Partap:** Oh! I will tell you. You cannot stop him? You cannot stop him? You think so. I do not think so. I think you can. I think the Land and Surveys Department could.

**Mr. Imbert:** Who tell you that?

**Mr. H. Partap:** Well, we will have to check the law and see. Yes, we will check the law and see.

Madam Deputy Speaker, right now these people are waiting on the Prime Minister to see if he can assign RDC to go and assist these people. I hope that he can because they are not getting any help from Self-help, Ministry of Local Government, Ministry of Works and Transport and from the regional corporation, and therefore, we need to provide some assistance to these residents and others.

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** We [*Inaudible*] \$15 million deficit.

**Mr. H. Partap:** You spent \$300 million on a Prime Minister's house and \$2 million or \$3 million for curtains, so why we cannot help these poor people? So, that is the point I want to raise on land and surveys.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I come now to the Biche High School. It is in the constituency of Mayaro now, but it remains an important issue for me. The people of Biche and surrounding areas are following very closely the development now taking place with respect to the construction of the new Palo Seco Government Primary School. What is taking place there in Palo Seco is of relevance to the people of Biche because the PNM has refused to open a \$30 million Biche High School on the pretext that they were smelling gas around the building.

**Mr. Imbert:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. H. Partap:** It is about eight years or nine years now and the school is there and has not been—

**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. [*Dr. R. Moonilal*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. H. Partap:** No, I have to get through with these things because they concern my constituency. So what I am saying is, the new Palo Seco Government Primary School is being built on two abandoned oil wells, and you have the Biche



High School which was built on a hill—they said that gas is smelling around it and so on. You close down that school, but you are still continuing construction on the Palo Seco Government Primary School which is built on two abandoned oil wells.

**Mr. Imbert:** You closed the school.

**Mr. H. Partap:** We did not close the school.

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes, you did.

**Mr. H. Partap:** Because we were getting—anyway, we will talk about that outside. Madam Deputy Speaker, the *Guardian* carried a report last week and it quoted Petrotrin Communications Manager saying that work has not stopped on the building. When it was the High School, there was a big hue and cry from the PNM about safety.

**Mr. Imbert:** It was you.

**Mr. H. Partap:** Yes! They appointed a commission of enquiry and so on. Yes! They never implemented what the commission of enquiry said. Never! No! They stopped the opening of the Biche High School, but they have not stopped the construction of the Palo Seco.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Why?

**Mr. H. Partap:** Is it different strokes for different folks?

**Mr. S. Panday:** Yes.

**Mr. Imbert:** Is you who closed the school.

**Mr. H. Partap:** No, we closed the school to do the assessment.

**Mr. Imbert:** No.

**Mr. H. Partap:** Yes, and then when the assessment came we wanted to open the school, but you all said no. I have the whole file. I will lend it to you.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this PNM has been spiteful to the children of Biche. [*Desk thumping*] You know today as I speak, children from Biche are still assigned to Sangre Grande, 17 miles away and Rio Claro, 17 miles away—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Peters:** Princes Town too.

**Mr. H. Partap:**—and Princes Town as well, which is even further.

**Hon. Member:** They have no heart.

**Mr. H. Partap:** Do you know why? You have closed down the school, but you are letting the Palo Seco Primary School continue to be constructed on two abandoned oil wells. You are building the Brian Lara Stadium—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. S. Panday:** Twenty feet.

**Mr. H. Partap:**—twenty feet away from a gas line.

**Mr. S. Panday:** A high pressure gas line.

**Mr. H. Partap:** High pressure gas line. Different strokes for different folks. But you see, your political victimization took you to a different height. You cannot do that to poor children. One child—I am sorry the Minister of Education is not here—from Biche was assigned to Matura High School, do you know what that poor child has to do? Get up at half past four in the morning, then that child has to change two taxis—because there is no transport—to Matura morning and evening. Is that what you are putting poor little children through?

**Mr. S. Panday:** PNM cares.

**Mr. H. Partap:** Oh, I am wondering if you really care.

**10.15 p.m.**

It was precisely to avoid that, that the UNC built secondary schools in rural areas throughout this country; not for “douens” and parrots, it was to help poor children so they could get access to secondary schools; but as usual, children means nothing to the PNM. You do not care about them. [*Interruption*] No, you cannot get it.

