

*Leave of Absence**Monday, September 14, 2009***HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Monday, September 14, 2009*

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

**PRAYERS**[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I received communication from the following Members requesting leave of absence: the hon. Stanford Callender, Member of Parliament for Tobago West for the period September 11—15; the hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj SC, Member of Parliament for Tabaquite for the period September 14—15 and the hon. Kelvin Ramnath, Member of Parliament for Couva South for the period September 14—18. The leave which these Members seek is granted.

Hon. Members, with respect to Members Callender and Maharaj SC, both of them are out of the country. With respect to Mr. Ramnath, as you know, he has fallen ill recently.

**PAPER LAID**

The Administrative Report of the Chaguanas Borough Corporation for the period 2006/2007. [*The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]

**STATEMENT BY MINISTER****Jamaat al Muslimeen****(Sale of Property)**

**The Attorney General (Sen. The Hon. John Jeremie SC):** Mr. Speaker, on 27<sup>th</sup> July, 1990, the Jamaat al Muslimeen launched a vicious attack against the State that was aimed at removing, by force of arms, the duly elected Government of the day. That attack, let me remind Members of this honourable House, wreaked untold havoc in this country. Large parts of the capital were destroyed and a number of persons, including members of staff of the Red House and a Member of Parliament, were killed.

In 1994, the government, then led by Prime Minister the Hon. Patrick Manning, commenced proceedings against Yasin Abu Bakr, the Jamaat al Muslimeen and others, claiming damages for the destruction of state property during the failed insurrection and its aftermath over the period July 27, 1990 to August 01, 1990.

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Mr. Speaker, I pause to make this point. These proceedings were commenced almost 10 years before the election of 2001. On September 06, 1996, the High Court registered judgment against Mr. Abu Bakr and others in default of defence and damages were later assessed in the sum of \$15 million with interest.

In February 2006, the Government, which by then was once again in the hands of the hon. Prime Minister, Patrick Manning, issued a summons, pursuant to the provisions of the Remedies of Creditors Act, Chap. 8:09, seeking orders for the sale of 11 parcels of land, 10 of which are owned by Mr. Abu Bakr, either by himself or together with others, in order to recover the moneys owed to the State. At the date of the issue of the summons for sale, the unsatisfied judgment debt with interest stood at \$31,680,046.17.

In defence of summons for sale, Yasin Abu Bakr suddenly recollected, swore and filed an affidavit on June 08, 2006, in which he alleged that there was an oral agreement made between him and the hon. Prime Minister to the effect that the order for the payment of damages to the State should not be enforced and that the defendant should never have to pay any money to the State under that order, reciting that he had made a deal in exchange for which his debt would be forgiven in exchange for him assisting the PNM in its election campaign.

It should be noted at this juncture that Mr. Abu Bakr had consistently alleged the involvement of various persons at various times in his unforgettable criminal activity of July 27, 1990. First, he alleged, as it suited him, before knowledge and, therefore, the criminal participation in his crime by the Opposition Member for Tabaquite, Mr. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj SC. No one took the word of a known criminal then over that of the hon. Member. No investigation was launched then, even though the Jamaat produced a tape, which they alleged substantiated their claims. Then Abu Bakr made similar claims contradicting himself against the hon. Member for Couva North. Again, no one took the convenient word of an insurrectionist seriously.

On this occasion, however, not surprisingly, he has chosen to attack the Member of Parliament for San Fernando East who, incidentally, is the only Prime Minister to command governments which have actually pursued this claim then against Abu Bakr. Neither the Member for Couva North nor any other Prime Minister of this country has done this. Instead of being commended for the dogging and successful determination to bring to justice the Jamaat al Muslimeen for its detestable acts, the hon. Prime Minister, Mr. Patrick Manning, is asked to respond to a concocted story from a man without a shred of credibility in this country. This Government cries foul.

It was the State's position from the onset in the courts that there was no truth to these allegations and that accordingly, Mr. Bakr's affidavit would have to be contradicted. However, Senior Counsel advised that the alleged agreement in which Mr. Abu Bakr relied was illegal or contrary to public policy and that in accordance with settled principles of law, the High Court should not take cognizance of it. Senior Counsel advised instead that an application be made to strike out the affidavit. Such a course would avoid the time-wasting spectacle of having the Prime Minister deposed to deny the agreement and be subjected to cross-examination.

It appears, in hindsight, that this is precisely the tactic which was being employed in Mr. Bakr's defence, since at no time did his lawyers seriously question the illegality of the alleged agreement. The application to strike out came before Mr. Justice Rajendra Narine who did not consider whether the alleged agreement was illegal and unenforceable, taking the position instead that the application to strike out was premature. This meant that consideration of the question of the controversial affidavit would have to be delayed until after all the evidence was in and cross-examination had occurred. In other words, the judge wanted the Prime Minister before him and he wanted him to be cross-examined. The Attorney General challenged this decision in the Court of Appeal, which overturned the decision of Justice Narine and unanimously ruled that the application to strike out the affidavit be heard there and then before them. The Appeal Court also ruled that the alleged agreement on which Mr. Bakr sought to rely was illegal and unenforceable and could provide no defence to the summons for sale of his land.

The Court of Appeal said as follows at page 21 into 22 of its judgment:

"I think that if the judge had considered the legal effect of the allegation in the affidavit, as he ought to have done, he would have come to the conclusion that the affidavit should have been struck out as being scandalous and irrelevant."

**Mr. Manning:** "All yuh hear?"

**Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC:** "I would allow the appeal and strike out the affidavit and order that it be removed from the record."

**Mr. Manning:** "All yuh hear?" That is the Appeal Court.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC:** The judge was, therefore, quite firmly reversed by a unanimous Court of Appeal, which included the present Chief Justice and two other senior Justices of Appeal, in terms describing the affidavit as scandalous. Those are not my words, but the words of the Court of Appeal.

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By a unanimous decision delivered on May 05, 2009, the Privy Council upheld the decision of the Court of Appeal, both in respect of its ruling that the application to strike out was not premature and that the alleged agreement could not form a defence. The board concluded that:

“...the affidavit propounding the agreement was irrelevant, as the Jamaat could not rely upon the agreement as a defence to the application for sale of the lands. The respondent should not have to incur the expense which would be involved in filing rebutting evidence. Nor should the proceedings be held up over the delay which would be an inevitable consequence of filing evidence, disclosure of documents and possible cross-examination of deponents.”

*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Manning:** “All yuh hear?”

**Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC:** As such, the Court of Appeal’s decision that Mr. Bakr’s affidavit be struck out and removed from the record stood and it was the State’s expectation that the relevant authorities would faithfully adhere to the decision of this Republic’s highest courts. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Manning:** The rule of law, in other words.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC:** Mr. Speaker, the rule of law required nothing less. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Manning:** The rule of law.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC:** With the status of the affidavit clear as being scandalous, irrelevant and, I would add, incredible, the way was now clear for the summons for the sale of Mr. Bakr’s property to be heard and determined.

It is important to pause here to emphasize that no question concerning the alleged agreement could any longer be considered by the court; Mr. Bakr’s affidavit having been ordered to be removed from the record by the Court of Appeal as being scandalous.

Accordingly, as he had now been required to do, on September 11, 2009, Justice Narine ordered the sale of the defendant’s properties in satisfaction of the State’s judgment. Inexplicably, Justice Narine then, without notice to or invitation by either party before him, permitted himself to refer at great length to the contents of the very affidavit which had been struck out as being scandalous and had as a consequence become wholly irrelevant to the matter before him; the very affidavit which had been described by the Court of Appeal as scandalous and

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which, more importantly had been ordered to be removed from the record and which as such, ought not to have been available to the judge to be referred to. The court then, quite remarkably and without saying what enquiries had been made, indicated that as far as the court was aware, no action had been taken by the authorities to conduct a thorough investigation of the allegations. The court then superfluously and publicly directed the Registrar of the Supreme Court to forward a copy of the affidavit filed by the second defendant on June 08, 2006, to the Acting Commissioner of Police and the Acting Director of Public Prosecutions for their consideration.