The SWAHA School is now completed—nine years in building. It started to be built nine years ago; it was completed for this term. It is open now. Do you know why? Let me tell you why.

**Mr. Imbert:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. H. Partap:** You cannot get it; you could do what you want, you cannot get it. They would fool you; they would take all your money; they would take all the CEPEP work; they would take all the URP work; they would take the money in the PNM jerseys and would still vote for the UNC. Anyway, time will come for that.

Do you know why the SWAHA School took nine years to build, because the Ministry broke its own rules; not this present Minister. There was a long-standing policy that an in-house construction company in a denominational board could not or would not be given the contract to build a school. That was good policy, but the policy changed for SWAHA, because it was a political decision.

They changed the policy; not this Minister, she just inherited the problem. They changed the policy, they gave SWAHA, because of political consideration, and SWAHA kept sending the price up, and so the school took nine years to build. Thank God, it is open now, and you have brought some relief to those poor children across there. *[Interruption]* After nine years, are you not ashamed? You should be ashamed of yourself, nine years and you are talking about deliver. I am taking pride in the school being open, because if I did not make noise we were not going to get it done. *[Crosstalk]*

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** You took a primary school and turned it into a secondary school in my constituency.

**Mr. H. Partap:** Do not allow political preferences to cloud your policy; let policy be policy. You must not let your politics interfere with your policy, that is what you did with SWAHA.

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** It was not suited for that.

**Mr. Harry Partap:** Madam Minister, the children of Caigual RC School—the school was closed and you had promised to provide them with transport. For the past two weeks they could not go to school, because of no transport.

**Miss Le Gendre:** So they had transport before that?

**Mr. H. Partap:** I do not think so. I think the parents had to transport them. The parents did it, but now things are hard; things are difficult; your Government is making it difficult for poor people. They cannot afford it. They requested transport. I spoke to the Public Transport Service Corporation (PTSC); I do not know what you could do to save these children, so they could get transport on Monday. I would hope that you would assist those children in that rural area.

As I am speaking about schools, I want to acknowledge that the Ministry is starting construction of an early childhood centre in the constituency and the people of Cumuto/Manzanilla are happy about this; so it is coming. I also want to acknowledge that the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs has provided us with four community centres, which we are happy about. The people are very grateful for that as well. *[Crosstalk]*

As from today, the people of Marquis Road in Plum Road are receiving electricity for the first time, thanks to the National Social Development Programme (NSDP) or the Ministry of Public Utilities.

**Mr. Abdul-Hamid:** *[Inaudible]*

**Mr. H. Partap:** You had nothing to do with that. I compliment the NSDP. The NSDP did it for us and we are glad about that. But with all that, you still cannot beat the PNM—[*Laughter*—the UNC, in Cumuto/Manzanilla. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is the final matter I will raise, which is roads and drains in the Cumuto/Manzanilla constituency. You mentioned the National Roads Authority; we have been hearing this for a long time. I understand that the National Roads Authority cannot be established, because there is a dog fight between the Minister of Works and Transport and the Minister of Local Government as to who should control it. Now you say no, that is all right; you are entitled to do it. You could twist up your mouth, you could do what you want, you could say what you want. I am telling you that our understanding is there is a dog fight for control of the Roads Authority. [*Crosstalk*]

While this dog fight is taking place, and I am not interested in that, I want you to establish the Roads Authority, so we could get the roads fixed.

**Mr. Imbert:** If your hypothesis is true, then how come in the Green Paper laid in this House, as your hon. leader pointed out, the local government bodies would no longer have responsibility for the roads. If your theory is true, how come in the Green Paper the local government authorities would no longer have responsibility for roads? Explain that to me.

**Mr. H. Partap:** I am not going to explain. I will tell you I am glad about that, because it means the Roads Authority would look after all the roads, therefore, there would be no demarcation between Works roads and this road and that road, as what takes place now. [*Crosstalk*]

As I say that, let me also acknowledge that after five or six years of complaints, the Ministry of Works and Transport is mobilizing to fix the landscape at the 7.5 kilometre mark. I do not want to talk too fast but [*Laughter*] they have started to mobilize, and that is a good sign. [*Crosstalk*]

I want the Minister to also know—[*Interruption*] that is good representation. [*Desk thumping*] Do not blame me for that; do not blame me for representing my constituents in the proper manner. I want to also tell the Minister that the St. Marie Emmanuel Road is in dire need of repair. [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*] It is neither the local government—[*Interruption*] No it is not a local government road. Act as if the Roads Authority is already established and send PURE to do it for the people. It is not an agricultural extension road; we need that. In fact, there are 19 roads in the constituency that need to be repaired and there are 27 landslips.

You know, you called me greedy once for asking for roads.

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** How many got repaired?

**Mr. H. Partap:** I want to list the roads for you, so that your officers would know the bad roads.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Tell them!

**Mr. H. Partap:** These are the roads: St. Marie Emmanuel in Caratal; Guaico Tamana Road; Cumuto Road; Tamana Hill Road; Bonair Road; Carmichael Road; Los Amadillos Road; De Gannes Road; St. Aines Road; North Oropouche Road; Fishing Pond Road; Genda Road; Guaigal Road No. 1; Guaigal Road No. 2; Plum Mitan Road; Plum Road; Marper Road; St. Isidore Road and Cunapo Southern Main Road. These are some of roads we need to repair. These are some of the roads that we need repaired. [*Crosstalk*]

I do not want to bring people to Port of Spain to ask for roads; I think they should be home. Persons in Cumuto/Manzanilla should remain there and do their work; you must do what you have to do.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this budget will not improve the lives of our citizens. In fact, this budget is going to bring more misery and distress to an already impoverished society. The imposition of all these nuisance taxes is really destroying the zeal of the people of this country to work to build for themselves and their country.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

**The Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Peter Taylor):** Madam Deputy Speaker, contrary to my friend on the other side, I must say what a joy it is for me to stand, as part of the PNM, to join this debate and, moreso, to congratulate the Minister of Finance, for delivering a sterling contribution in this House. [*Desk thumping*]

A budget presentation, in the best of times, is not an easy proposition. It is about balancing competing wants against expenditure and against revenues, moreso in a time of economic decline. It is for this reason that it would not be too much to say to the Minister of Finance, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." [*Desk thumping*]

As I listened intently to speaker after speaker on the other side, beginning with the Leader of the Opposition and ending with the last speaker, they sought in vain to try to discredit this budget, they sought to attempt, vainly so, to suggest that the Government has not been prudent in its management.

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Listening to the Leader of the Opposition, I felt somewhat sad. In listening to him, one got the feeling that it was almost like a soft drink that had lost its fizz; it lacked energy; [*Laughter*] even like food that has been cooked without salt, tasteless.

**Hon. Member:** Flat.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** That is what the doctors recommend.

**Hon. P. Taylor:** We know what the good book has to say about salt that has lost its savour: "It is thenceforth good for nothing but to be trodden under the foot of men." [*Crosstalk*] [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*]

**Hon. Member:** "Look who quoting scripture."

**Hon. Member:** These are members of my flock. [*Laughter*]

**Hon. P. Taylor:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition, as well as the Member for Caroni East, tried to pin the label of corruption on the Government.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

In fact, if I were to quote the Member for Caroni East, he had the temerity to say that Trinidad and Tobago was the king of corruption or where corruption was king, or words to that effect. What he did not say was the throne resides in Couva North. [*Desk thumping*] Who could forget that it was during the tenure of the UNC that corruption reached unprecedented levels in this country. It was his own Attorney General who was at the vanguard in calling on the then Prime Minister, as he was in 1995—2000, to attack corruption within his own party.

But the hon. Member for Couva North was not interested in that, for no sooner had the present Member for Tabaquite sounded the signals that he was relieved, one, of the Anti-Corruption Bureau, he was relieved of the anti-money laundering task force, that he headed, he was put in place by the then Basdeo Panday.

What is sad is that as we look at how things have come full circle, as we look at the other side and see the turmoil within their own ranks, the Member for Couva North, then was embattled by three; it was then Maharaj, Maraj and Sudama. Some nine years hence, he is now being embattled by another three, the Ramjack G. [*Desk thumping*]

**10.30 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, in a very real sense, that episode has all the ingredients of a Shakespearean tragedy, were it not so comical. But, Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be part of a government that is focused and inexorably committed to the development of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, one of the underpinnings as it were, of the Government has to do with, of course, enabling competitive business on the one hand, and creating innovative people on the other.