**10.15 a.m.**

This was, of course, in defiance of the order of the Court of Appeal which had described the affidavit too scandalous and ordered it to be removed from the record. That decision was upheld by the Privy Council.

Mr. Speaker, I repeat, this is the very same affidavit which the Court of Appeal held was scandalous and irrelevant and ordered that same be removed from the record. How then could the judge consider it proper to refer to this affidavit and furthermore to send it to third parties?

The action which Justice Narine took in this instance is to be contrasted with that of the Court of Appeal and the Privy Council; both of which, despite having the affidavit before them, did not think it fit, in effect, to require that a criminal investigation be carried out into the allegations made in Mr. Bakr's affidavit, no doubt confident that the relevant authorities would do their job as they, in fact, have done.

Mr. Speaker, in light of the above, I have today penned a letter to the hon. Chief Justice, expressing the concerns of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in relation to these developments. This Government prides itself on its respect for the rule of law and the doctrine of the separation of powers.

Mr. Speaker, in this country, even the words of an insurrectionist can engage the attention of the police. We welcome that, as we welcome every police investigation as an opportunity to demonstrate to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that we are fit to govern this land. What we deplore in the strongest terms possible is the attempt by some to treat these words as factual in the absence of any investigation and any assertion made in his own defence by the hon. Prime Minister. All that we seek is an opportunity for the Prime Minister to be vindicated.

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

**Mr. Manning:** Yeah! [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order! Members, I am on my feet and you are required to be silent.

**APPROPRIATION BILL  
(BUDGET)  
[Third Day]**

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question* [September 07, 2009]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

*Question again proposed.*

**Dr. Hamza Rafeeq** (*Caroni Central*): Mr. Speaker, I will make no comment on the statement that has just been made, except to say that sometimes even convicted criminals speak the truth. [*Desk thumping*] There are other Members who are going to deal with that matter in greater detail later on.

This morning, the country woke up to screaming headlines: “Carnage in Curepe bar 5 killed”. This is not how I intended to start my contribution this morning, but I think it will be remiss of me if I did not refer to this article. Five people were killed in a few seconds in a bar in Curepe yesterday. Mr. Speaker, we do not know what else it will take for this Government to act decisively on crime. We have close to 400 murders that have already been committed this year, and we are just in the middle of September. Mr. Speaker, 400 persons have lost their lives already and nothing that this Government has done seems to be working.

In a while, perhaps in today's debate or in the next couple of days, the Minister of National Security will come and recite many things that he had said before—he is buying OPVs, guns come here, drugs come here, the drugs go and the guns remain and all sorts of nonsense, and at the end of it nothing has changed and nothing will change.

On behalf of all the law-abiding citizens of this country, first of all, we express condolences to the members of the families who have been killed and, secondly, we call on the Prime Minister to relieve the Minister of National Security of his portfolio. [*Desk thumping*] There are many persons to choose from. The Minister has been in office close to five years or six years and every day the situation seems to be deteriorating. It is strange. I never thought that the day would come when we in this country would have to announce with some degree of pride, that we had a good day yesterday, because only one person got killed. They are now killing in crops—three persons, four persons, and then five persons were killed in a bar yesterday. Mr. Speaker, that is not really the thrust of my contribution this morning but, as I said, other Members are going to deal with that matter in greater detail later.

During this week, Friday last and the next week to come, 71 persons would have spoken in this budget debate which would have lasted close to 75—80 hours. During those 75—80 hours, many suggestions and recommendations would have been made in an attempt to improve the quality of life of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and to improve the provisions in the budget. If the Government decides, as it has done on so many previous occasions, that it is not going to change a full stop, a comma or a sentence in the debate then, indeed, that will be very unfortunate, but as a responsible Opposition, it is our duty to point out the flaws, deficiencies and the shortcomings in the budget and to make alternative suggestions.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to many shortcomings and discrepancies in the budget, as outlined by my colleagues, and which will be outlined in the coming days and in the course of next week when the debate continues in the other place, the biggest casualty in this debate has been credibility. If the population could believe that 60 per cent or 75 per cent of the promises in this budget would be implemented, then we could sit and have a mature discussion on the provisions here, but if it takes the course of previous budgets, then we have very little hope that within the coming year the provisions in this budget will be implemented, because we have had several empty and lavish promises being made in budgets in the past and they have not been implemented.

We get the impression that there is a statutory requirement and that the budget must be passed by a certain date which is October 31—the Government puts a budget together and then it will pass it, but the provisions in the budget will be of very little relationship to what actually happens at the end of the day.

When the Leader of the Opposition was speaking, he made reference to the promises of a highway from San Fernando to Princes Town and Mayaro which was in previous budgets; a highway from San Fernando to Point Fortin which was in previous budgets; the dialysis centres which were made in 2004 and to date not implemented; the Point Fortin Hospital; praedial larceny and agricultural access roads.

Mr. Speaker, what has changed that will give us hope now is that those promises that were made in past budgets that were not delivered will not be delivered this time. The only thing that has changed in the last few years is that now we have less money to do it. In the past, we had a lot of money and those promises were not delivered and now we have a lot less money. As I said, it gives us very little hope, seeing that we had so much money in the past and these projects were not delivered, we have very little hope that they will be delivered. All that we will say here within this week and next week—the 71 Members who will speak in this budget debate and those who would have commented outside

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this Chamber—is that all we are doing really is engaging in an exercise in futility. Having said that, it is our responsibility, as a responsible Opposition, to put our side of the story on the table.

Mr. Speaker, firstly, I want to make a few comments, seeing that my colleague, the Member for Caroni East had run out of time, I would like to continue from where he left off and make a few comments on the health sector. Despite the pleadings of the Government and, particularly, the Minister of Health, that everything is good in the health sector, people who seek health services in the public health care on a daily basis can tell you that things are deteriorating rapidly in the public health sector.

The millions of dollars that are being spent on public relations exercises are not helping. I want to say to the Minister that he does not need to do that. If things are good in the health sector, the people who seek services there will be your best PR. They are the ones who will go and tell people that things are good, but the millions of dollars that are being spent would do him no good.

Mr. Speaker, there is nothing in the budget that gives any hope that things will improve. I just want to refer to a couple of issues in the health sector. Of course, the first matter has to do with a perennial problem that we always complain of and that is the issue of overcrowding at the nation's hospitals. There is a statement in the budget that 500 beds will be added to the health sector upon completion of the Point Fortin, Arima, Sangre Grande and Scarborough Hospitals. Mr. Speaker, again, how long can we wait for Point Fortin Hospital? When is the Point Fortin Hospital expected to be completed? Give us a date! When will the beds be available to add to the complement in Trinidad and Tobago? That is what I want to know. I am talking about overcrowding. You said that you are going to add 500 beds, so tell me when are you going to have the beds available to members of the public. Tell us when you are going to have the beds available at Arima Hospital for members of the public; at Sangre Grande Hospital for members of the public; and at the Scarborough Hospital for members of the public. Tell us when these beds are going to be available.

It is a nightmare. I think Members here, especially those on the other side might hardly understand that it is a nightmare when you go to the San Fernando General Hospital and you have to go through casualty and then go up to the ward. People who get sick tremble when they know that they have to go and face that situation at the San Fernando General Hospital.