Mr. Speaker, as the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla spoke, I remember sometime last year in 2008 he brought a motion to this House seeking to condemn the Government for doing nothing in the fight against high food prices, but I noticed throughout his contribution tonight, he steered studiously clear of food prices in particular and I think that is in clear recognition of the fact that if it is one thing the Government has been able to do is tackle the issue of food prices head on. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I remember when we assumed office in November 2007, the biggest challenge facing this country was increasing food prices. At that time, the international community was witnessing almost weekly increases in prices on the international commodities market; cereals, grains, almost every manner of produce that was imported into Trinidad and Tobago were increasing and that had a lot to do at the time with the fact that China and India were enjoying higher incomes and, therefore, were as a result having an impact on the supply of these products that the price skyrocketed.

And almost in a complete about turn, just about June/July of 2008, the world went into an economic decline and with that, the price of oil began to fall and commodities began to fall.

Mr. Speaker, the natural concomitant of that was now that we were seeing international decreases in these prices, we in Trinidad and Tobago began to expect that the savings would be transferred or passed on to the consumers. And so it was the task of the Ministry of Legal Affairs, the Consumer Affairs Division, the watchdogs of the consumer, the price police as it were, to begin now to engage the stakeholders in discussions and say to them; "Listen, we have noticed certain trends taking place internationally we want to see prices reflected on the supermarket shelves that are consistent with those reductions internationally."

Mr. Speaker, we examined the Food and Price Organization and the FAO price index for the period June 2008 to June 2009 in the first instance and it showed very clearly that there was a reduction in the price index from 214 base points from June 2008 to about 150.

In the case of dairy, 49.9 per cent reduction on the international market over that same period. In the area of oils and fats, there was a reduction of some 35 per cent, and when our consumer advocates, our research persons went out to the

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supermarkets as we do, we were not seeing these savings reflected. And, therefore, it was the intention or the responsibility of the Government to call on the stakeholders to reduce their prices to the benefit of the consumers.

Mr. Speaker, I held a post-Cabinet press conference on July 30, or thereabouts, just after the Central Bank had published a new reduction in the rate of inflation, a fall in the rate of headline inflation of which food prices were the contributor, and what I sought to tell the supermarkets and all stakeholders was that there was now convincing evidence, conclusively so, that they were enjoying savings of a significant proportion and we were not seeing them passed on. Lo and behold, within 48 hours of that press conference the stakeholders were issuing statements in agreement with that position. I was pleasantly surprised.

Leading the call, for example, was the President of the Supermarket Association, Mr. Balliram Maharaj and he was strident in his call for his own members to reduce their prices. There was an article in the *Newsday* of August 01, 2009 entitled "Milk prices to fall" where the Director of Vemco Limited, Mr. Francois Mouttet was agreeing with the call that prices were, in fact, too high.

Mr. Speaker, if I am permitted to read briefly from that press release, it says:

"Vemco Director, Francois Mouttet yesterday told *Newsday* that the minister was correct in saying that international prices for dairy products have been going down for quite some time. 'There has been a reduction internationally'..."

Calling the Minister's warning timely Mouttet said "that his company will receive a new shipment soon at a reduced cost." These savings, he said, will be passed onto the consumer." Very good news for mothers, and persons on fixed incomes.

Mr. Speaker, the tenor of goodwill did not stop there. You had as well the Director of Erin Farms and Meat Packers Limited, Mr. Ronald Leong Poi saying that he was making a very concerted effort to reduce the cost of pork, and the title of that article was: "Consumers to pay less for pork" and the date of the article was August 22, 2009 in the *Newsday*.

"...he said the company was doing its best to respond positively to calls by the Minister for businessmen to reduce the cost of food."

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to say that perhaps, it is for the first time at least, that I can recall that there were Members on the other side of the economic divide as it were, agreeing with the Government that prices were too high and publicly taking a stand to say they are going to work with the State to reduce prices in the interest of the consumer. [*Desk thumping*]



Mr. Speaker, I got correspondence from Happi Products Limited as well. The Manager, Brenton Salick wrote indicating that their prices had been reduced and he gave a breakdown. He said that the pack of 27 x 350g of milk in January it was \$477.69 and by July he had reduced it to \$411.56; the 12 x 800g in January it was \$477.77 and by July it was \$402.89.