Imagine that you are in pain, you cannot breathe properly and you have all kinds of health difficulties—when you go to the hospital, eventually when you are



seen after three, four, 10, 15 or 20 hours and you are referred upstairs where you will be warded—you have to remain on a couch, a bench or a chair for two or three days. How can that be right after we had so much money in this country and the Minister is spending so much money in PR to tell the citizens of this country that the health sector is good? How can that be right when sick people have to remain on a bench, or a chair for one day or two days or three days? When they eventually get a bed on the ward, it is either they die or when the doctor is making the rounds in the ward he has to discharge sick people, because there are more people downstairs waiting to go upstairs. So, the doctor has to make a judgment as to which person he is going to send home and which sick person he is going to admit on the ward. That is the situation and the reality of what exists in the public health sector. We have been told that 500 beds will be added and, as I said, we do not have a clue as to when this will be done.

With respect to the Point Fortin Hospital, I do not think that a design was done. If the design was not done, when will construction start? When is a contract going to be awarded?

**Mr. Imbert:** Soon.

**Dr. H. Rafeeq:** The answer is not for me. The answer is for the hundreds of thousands of people in this country who are suffering.

**10.30 a.m.**

Mr. Speaker, Arima Hospital, again, we do not know if a contract has been awarded; we do not know if even a design brief has been prepared as yet. Sangre Grande Hospital, what is the status of that? Scarborough Hospital, that of course, as you know, is a scandalous situation; every year we hear, well this year it would be completed; this year it would be completed, and that has been going on for the past five years.

Chaguanas: We were told in this Chamber here that the Chaguanas District Health Facility would have been completed by August 2005, and that is by no less a person than the Minister of Health himself; 2005 has gone, 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009, and earlier this year, we were told in answer to a question about the Chaguanas District Health Facility that a contract has not yet been awarded. So, we were told that the construction would be completed and now we are told that not even a contract has been awarded for the construction of the Chaguanas District Health Facility.

What about the Couva Hospital? You know something has happened here that very few people have taken note of, and that is, a burns centre was supposed to

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have been established in San Fernando Hospital, and for good reasons, because a burns centre requires many back up facilities. You require an operating theatre, a good intensive care unit, laboratory facilities, and specialists in many different fields, who would be around to look after patients. That is what a burns centre does and requires, but we were told that the burns centre, which was originally scheduled to be constructed at San Fernando Hospital, has now been removed to the new Couva Hospital.

Subsequent to that we were told that four hospitals were to be constructed: Point Fortin, Arima, Sangre Grande and Scarborough. Couva has been taken completely off the radar, which means that the burns centre has also gone with it. So, Couva Hospital has gone, burns centre has gone. [*Desk thumping*] So, there is no hospital for central and, of course, no burn centre for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, Renal Dialysis Centre. In 2003, the Prime Minister as Minister of Finance came here and made an announcement in the budget statement that by January 2004, two renal dialysis centres would be established in Trinidad, to dialyze 200 patients each; one in the north and one in the south. That was January 2004. You know, sometimes they say on that side, that when a project is announced, the project will not be completed in the same year, and we understand that.

If a project is announced, it takes about two to three years to be completed—some of them—but when a definite statement is made that the project would be completed, we expect that the project would be completed. Not only that, we expect at least that the project would have been commenced. [*Desk thumping*] If for some reason you missed the date, January 2004, what about January 2005? What about January 2006? What about January 2007? What about January 2008? What about January 2009? Up to now construction has not even commenced and today we have heard in the budget again, construction will begin on two renal dialysis centres at San Fernando and the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, and this will be done in partnership with the private sector. Six years later, nothing has been done yet, but we got another announcement that dialysis centres will be—

Mr. Speaker, this is why I am saying that the biggest casualty in this budget really is credibility. How can we believe that during this year construction will really begin on the renal dialysis centres, and in one year or two years time patients who are suffering from renal failure will have had added to the services in Trinidad and Tobago two dialysis centres.

In Trinidad and Tobago we have a high incidence of diabetes, high blood pressure, and, as a result of these, we have a high incidence of chronic renal

failure. For those people who have had relatives and friends who suffer from renal failure, they would know the agony that these patients have to go through when they cannot even breathe because fluid is accumulating in their body, and they need dialysis urgently, and to tell these patients well, okay, it did not start in 2004; it did not start up to 2009, but this year something will start. Mr. Speaker, that is just making a mockery of the situation.

What about the Oncology Centre? That is another scandal. We were told by several Ministers in the PNM Government that the Oncology Centre would have been completed by 2007; 2007 has gone; 2008 has gone; we are now in 2009, and if you pass near the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, you would see the site there that is overgrown with grass, bush and so on. Nothing is happening with the Oncology Centre there.

There was a time in this country, when you had cancer that you know it was almost certain death, because cancer was a death sentence; that is no longer so. There are modalities of treatment that are available for cancer now, that you can almost be cured of cancer, and you can live a long number of years, having had cancer you can live a productive life but, of course, you must get the proper treatment.

This is what we were hoping and this is what we were planning, that the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who suffer from cancer, at least they would have had these modalities of treatment available to them at this Oncology Centre. What can we tell the thousands of patients who are suffering from cancer? What hope can we give them that in the very near future, they would have a centre that they can go and get proper treatment for their condition? What can we say to them? The answer is, there is nothing that we can say to them because there is no hope that we can give them.

Mr. Speaker, dengue: In the constituency of Caroni Central, just within this last week, there is one area in this constituency that eight people contracted dengue in a very small area. The eight of them had been hospitalized at different times, within a period of about two weeks; that is only one small area in this country, but there are several cases of dengue. Dengue in Trinidad and Tobago has almost reached epidemic proportions and we are hearing nothing.

You know, what is happening in Central Trinidad, Mr. Speaker? In the county of Caroni there is a public health inspector attached to the regional corporation, and he has with him three insect vector people who do the spraying and so on. There were about nine people who had been temporarily employed; they have been sent home. He now has three people working with him to spray the entire county of Caroni. How can that be? How can he do that? How can three people

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manage the whole of Central Trinidad? And I am saying you had eight people who were hospitalized and there are several more in the constituency of Caroni Central and, indeed, in the other constituencies in Central Trinidad, and I am sure in other areas the experience would have been the same.

Mr. Speaker, I am just raising these issues; I cannot go into much detail because I have other things to say, but I just want to make a little comment on the CDAP. We had said from the very beginning of this CDAP that the programme is a good one; that it caters for people who have chronic diseases and it gives them some measure of relief. There are issues with the quality of drugs and so on, that can be dealt with, but the programme is a good programme.

Again, the population has been duped; the population has been fooled. There are many pharmacies in this country—and I would be filing a matter on the adjournment, as soon as this budget is finished, so that we can air this in greater detail—and there are many patients who cannot access CDAP drugs because they are simply not available at the pharmacies, and when the pharmacies make the request to Nipdec for drugs, they are just not getting the quantity of drugs they require.

So, when patients come with a prescription with about five or six items, they get two; sometimes they get three; they do not get the rest; they have to buy the rest, those who can afford; those who cannot afford, they would do without, and then when they go back to the clinic at the next visit, their condition has gotten out of control. Whether it is diabetes, high blood pressure or whatever it is, it has gotten out of control because they do not have the medication to deal with it.

I do not know if money has run out. I do not know if the problem is a management one. Whatever the problem is, the point is, it is poor people who are suffering because they are not getting the drugs that have been promised them.

I just want to make two comments again on the health sector. I wanted to find out—and I do not know if the Leader of Government Business can indicate this to the Minister of Health when he comes—what is happening with the Health Sector Reform Programme.

The Health Sector Reform Programme commenced in 1995; now is 2009. There were certain goals and targets that were applied to that health sector reform programme. We want to find exactly what has happened to the Health Sector Reform Programme in terms of the expense, projects that have been delivered, successes that they have had, the challenges that they have had, because plenty money has gone into the Health Sector Reform Programme, and we are not really seeing the benefits of it at the end of day. We want an appraisal of the Health Sector Reform Programme. What has happened to it?

The next issue is the Human Tissue Transplant Act. You know, after 25 years, when we were in government, we passed the Human Tissue Transplant Act in 1999. Subsequent to that the regulations were supposed to have been developed and the Act was supposed to have been implemented. Well, of course, we demitted office and the new Government took office. I think just about two years ago, the regulations finally came. From then to now, one operation has been done with respect to that Act; that is from a cadaver.

What that Human Tissue Transplant Act did was, gave the authority to transplant organs from cadavers to living persons. The Minister came some time ago and he said that 15 or 20 transplants had been done, but they were from living persons to living persons. There was no legislation that was required to allow that to be done. Transplants have been taking place in this country for the last 24 years, since 1985, from live donors to other people.

There are 150 people who have died by motor vehicle accidents; this year there are 360 who have been killed. Many of these persons would have had organs that would have been transplanted to people who are suffering from renal failure, to people who are suffering from other diseases, and given them life; corneal transplants and so on, but the programme has just not got off the ground.

We are not saying that we are depending on people to be killed on the roads so that other people can live. We are saying that the reality is that people are being killed on the road and quite a number of them are young people who have very good organs that can be transplanted, and they can save lives. Why is this programme not being implemented? [*Desk thumping*]

I would just make one final appeal and that is, the Gaffoor Report. Justice Gladys Gaffoor did a comprehensive investigation into the health sector, and she made several recommendations for the improvement of the health sector. When the report was laid in this Parliament, the Prime Minister got up and said that he had established a team of people—[*Interruption*] You are disclaiming that you did that now, Mr. Prime Minister?—to look at the Gladys Gaffoor Report and make recommendations within one month, as to how the implementation would take place. That was three or four years ago; nothing has happened.

**Mr. Manning:** Who tell you that?

**Dr. H. Rafeeq:** If that report had been implemented, today we would not be talking about these things. [*Desk thumping*] Today the health sector would have been in a much better condition, because she made comprehensive recommendations.

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Mr. Speaker, permit me to move on now. Over the last two or three weeks, when the budget date was announced, several individuals and groups from sections of the society, were making comments and recommendations as to what they would like to see in the budget. Some of them said they would like to see something done with the crime situation. Of course, nothing is being done. They would like to see something done with the deteriorating health sector. They would like to see things done with the traffic congestion, and so on.

Almost all of the people who were interviewed with respect to what they would have liked to see in the budget said that something should be done about agriculture and the lowering of food prices. I am talking about people who do not have any training in finance, economics and so on. They were saying that food prices, even though there was a slight dip in food prices, and I went to the groceries and I compared what had been happening last year with the food prices and I know among certain items, there is a decrease in some of the food prices, but that is not sufficient for the people who live on minimum wage, people who live below the poverty line or people who live on fixed incomes.

**10.45 a.m.**

Mr. Speaker, we have heard several times, so many times in the past and we continue to say it, that we live in an oil economy and now it is a gas economy, but regardless of how long we continue to say that, oil and gas will run out. We are not going to quibble with the Ryder Scott Report as to whether it will take 10 years, 15 years or 20 years. The bottom line is oil and gas will run out, and when they run out we should have sufficiently diversified the economy so that the citizens of this country can continue to live the standard of life that they are accustomed to, and so we need to have a proper diversification programme.

As early as 2002/2003 this Government came to the Parliament in one of the budget statements and they gave an outline of the diversification programme and they spoke about manufacturing, tourism, the financial services sector, agriculture and a couple of others as plans for diversification. Mr. Speaker, noble intentions! What has happened with this diversification thrust, and in particular what has happened with agriculture since 2002 till now? The agricultural sector—and I do not want to quote newspaper reports but just yesterday there was a newspaper report where several people from several of the agricultural associations were saying that all that is happening is that you are putting “plaster on sore”, but nothing concrete is being done to stimulate the agricultural sector.

As we know, the agricultural sector has the potential for generating foreign exchange, it has the potential for giving us some measure of food security as a nation, and of course, decreasing the food import bill. I want to read out the food import bill for the last couple of years: In 2003 the food import bill, \$1.9 billion; 2004 the food import bill, \$2.2 billion; 2005 the food import bill, \$2.7 billion; 2006 the food import bill, \$2.8 billion; 2007 the food import bill, \$3.4 billion and 2008 the food import bill, \$4.2 billion. From 2004 to 2008—in four years—the food import bill has doubled from \$2.2 billion to \$4.2 billion. Up to April this year the food import bill was \$1.178 billion. I am saying that we need to take agriculture seriously because agriculture has the potential to decrease this food import bill, it has the potential to earn foreign exchange and it has the potential to give us some measure of food security.

The other thing is that the contribution of agriculture to GDP is less than one-half of a per cent. If we really want to diversify the economy away from oil and gas at some point in time—diversification is something that you do not do in a couple of months, you do not do even in a couple of years; it takes a considerable length of time to diversify the economy and the time to start the diversification process is when you have money. We had money recently, the diversification process was not started. But if we want to diversify the economy, half of a per cent contribution to GDP from agriculture certainly will not do.

Mr. Speaker, let us move on. If we are serious about agriculture, I want to go to the budget statement and I will make comments on some of the initiatives that the Minister has announced in the budget statement. There is a strange statement here, it says:

“The first is to promote greater food security”—this is talking about the agricultural sector—“based on increased local and regional production.”

Very good. But the second:

“To develop a range of new value added products which can meet domestic and international market requirements.”

Mr. Speaker, what exactly does this mean?

“To develop a range of new value added products which meet domestic and international market requirements.”

What does that mean? Is it agri-business? What products are you talking about?

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Not only that, but where in the budget is the financing for developing a range of new value added products which can meet domestic and international standards? Where is the financing for it? What are the activities that are going to take place to develop this new range of new value added products to meet domestic and international standards?

Let us talk about some of the issues that must be addressed if we are to move the agricultural sector forward. The first one is land tenure. There is a statement made here in the budget:

“The Government proposes to accelerate the land regularization process at the EMBD especially for those farmers with expired leases.”

Before any serious effort can be made with respect to the agricultural sector, we have to address the issue of land tenure. The first thing that has to be done even before you talk about land tenure—in the issue of land management you are supposed to have a land capability study, a land capability study to tell us in Trinidad and Tobago where are the lands that are suitable for agriculture; where are the lands that are suitable for housing; where are the lands that you are going to make available for commercial and industrial activities. That is the first thing! You need to know where these lands are and do not convert agricultural lands for housing and industrial activities unless it is absolutely necessary. [*Desk thumping*] Do not do that!

Because you know what has happened in the Tucker Valley area? Land capability, in the River Estate, soil Class I—best agricultural soil in the country. In 1960, 13 per cent of those lands were in housing; by 2006, 43 per cent were in housing. So you converted 30 per cent of the lands with the best agricultural soil to housing. In 1960, there were 4.3 per cent for commercial activities, in 2006, 14.9 per cent; and agriculture in 1960, you had 50 per cent of the lands in agriculture, in 2006, you had 24.5 per cent. So you have lost a little more than half of your best agricultural soil for commercial and housing activities. Why? Why should that be so? If you are serious about the diversification into agriculture, why are you taking prime agricultural land and converting it to housing? We have a great deal of land in Trinidad and Tobago that can be converted to housing. Why are you taking prime agricultural land and converting it to housing?