Mr. Speaker, Dairy Dairy took out a full-page advertisement indicating to Trinidad and Tobago that they are heeding the call to reduce the price of milk. Milk is a basic commodity that every sector of the country uses, but what is significant and what I applaud all these stakeholders for doing is that they have sent a signal for the first time to the country that we have crossed to a very important juncture in the society's development, and that is to say that we are developing a type of social conscience and equity where persons who are in a position to assist recognize their responsibility as part of national development and they were very willing and forthcoming to play their part in national development. I really want to go on record as congratulating them for moving so expeditiously once the call had been made to reduce prices in the interest of the consumers.

Mr. Speaker, we recently celebrated 47 years of Independence and while as a country we may possess all the paraphernalia of nationhood, that is to say, we have a National Flag, a National Anthem, a Coat of Arms, but unless we are able as a people to give meaning to civic responsibility, to social ethics and social consciousness, we would still be very far away from achieving nationhood. It is for this reason that I make the point that I feel we have crossed to a very important juncture in our society's development by the very genuine efforts of the business community to insofar as possible pass savings on to the less privileged.

And so, Mr. Speaker, thus it was that we are happy to say that by the overall reduction in prices, headline inflation continued its downward trend to the point where now it stands at some 10.1 per cent and the overall inflation rate is at single digits at about 5.8 per cent or thereabouts.

#### **10.45 p.m.**

The Ministry of Legal Affairs is multifaceted and, of course, the issue of our food prices was just one of the areas of concern that we had to address. As the country moves towards developed nation status we are cognizant of the importance of creating a knowledge-based society and one of the requirements of a knowledge-based society is the development, or the creation of the environment where persons who have creative abilities can express that talent, and once expressed, there must be the environment for it to be protected.

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So I am making reference now to the role of the intellectual property office which is leading the charge in the protection of intellectual property for the country, because we recognize that as we forge, what we call, a new economy, that we must look beyond oil and gas which, for all intents and purposes, are very finite resources, but there is another resource that is infinite and, perhaps, still largely untapped, and that is the human resource. It is to the intellectual property office that artistes, our writers, our singers, must turn to for the protection of their works.

So mindful is the Government of its responsibility to ensure that our national patrimony does not suffer the same fate as the steel band did in its formative years, as many of our cocoa varieties did in its formative years because we did not protect it, or even as Lord Invader did when he wrote "Rum and coca cola" and did not protect it—well, we know the story about that. An American by the name of Morey Amsterdam came to Trinidad; heard the song; went back to the States with it; engaged the Andrew Sisters; they recorded the song and made millions from it. Thereafter, Lord Invader had to resort now to an American court to salvage his pride and his authorship in the work. By then, of course, the horse had bolted and Lord Invader recovered part, what we call, relatively speaking, nominal damages for the loss of his rights in the song. The Andrew Sisters made millions. I understand he got about US \$150,000 which is really like chalk and cheese.

The point I am making is that the Intellectual Property Office of the Ministry of Legal Affairs is now leading the charge in ensuring that insofar as it is possible to do so, that we inform our citizenry of the importance of protecting their work. The Government, I must say, is leading by example in that regard, for the Government has taken a series of steps to ensure its own protection of innovations in which it has its own interest. For example, the most recent innovation of the G Pan, a patent application has been filed worldwide to protect it; also the logo of the G Pan itself has been filed as a trademark application. We have also filed the Vision 2020 logo so that Members on the other side would not attempt to take any credit for that at some point in time. [*Desk thumping*] That has been filed as a trademark application.

The arm band for the Soca Warriors, all future captains of national teams can use that; that was filed as an industrial design. The logo for the 5<sup>th</sup> Summit of the Americas, that beautiful logo which was designed by Saga Studios, has been filed as a trademark application and so, too, the logo for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference to be held in November; a trademark application has been filed to protect that. If this is not done, it is open to anyone to appropriate these items, these marks, and use them for their own financial gain to the detriment of Trinidad and Tobago.

All throughout our ministries there is a great repository of intellectual property that needs to be protected, that needs to be harnessed. The Ministry of Information has a very great archival database dated back years, that tells the history of Trinidad and Tobago; they have broadcast rights in so many of those productions that have to be protected. The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, for example, would be the repository for a series of innovations and methodologies in the oil and gas industry.