I am of the view that agricultural lands should be protected by law. [*Desk thumping*] Even if it has to be protected by the Constitution, I am of the view that it should be protected, because when you lose lands from agriculture to other areas like housing, commercial and so on, you do not ever recover that. That is



not reversible. That is lost forever. As I said, I am of the view that it should be protected even if you have to protect it by the Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, Caroni Limited had 77,000 acres of land and in answer to a question raised in this Parliament again by myself, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources responded as to what was being done with those 77,000 acres of land. More than half of the lands were ear-marked for other activities except agriculture. So, out of those 77,000 acres of land more than half were earmarked for other activities—commercial and industrial activities, housing and so on. So already by policy more than half of the agricultural lands have been converted to other use. I am saying that if you are serious about agriculture you should not do that. There are other lands that you can use for industrial and commercial purposes and so on, but leave agricultural lands to agriculture. [*Desk thumping*]

The second issue in land management is the issue of distribution of land. Somehow this Government is very reluctant to distribute lands to farmers. If you live in an agricultural area—and I am sure a number of the Members of Parliament here would have that experience—there are hundreds of people who have been applying for lands to do agriculture who are on government lands who are doing agriculture and do not have a lease and who had leases and are not getting their leases renewed.

In my own constituency in Carlsen Field there are about 50 farmers there—and I raised this issue before without any redress and I am raising it again today—who are farming on 100 acres of land and for the last 25 years they have been asking for regularization of the lands there. We went through the entire process up to the lands being surveyed and allocated. I had a meeting with the Director of Land and Surveys—I think that is the designation—and when I went there she said that there was a problem—and that was two years ago—and the problem was that there was some issue with surveys that were done and the surveys had to be redone. She said no new surveyor wanted to correct a survey that somebody else had done and the previous surveyor did not want to correct his own survey so there was an issue with that. She said that she would try to find the money within the budget to redo the survey.

Two budgets have passed since and moneys have not been allocated to redo that survey and the people are still in limbo. They have been coming to me on a regular basis. I have written the Minister asking for an appointment to meet with him to discuss this issue and all I get is, “I have seen your letter and we will contact you for an appointment”. Six months have passed and we have not had the opportunity to get an appointment with the Minister to discuss this issue.

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Mr. Speaker, he referred me to the office in Chase Village. There is an agricultural office in Chase Village, and when I went to the office in Chase Village, they had absolutely no information concerning the settlement in Carlsen Field and they could not give me any further information than what we already had. As a matter of fact, the farmers had a lot more information than the people at that office there. That is Carlsen Field and there are two areas close by, one in Writson Road and one in Bancroft Road, same thing, and all the Members here have issues similar. There are people who are on state lands, they are not having their leases granted in the first place and those who have had leases, the leases have expired and they are not being renewed.

There are about 7,500 farmers—and this is not the ex-Caroni workers—who have had leases and the areas are in Bois Bande Village, Sangre Grande; Valencia; Caura Valley; Spring Village, St. Augustine; Bamboo Nos. 1, 2 and 3; Bejucal Warren; Orange Grove; Tabaquite; Cragnish; Pasea; Maloney; Garden Village, Arouca and Curepe. These are some of the areas that people are doing agriculture but they cannot go to the ADB and get a loan; they cannot go to any one of the commercial banks and use their land tenure to get any of the incentives because they do not have a piece of paper with them. They do not have any kind of regularization. Why is it that the Government is making this so difficult for them?

Mr. Speaker, you cannot do agriculture if you do not have land. If the Government is serious about land, then they should make it easy; regularize all of those who are on government lands and give all of those who are genuine farmers who are interested in agriculture, regularize their tenancies for them.

Trinidad is not the only place that is thinking about diversifying into agriculture. The whole world is realizing that they have to diversify into agriculture because food security is becoming a very important issue. There are some countries which were net exporters of food, they are now importing food. Countries like China, India and so on, they are now importing food. There are countries now which are acquiring lands in other countries in order to do agriculture; like Russia, they are acquiring lands in Ukraine; China, they are acquiring lands in Mozambique; in Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Syria, they are acquiring lands in the Sudan in order to be able to plant food so that they will guarantee their food security.

A few years ago the Prime Minister as Minister of Finance in his budget statement came here and said that he had started an initiative to acquire lands in Guyana in order to plant food. What has happened to that initiative? What has happened to that initiative in acquiring lands in Guyana to plant food? The Prime Minister should tell us what has happened to that initiative. What has happened to

the initiative in Guyana, Mr. Prime Minister, where you had said that you would acquire lands for agriculture?

**11.00 a.m.**

Is it that you want the lands and you want the Government to provide the infrastructure as well? What is the problem? Tell us what the problem is.

Mr. Speaker, the other problem is water. You have lands, you have people who are willing to go into agriculture and you cannot do agriculture unless you have proper water management. In this country, it will not pay farmers to plant only for six months for the year, or three or four months for the year. Farmers must be able to plant their crops throughout the year, and the only way you can plant crops throughout the year first of all, is if you have proper irrigation in the dry season and if you do not have flooding in the wet season. The situation here is the reverse. You have flooding in the wet season, and in the dry season you do not have water for agriculture.

So, Mr. Speaker, make a connection between the two. You make a connection between the two, you established ponds and you established dams and so on, you trapped the water during the rainy season and you have your irrigation during the dry season so that farmers can plant throughout the year. What is so difficult about that? If you are serious about agriculture, if you want agriculture to contribute more to your GDP, if you want to bring down your food import bill and you are serious about agriculture, you need to deal with water management. You need to establish ponds, you need to establish embankments, you need to put sluice gates, you need to have pumps and so on, and deal with the issue of water. So that in the rainy season you do not have flooding, and in the dry season you will be able to use that same water that you have trapped to irrigate your lands so that you can plant. Not six months of the year. So you can plant throughout the year. You do not have to plant six months and then let the land remain idle for the other six months of the year. Not only that, you do not have to suffer from flooding which we know a lot of our farmers suffer from.

Mr. Speaker, when their produce is flooded out and they go the Ministry to ask for some kind of assistance in getting back on their feet, there is a schedule by which the Government pays. For a melongene plant, do you know what they pay? Sixty-nine cents. Sixty-nine cents for a melongene plant. Do you know the how much money you can make from one melongene plant? For eddoes, they pay 55 cents for an eddoes plant. For corn, they pay 19 cents. For cassava, they pay \$2.56 cents for a full grown cassava plant. Pigeon peas, \$1.68. One dollar and sixty-eight

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cents cannot even buy one pound of pigeon peas. Not even one pound, and one tree will give you about 10 pounds of pigeon peas. That is what the Government pays, \$1.68. For a full grown tomato tree, 100 per cent maturity, they pay 97 cents. One tomato tree will give you about 10 pounds of tomatoes.

**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. H. Rafeeq:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank my colleagues. There is just one final one I want to give you and that is watermelon. They pay \$4.13 for one fully grown, 100 per cent maturity, watermelon plant. That cannot even buy half of a watermelon. That will buy 2 pounds of watermelon at \$2.00 per pound. That is what they are paying the farmers, and the tragedy is that some of these extension officers visit these flooded areas about two, three or four weeks after the flood has taken place and they say that they have no evidence that you have lost all of these crops, so we cannot pay you. That is the reality of the situation. Do you know what a farmer told me in Caparo? He said the agricultural extension officer came to visit his place about three weeks after the flood had taken place. He told them that he had lost so many ducks and they were asking him, where is the evidence of the ducks that you have lost?

Mr. Speaker, how would you keep the carcasses of these dead ducks for six weeks? How will you do that? So, you do not send your agricultural officer to do an assessment within a reasonable time, and then you tell them that you do not have any evidence of what you have lost and then there is nothing to do. If the Government is serious about agriculture, they have to get serious. They cannot operate in this ad hoc manner.

Mr. Speaker, let me deal a little bit with praedial larceny. We know in several budgets for the last four or five years the issue of praedial larceny has been mentioned—even the Prime Minister. The Government knows the problem. That is the thing. The Government knows all the issues; they know the problems. They have listed them on several occasions in these budget statements. They have listed the issues. They are aware of the issues. I do not know why they do not deal with the issues, because the issue of praedial larceny has been coming up in several budgets for the last four or five years. This one—“...praedial larceny is a major disincentive to agriculture.” That is this year's budget. “The Government is

committed to putting an end to this illegal activity and will implement the Agriculture Ranger Squad (ARS) to reduce the incidence of theft within agricultural communities.

Mr. Speaker, somewhere in this budget it say that there will be zero tolerance for crime, and then five murders yesterday. So, I wonder if the people who are in agriculture will believe this.

“Government is committed to putting an end to this illegal activity and will soon implement the Agricultural Ranger Squad (ARS) to reduce the incidence of theft within agricultural communities.”

It is heart-rending when people prepare their lands, they plant, they nurtured these crops throughout until they reach maturity and when the time has come for them to reap, and then somebody else comes and reaps for them. It is really, really heart-rending. What about livestock? Again, you rear the animals from the time they are born till the time they reach the age of maturity, where you either sell them or you will do something else with them, then somebody comes and steals them. Persons like these have lost their entire livelihood because that is what they depend on. Two or three cows, whatever it is, they have lost all completely.

Today, when someone is being robbed, there is a break-in your home, somebody is stealing your car, even a murder and you call the police, it is difficult to get the police to come to your home. It is difficult to get the police to come to your home in response to these calls. Do you think the police will respond to a call if you say somebody is thieving my goat? Somebody is stealing my goat, do you think the policeman will respond to that? Do you think if you tell them somebody is stealing my watermelon, a policeman will respond to that at 12 o'clock in the night? That is only wishful thinking. But that is not the only area where farmers suffer as far as crime is concerned. They lose their equipment like water pumps; boat engines for those who are doing fishing; equipment and supplies, they lose those as well. A lot of these pieces of equipment are stolen.

Then there is another issue, and that is, farmers have to go to the market sometimes 1 o'clock and 2 o'clock in the morning to sell their produce and when they go there, they are exposed to the mercy of the bandits and the criminals there. So, there is a lot to be dealt with in the area of praedial larceny. But there is a curious provision in this budget as it deals with praedial larceny. They are saying that the Government is going to establish an Agricultural Rangers Squad. I want to ask the Minister—*[Interruption]*

**Dr. Moonilal:** What is the abbreviation for that?

**Dr. H. Rafeeq:**—what exactly is an Agriculture Ranger Squad, and how it is different from the praedial larceny squad? What is the difference between an Agriculture Ranger Squad and a praedial larceny squad? The name? [*Interruption*] Oh, the difference is the name. Fine, if the difference is one of name—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Dr. H. Rafeeq:** and you are saying it is going to be a pilot project, this Agriculture Ranger Squad is going to be a pilot project in Carlsen Field and officers will be patrolling that area 24 hours a day. One million dollars has been allocated in the budget for this activity. That is the Agriculture Ranger Squad.

Mr. Speaker, how many officers will staff this Agriculture Ranger Squad for this pilot project? Remember when you have a complement of staff, you will have people on holidays; you have to establish three shifts because they work in eight-hour shifts, so you will have to have three shifts of people; you will have people on sick leave; you will have people on all kinds of leave, some of them have to make court appearances and so on. One million dollars! How many officers are you going to put in that squad; how many officers you are going to put in Carlsen Field to patrol on a 24-hour basis with \$1 million? So, I think this thing has not really been properly thought out. There is an existing praedial larceny squad. They should try to deal with that. Strengthen that, put more officers in that squad, rather than having to establish something new. As I said, \$1 million for that squad, but the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources this year will be spending \$6 million on public relations activities. Activities related to public relations, \$6 million. I checked it out myself last night in the budget documents; \$6 million they will be spending on activities related to public relations.

Let us deal with something else now, Mr. Speaker, and that is agricultural access roads. There is again, a curious statement in the budget. “Approximately 1.2 kilometres of agricultural access roads were rehabilitated at a cost of \$200,000.” I do not know if that is all the roads that they were able to rehabilitate within the year—1.2 kilometres. If that is all, something has to be wrong. Something has to be wrong if you are saying—[*Interruption*] No, no, I will give way just now. Hold on a minute. If it relates to a particular activity with the Agricultural Society and so on, then I accept that.

**Mr. Imbert:** [*Inaudible*]

**Dr. H. Rafeeq:** Okay, no problem. Well I accept that because somewhere else it is said in the document that 7.5 kilometres of road were rehabilitated during last year. Mr. Speaker, there is a statement here that says, “We estimate that there are

approximately 500 kilometres of agricultural roads requiring urgent rehabilitation.” That 500 kilometre is just a drop in the ocean. There is a lot more than that, but even if we take 500 kilometres of roads and last year you rehabilitated 7 kilometres, how long will it take to rehabilitate 500 kilometres? The documents states further that this year they will rehabilitate 8.42 kilometres of road. So you had 7 kilometres last year, 8 kilometres this year—that is 15 kilometres in two years—how long will it take to rehabilitate 500 kilometres of road? Obviously, the Government cannot be serious about agricultural access roads. Fifteen kilometres you are going to rehabilitate in two years.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make a little statement on this issue which has been completely left out in this budget, the mega farms. Last year, this formed a significant part of the budget presentation, this year it has been left out. But money has been allocated somewhere in the budget, so I want to deal with it. Tucker Valley—there is a mega farm at Tucker Valley. Two hundred acres of the best agricultural lands in this country for a mega farm in Tucker Valley and with the help of the Cubans, they are planting sweet pepper, cucumber, cassava and so on. There is another 100 acres that have been leased to PCS Nitrogen on which they are planting vegetables as well, and my understanding from press reports is that there is another 100 acres that have been allocated to a couple of Guyanese farmers to plant rice. That is all I said that we have heard about the mega farms.

Mr. Speaker, first of all, you do not use prime agricultural lands to plant cassava. You do not do that. You can plant cassava anywhere in Trinidad and it will grow. The soil type in Trinidad is that you can plant cassava. You do not use the best soil in Trinidad, the Tucker Valley soil to plant cassava—You do not do that. There are other things that you can plant—and I will come to that in a minute—but you do not use the best agricultural soil to plant cassava. That is the first thing.

**11.15 a.m.**

The second thing is that these mega farms should never be planting things that the small farmers plant. They should be planting things that the small farmers are not involved in. I will tell you what: Things that you need in large quantities, things that could be processed here and things you could even export. You could plant corn; you need to plant corn, because you can absorb all the corn that could be planted in this country; you could even use it as feedstock for animal feed. You could plant legumes: peas, beans, lentils, black eye. You could plant all of those and absorb all. We import millions of dollars of these on an annual basis. You could plant carrots; we import millions of dollars in carrots on an annual basis; no small farmer plants carrots. You could use the mega farms to plant these types of crops.

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You could use the mega farms to plant pineapple. We in this country have a special brand of pineapple, a special variety that is resistant to disease. Several countries have tried to replicate that and use it in their own countries, but they have not been successful. So since we have a special brand of pineapple that is resistant to disease, you could plant pineapples in these mega farms. You could plant all of these. You do not need to plant things that the small farmers are planting, so that you would be in competition with them.