As the country moves towards greater development, the University of Trinidad and Tobago and In-Teck Park, they would develop their own methodologies and innovations that would allow for new techniques to be protected. The Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, in the area of traditional knowledge, in the area of folklore, in the area of indigenous creations, all have a very important role to play in the recognition and harnessing of intellectual property.

It is for this reason that Cabinet recently approved the establishment of a special purpose company—I know the Member for Caroni East would be extremely pleased to hear that—to manage all intellectual property in which the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has a controlling interest, including applications, market research, technology and licences.

The point is that we are not just talking the talk, we are putting the systems in place to ensure that we are able to manage, as far as possible, all the intellectual property that would arise throughout various ministries, throughout various state entities, thereby allowing it to be monetized, allowing it to redound to the benefit, financially so, of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Another point, another variation of the same theme, has to do as well, with the application for the extension of some species of crops in Trinidad and Tobago. I refer specifically to the reconstituted ad hoc committee which was set up to advise on the selection of species—when I say, species, of different species of plants and crops—to be protected under section 8 of the Protection of New Plant Varieties Act, 1997.

This is a committee that was set up; it is being chaired by Prof. Umcharan of the University of the West Indies and its mandate was to seek to find new varieties of crops. I am happy to say that thus far there are three new varieties of crops: one is pigeon peas; the other is bodi and the third is cocoa, and just a few weeks ago I signed the order that will allow now, these products to be protected.

With respect to pigeon peas, just let me divulge some of the important aspects of this so that we could understand the importance of it. Let us take pigeon peas,

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for example. The traditional pigeon peas, what we call Tobago peas, is what we use in our pelau and our peas and rice, that type of pigeon peas is day-length sensitive. What we mean by that is that brand of peas only flowers when the days become shorter, and we know that the daylight hours are shorter around Christmas time, so that is when they flower. This new brand of pigeon peas, however; this new species, will bear all year round. So you no longer have the limitation of seasonality that exists with the existing pigeon peas.

With respect to the new brand of bodi, it is more resistant to disease; it is more hardy; it is more sturdy. So that, for example, we know in Trinidad and Tobago that during the rainy season we have different types of pests, different types of rodents just cropping up that affect your crops. This type of bodi is resistant to many of those diseases. Of course, with our cocoa varieties, it is yet another type of that excellent cocoa we have, that is used in chocolates all over the world. So these are now being protected.

Cabinet approved the National Intellectual Policy in 2008, recognizing that intellectual property, as I said, is an extremely powerful tool of socio-economic development and it is for that reason that it is important that in the whole scheme of national development objectives, we realize its importance.

I turn briefly now to the Registrar General's Department which plays another fundamentally important role in development, and we are talking development; we are talking promoting effective government, and Members will recall that only in May this year we told the country that you can now get your birth certificate instantaneously. But this was not an overnight process; this was a long road that started in 1994 when Cabinet authorized the Registrar General's Department to develop a population registration system. That system was to serve as a means of uniquely identifying every member of the population of Trinidad and Tobago. That system envisaged an electronic register which would record every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. So as the software developed, as the technology developed, we were able to improve the system; improve the serviceability to our citizenry, so much so that by 2003 we were able to offer free birth certificates to persons under the age of 18. [*Desk thumping*] That was one achievement; 2003.

**11.00 p.m.**

Three years later, 2006, the mail-in/mail-out unit was developed recognizing that there are many persons who live in rural areas and cannot come to Port-of-Spain and line up at our offices at South Quay to get their birth certificates. We had a process where you would mail in your application via TTPost; it would be processed

and we would mail the birth certificate back to you. That system worked well. There were one or two hitches but of course, in the main it worked quite well.

By 2007, we had offices in Tobago and Arima to decentralize the service. The crowning glory as it were was in May 2009 when the software was upgraded to allow persons to access their birth certificates automatically, instantaneously. The actual birth certificate took three minutes to print. It means that the length of time it took you in the line to get to the counter would be the time you would have to wait. It was a big improvement from when you had to come to make your application and come back probably in three or four hours or a few days after, now you can get your birth certificate instantly.