Mr. Speaker, this is what I do not understand: The Minister came here and answered a question with respect to the Tucker Valley Farm; he said that there was a demonstration component to it; but Tucker Valley is not really a demonstration farm, there is only a demonstration component to it. He said that, at the end of the day, in one year, the projected income is expected to be \$3.9 million. When they plant in Tucker Valley and sell their products, they are expected to get a profit of \$3.9 million. But forget the capital expenditure, that is for grow boxes and green boxes; forget all those.

The recurrent expenditure to give you this \$3.9 million in profit would be \$4.65 million. So you are spending \$4.65 million to get sales of products of \$3.9 million. How can you do that? There is a demonstration component to this thing. How are you going to tell that to farmers? This is the best agricultural soil in the country. You are using the best agriculture soil in this country, spending \$4.65 million to get \$3.9 million. Is that what you are going to tell your farmers? "Listen, we are teaching you how to grow your crops and how to do your business, spend \$4.65 million to get \$3.9 million." Something has got to be wrong.

If you had given that sum of money to the private farmers themselves, they would have been able to make a much larger profit with that in a much shorter time. I guarantee you that. Farmers in Trinidad and Tobago are very entrepreneurial; they are very experienced. You bring Cubans to assist them, and you are paying \$4.65 million to get \$3.9 million. It just does not work that way. Something has got to be wrong with that.

The final point on that is that they have removed the seed propagation station from Tucker Valley to Centeno. That was a very, very poor technical decision. In your seed propagation system, you are supposed to be in an area that is fairly sterile, one that would not be disturbed by other environmental issues. That was the reason it was put there in the first place. When you take it to Centeno, you do not have the suitable environmental conditions there for plant propagation. That was a poor technical decision on the part of the Government.



Mr. Speaker, the Government said it would give an additional \$75 million to the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) with a further \$75 million, if that was necessary. Last year in the budget, they said that they would give \$125 million to the ADB. I have looked in the document and I have seen none; so they have given the Agricultural Development Bank none. This year they are again saying that they would give \$75 million to the ADB, but we do not know if they would really receive that money.

They are also saying that the Government would purchase, through an arrangement with a company called YARA, 2,000 tonnes of compound fertilizer, and make it available to farmers at cost. The cost of inputs into agriculture is extremely high. Fertilizer is only one of the inputs into agriculture. You have seed and seedlings; you have weedicide; you have equipment; you have machinery. You have a lot of agricultural inputs, of which fertilizer is only one. So when you are going to make 2,000 tonnes of agricultural fertilizer available, that is only a drop in the bucket; that would not satisfy the lowering of the cost of inputs, if you are serious of making agriculture an important part of your diversification process.

Cocoa: It has been said, and we all know that it is true, that we have the best cocoa in the world. What has happened within the last two years, as far as cocoa is concerned, is that the Government has allowed it to run down to the extent that, as an industry, it hardly exists today.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say to this Government that cocoa is a gold mine. It is something that you should be promoting with all the resources you have available. You should be promoting the growing of cocoa with all the resources you have available to you, because that is a gold mine. That is true. It is US \$5,000 per tonne.

Our cocoa is used to make chocolate bars abroad. You can encourage downstream industries here, where you use the same cocoa to produce the chocolate bars. We can have our own brand of world class chocolate that we sell to the world. [*Desk thumping*] Why must we take the best cocoa in the world and send it abroad, where they make chocolate bars and send them back for us to buy? That is the old colonial thinking. We could use cocoa here; encourage private sector participation; give them the necessary incentives and make our own chocolate bars, so that we have our own unique brand of chocolate with which we could lead the world. After the cocoa industry has gone completely down, the Minister is now saying that he wants to revitalize the industry.

Let me tell you what has happened to milk. In August this year, dairy farmers met with the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and Nestlé

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Trinidad and Tobago, desperately seeking an increase in the price of milk because they were also on the verge of extinction—the cattle farmers and the milk farmers.

At present, the Government pays a subsidy of \$1, and Nestlé pays \$2. That price has remained the same from 1997; that was 12 years ago. The Government, of course, has refused, and the result is predictable. Milk production dropped from 13 million litres in 1999 to 5.8 million litres in 2006; that is the drop. It was predictable, because of the price. Last year, with only a handful of farmers remaining, they produced 4 million litres. Are you serious about agriculture?

What about fishing? Fishing is almost on its deathbed. Fisherfolk do not have infrastructure; they do not have proper jetties; they do not have proper storage facilities; they do not have security and they do not have assistance on the high seas for their boats, not forgetting, of course, high gas prices. Since the implementation of the water taxi in San Fernando, they do have a regular facility.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources told the fisherfolk in San Fernando who had been fishing on the jetty, where the water taxi is, "Go somewhere else and fish." A gentleman by the name of Salim Gould, who has been a fisherman for the last 25 years, said, "This is unrealistic". "Does it mean that we must leave the Gulf and go to the North or to the East?" "This will have a very great overhead cost on fishermen, the boat owners and people in the community." "I have invested my life here; I am a boat owner for 27 years; I never went to school; I do fishing here from a little boy; what I am going to do now?"

Another gentleman, Martin Alexander, said that the ADB no longer used the boat as security, nor your house or land; they either wanted cash or shares in the Unit Trust. They want shares in the Unit Trust to use as collateral in order to get a loan. The Government really cannot be serious about agriculture. As somebody said yesterday, they are only putting plasters on sores.

As far as fishing is concerned, last year they were allocated \$3.9 million; this year the fisheries sector has been allocated \$1.7 million; a decrease of \$2.2 million in the fisheries sector.

**Dr. Moonilal:** "To kill de fish!" [*Crosstalk*]

**Dr. H. Rafeeq:** I just want to say two words on the issue of sugar.

Mr. Speaker, we have lived in this country to see in our lifetime sugar becoming king again. When the closure of the sugar industry took place, we did not support it. We said that we needed to restructure the sugar industry; in fact, that was told to some of the sugar workers, the cane farmers. We thought that the

plan was to keep sugar, at least, for domestic consumption; 75,000 tonnes or thereabouts for local consumption. The Government closed the industry entirely; they got rid of the entire sugar industry.

Today, even with the downturn with economies all over the world, there is a shortage of sugar. That is going to continue for weeks and probably years to come. The price of sugar is going to increase in years to come. As I said, yes, what did we do? We looked at an area that would have been so very profitable, and we closed it down completely.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Vision 2020.

**Dr. H. Rafeeq:** The President of the Trinidad Manufacturers Association, Greg Laughlin, in an article on August 23, 2009, described the looming sugar price situation as frightening. He said that the burden would be on manufacturers to keep the prices down, but consumers would feel the brunt, unfortunately, and the price increase had to be passed on.

What products in this country use sugar? So many things in this country use sugar. The cost of all these is going to go up. He said that one could always say that the decision to close the sugar industry was a bad one.

The Government has no interest in getting into the sugar industry, fine, but I am asking them to get into some kind of private sector arrangement whereby they could rehabilitate the sugar industry. [*Desk thumping*] The technology is available in Cuba and India, capital intensive agriculture, [*Desk thumping*] not labour intensive agriculture anymore, for the sugar industry. You can do that and turn around that sugar industry in a very short time.

**Mr. Imbert:** Turn around? Profits?

**Dr. H. Rafeeq:** You can make profits in the sugar industry, if you give it to the private section. What happened to ISCOTT when you had it? You were losing \$1 million a day; you gave it to the private sector and they turned it around for you.