Another improvement worthy of mention is in the Companies Registry. As you know, those of us who were in the practice of law will know that previously, if you had to conduct a company search you would have to come to the ministry, pay a fee and get a search clerk to go down to the vault to get the actual company file. The search clerk will take perhaps 10 to 15 minutes either way doing that and you would then have to go through each page physically. Over the last three years we have been doing a back-filing to record every company and business name electronically. That was completed on August 06, 2009. It now means that once you have Internet access you can stay in the comfort of your office or home, wherever you may be, whatever part of the world you may be, and access our Companies Registry online. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. B. Panday:** At what cost?

**Hon. P. Taylor:** There is a nominal cost of \$20 to download. You have to pay a \$500 subscription fee at which time you would be given a password and user name and from then on you would be able to download the access to the system. It is \$20 per download. Each company's access is \$20.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Where is that?

**Hon. P. Taylor:** You make a manager's cheque to the registry payable to the Registrar General and you are home free. The benefit of this in the context of enabling competitive business in promoting effective government, means that persons from all over the world can access companies' names, the directors of a particular company and the Articles of Incorporation. The process of doing business automatically becomes faster, cheaper and easier. On August 06, 2009, there were 45,812 companies registered and for the same time there were 81,922 business names registered. We keep updating the records on a daily basis, so there is no slippage or lack of information. Everything is current.

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I am happy to say that we are moving inexorably forward. I must also mention that the Law Revision Commission has embarked on a digital library that would seek to digitize all the laws and amendments thereto dating back to the 1800s that have impacted and formed part of the jurisprudence of this country. That is important if we are to have a level of jurisprudence and history that is consistent with our developed nation status. When you look at countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand that have long histories of jurisprudence, they can refer to hundreds of years of legislation that while not necessarily in force, traces the history of the modern legal framework. That is a very important process. We expect that it would take perhaps about three years to complete, but once we have the software, we would begin to work very diligently to ensure that this project is brought to finality.

I see my friend, the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla relaxing. I think that it was he who said that, if I were to use the vernacular, "he does pull chain in de night". I would urge him to desist from that objectionable practice and focus on his constituents.

Again, I make the call that as we move as a society to developed nation status, as we seek to create a new ethos, that we be mindful that we use the opportunity to embrace that social conscience, equity and understanding of humanity of which I spoke and look at the words of Dr. Eric Williams in a new context. We just celebrated independence a few weeks ago and very soon we will be in the midst of celebrating republicanism on September 24.

As I close, I invite us to reflect on the words of Dr. Williams as he said on August 31, 1962: "A country will be free. A miniature State would be established but a society and a nation will not have been formed." We are at a juncture, a very fortunate time in the nation's history when under the reign of the People's National Movement, we have a wonderful opportunity to take the nation forward as one nation under God. It is incumbent on us all to be able to use the lessons of history to ensure that we continue to leave a legacy for others to follow and we would continue to reap the benefits of a country that is laden with potential but we must ensure—

**Mr. Speaker:** You need some more time.

**Hon. P. Taylor:** Just about a minute.

**Mr. Speaker:** No, because your speaking time has expired. The speaking time of the hon. Member for Princes Town South/Tableland has expired.

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. P. Taylor:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Members for being so gracious in allowing me that extra time which will not be necessary. I was making the point that as a nation we have a unique opportunity to embrace all that is good and we must ensure that whatever we do, we leave a legacy that is positive for future generations to enjoy and we continue to move as one nation under God.

Thank you.

**Mr. Anthony Roberts** (*St. Ann's East*): Mr. Speaker, thank you for recognizing me and thus affording me the opportunity to make a very, very brief intervention in this debate for fiscal year 2009/2010. Before I proceed, I congratulate my colleagues, the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, the Member for St. Joseph and the Member for Barataria/San Juan, for the sobering effect that they are having on our colleague, the Member for Princes Town South/Tableland. I am of the view that he is on his way to be a man of the cloth. [*Laughter*]

As a people and a country, as we strive to grapple with the economic realities of today, we should seek to have a responsible approach to the way we deal with the business of our nation. I join with my colleagues in extending congratulations to the hon. Minister of Finance, notwithstanding she is not here [*Desk thumping*] for the work that the Minister has been doing and by extension, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, for keeping focused as we strive to unfold our vision for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

The PSIP and all other government policy documents over the years and this year is no different, continue to make a strong plea and mention of the role of the family. It has said that the family is the bedrock, the foundation of the society. Maybe, my colleagues are having an effect on me as well.

### **11.15 p.m.**

Any serious Government such as the PNM, from 1956, must of necessity take all the appropriate action to deal with issues affecting the smooth functioning of the family. It is for this reason that the approach of decentralization of the delivery of social services becomes so critical to the success of achieving functional families in our society today. This system I consider to be the most forward-thinking and proactive approach to dealing with the many social ills affecting our families in Trinidad and Tobago.

So, Mr. Speaker, the generic social worker, as they are called, can now become much more intimate with families as they work with them in identifying some of the weaknesses and thereby be able to bring to bear the social services of the Government to change the circumstances of these families as we try to

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develop our society. As these circumstances change or improve, certainly there will be that sense of community. People will develop a sense of pride in the country in which they live. They will now be a little more prepared to come together to discuss and come up with ideas to develop their respective community.

So, I commend the Government on its initiative to construct some 92 community centres—I think I have it right—throughout Trinidad and Tobago, more importantly, in areas where there are no such facilities. [*Desk thumping*]

I take the opportunity to commend the hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs for considering my own constituency, the community of Gasparillo in Santa Cruz. [*Desk thumping*] I am being specific because there is another Gasparillo in Trinidad and many people do not know of Gasparillo in Santa Cruz.

On behalf of the residents of that community, I extend profound and sincere gratitude to you, notwithstanding that you have not yet started. Of course, you are PNM and I can take your word for it. [*Desk thumping*]

As I speak about community development, I again express my pleasure in that the Government has allocated substantial sums for another initiative, that of self-help in Trinidad and Tobago. This initiative has brought communities together while, at the same time, developing the infrastructure within those particular communities. For example, many communities have benefited through better roads, bridges, drains and the laying of water mains. Again, I congratulate the Government and the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs on this initiative.

As I move quickly along, another initiative of the Government that I commend is that of the strengthening and deepening of local governance through the local government reform. I assure you, Mr. Speaker, that I am a former practitioner of local government. I am convinced that it has a significant role to play in the development of communities in Trinidad and Tobago.

Let me turn my attention—as I indicated, it is just a brief intervention but I want to use this opportunity to make a plea on behalf of my constituents on a few issues. For example, the people of Santa Cruz, Upper and Lower Santa Cruz, are experiencing grave problems for water. I cannot understand why a community, nestled in the Northern Range, with springs and flowing rivers, is experiencing difficulty for water. It is a watershed. Through you, Mr. Speaker, I appeal to WASA not to stretch the patience of my constituents. I appeal to them to do something almost immediately in an effort to relieve the pain and suffering of the people of Upper and Lower Santa Cruz.



As well, the community of Laventille Road, Febeau Village, a densely populated area in San Juan, severely lacks infrastructural development. I appeal to the relevant authority to give urgent consideration to the cries of the people at Laventille Road, Febeau Village. We appeal for better roads, drains and other infrastructural development in terms of the construction of steps and rails. I know that we have some of the special purpose companies with responsibility and I appeal to them that they listen to the cries of the people of that community.

As it relates to the Maracas Valley community in my constituency, I appeal for the construction of a health facility. The community has outgrown the one that now exists and I appeal to the Ministry of Health to consider the reconstruction of a health facility for the people.

I commend the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs for his intervention where he kick-started works at the Brian Lara Recreation Ground in Santa Cruz. I commend him, but I appeal to him as well to ensure that whatever documentation or preparation that is necessary is done so that the first phase will flow into the second. At the same time, I also appeal to him to put his boots on and kick-start the work taking place on the Maracas Valley Recreation Ground.

I have the honour to represent a sporting constituency which has given to the world and to Trinidad and Tobago Brian Lara, cricket; the Bravo Brothers, cricket; Arnold Dwarika and Alvin Thomas, football; Ato Boldon, athletics; Anthony Roberts, any sport. [*Desk thumping*]

I am really appealing to my colleagues for assistance and thank those who have come to my assistance and to the assistance of the people of the constituency of St. Ann's.

I thank you.

*Motion made and question proposed*, That the House do now adjourn to Monday, September 14, 2009 at 10.00 a.m. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 11.26 p.m.*