**Mr. Imbert:** Turn around sugar?

**Dr. H. Rafeeq:** My time is running low, but I just want to mention one little fact which a lot of persons in the public domain do not know. As far as the financing for the agricultural sector is concerned, for this year and last year, last year for recurrent expenditure you had \$586 million. For the Development Programme from the Consolidated Fund, \$102 million, and from the Infrastructure Development Fund, \$71 million, giving a total of \$759 million for the agricultural sector. Last year

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the agricultural sector was allocated \$759 million. This year, recurrent expenditure \$635 million; Development Programme from the Consolidated Fund, \$81 million; from the Infrastructure Development Fund (IDF), \$21 million; \$740 million. So from last year to this year, \$760 million last year and this year \$740 million for the agricultural sector.

**11.30 a.m.**

Mr. Speaker, that is the information we got from the documents that the Government gave us as far as the recurrent expenditure is concerned and the development programme. So this year the agricultural sector got \$20 million less than they got last year. I want Members to be aware of this so if they are thinking that things in the agricultural sector will get better, Mr. Speaker, they must be aware that they have got less money this year.

Mr. Speaker, what would the UNC do if it were in office? First of all, and this is sadly lacking in all the documents they have presented in this budget, we would immediately set target for agriculture; agricultural contribution to GDP, our import bill, employment and so forth.

Land distribution regularization; we would immediately regularize all existing land and land tenants, we would bring legislation if necessary to the Parliament to protect state lands; we would strengthen the Land and Surveys Department with other land agencies because I have been there myself and that department is in chaos. There are a couple people there who are working and that department needs to be strengthened if you are going to distribute land to farmers. We would look at that.

Water management: I mentioned that you need to dredge all the watercourses, you need to establish pumps, embankments and as I said, retention dams and put the necessary infrastructure for irrigation during the dry season.

Development of the mega farms along the line as I told you to plant corn and carrots, potatoes, legumes and rice and so forth. Next, we would invite the private sector participation and reopen the sugar industry for all the reasons I mentioned for capital-intensive agriculture, not labour intensive. We would strengthen the laws relating to praedial larceny and not establish a ranger squad as they have said.

Mr. Speaker, we would work out a tax incentive for farmers to rehabilitate the access roads, we would immediately begin rehabilitation of the cocoa industry and as I said put enough resources because that is where the future of agriculture in this country lies. That is a gold mine and I am saying if you are not going to get the kind of revenues that you were getting from gas and oil, you have to look at cocoa.

Mr. Speaker, we would purchase farm crops at a guaranteed price so that farmers would at least know that at the end of the day when they produce whatever they produce there is a guaranteed price for it. We would establish a government-led crop insurance programme so that farmers do not have to lose their livelihood when they get one flood.

We would take and implement a policy decision to have a high local content in the school-feeding programme, meals and meals that are served in hospitals especially government hospitals. We would have a programme rehabilitation of all parts of the fishing facilities.

Mr. Speaker, we would give the required and necessary incentives for entrepreneurs to go into agro-processing and review the agricultural incentive programme. We would give support and incentives to the coffee, cocoa, coconut and copra industry.

Mr. Speaker, there is so much more to be said but I know my time has run out. There are some constituency issues I would have liked to deal with, but I know my time has run out. If you will just permit me one minute, I would like to say to the Minister that I have been trying to restrain the people in Arena Road from protesting. So many times they wanted to come out and protest and I have been able so far to restrain them. I will not be able to restrain them much longer.

Please, Mr. Minister, look at the Arena Road and fix it for them, they have been clamouring for that for years now. I have had so many promises but nothing has been done. Please fix the road. And to the Minister of Public Utilities, there are many areas in Caroni Central that are not getting water, I have written you, and I will write you again.

Thank you very much.

**The Minister of State in the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education (Hon. Fitzgerald Jeffrey):** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, I listened to the Member for Caroni Central and you would wonder whether they were ever in Government at all. Mr. Speaker, it is a case of much ado about nothing, and so this morning, I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate the Minister of Finance, the Member of Parliament for D'Abadie/O'Meara for an excellent budget presentation, [*Desk thumping*] full of informative data, reader friendly, logical and very relevant.

Mr. Speaker, this budget must be seen within the context of Vision 2020. As I glance across at the other side, I see derision and cynicism on the faces of many

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of my friends opposite. Mr. Speaker, I can understand their position because they recognize as we march confidently towards Vision 2020, their chances of coming on this side are very remote. [*Desk thumping*]

For the benefit of this House, I want to inform this House about Vision 2020 and what it really says. It says that:

“Trinidad and Tobago”—this land of our birth, this rainbow nation, on or before the year 2020—will be a united, resilient, productive, innovative and prosperous nation with a disciplined, caring, fun-loving society, comprising healthy, happy and well-educated people and built on the enduring attributes of self-reliance, respect, tolerance, equity and integrity”.

Mr. Speaker, the philosophy of Vision 2020 is in sync with the virtues of the holy books and, therefore, Vision 2020 is divinely inspired and sanctioned. And so those on the other side on a path of deprecation need to heed the words of Gamaliel in the Acts of the Apostles, Chap. 5: 33-35 when he says:

“If this work be of men, it will come to nought; but if it be of God, you cannot overthrow it.” [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the various contributions by Members opposite and I am yet to find one of them to congratulate the Minister of Finance for her Budget Presentation. Not one of them could find one single thing in the budget to praise her for. This is indeed a sad day.

Mr. Speaker, I shall not be surprised because we know those on the other side hold sternly to the dogma of Churchill that the duty of the Opposition is to oppose; whether or not it is something good that the Government is doing or something bad. We know that people will pelt stones at a tree with fruits, and, therefore, when I see them attack my Minister of Finance, I know we are on solid ground.

Despite the futile attempts of those opposite who go abroad and try to discourage investors from investing in this country, despite the futile efforts of those who try to inveigle those international rating agencies to try to downgrade Trinidad and Tobago; despite the effort of those who are trying to create civil disobedience in this country, 99.99 per cent of this country is behind Vision 2020. They want us to achieve developed nation status.

Mr. Speaker, I listened to the Leader of the Opposition as well as several Members attacking the smelter plant at La Brea. I just want to put in the record an address by the hon. Basdeo Panday, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago on the occasion of the signing ceremony for the project agreement for an aluminum

smelter in Trinidad and Tobago on Thursday, November 12, 1998, at 12.30 p.m. at the Trinidad Hilton.

Mr. Speaker, on page 9:

“Ladies and gentlemen,

Trinidad and Tobago’s thirty-year quest to establish a local smelter is finally within our grasp as we sign this Project Agreement for the establishment of an aluminium smelter/power plant.

This project will provide sustainable jobs and further an economic development in this country.”

What is wrong with 2009 when they want to put down the aluminium smelter at La Brea? [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** After stakeholder consultation.

**Hon. F. Jeffrey:** Mr. Speaker, the people in La Brea need jobs and we are talking in terms of the economy. They also attacked the environment; let us go to page 11 and hear what it says.

“In addition to the multiplier effects in terms of indirect employment creation, this investment would facilitate the expansion eastwards of the Point Lisas Industrial Estate, an expansion of port and marine infrastructure ...” and so forth.

Mr. Speaker, I wonder where was the environmental consideration then? What about the crabs and the birds, where were they? No concern, but there is concern now in 2009.

**Hon. Member:** Who said that?

**Hon. F. Jeffrey:** That was the right hon. Leader of the Opposition who was Prime Minister then.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to read in the record a statement at page 20 which says:

“I am pleased to see that Norsk Hydro envisages a two-train smelter facility each with a rated capacity of 237,000 tonnes.”

Mr. Speaker, the smelter at La Brea is 125,000 tonnes and I go further by saying that the smelter at La Brea is one of the most environmentally friendly aluminium smelters on the globe to be built.

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Mr. Speaker, I find it very hypocritical to attack the smelter in La Brea. It seems that one of those opposite who is leading the court battle against the smelter was the Attorney General when this document was prepared.

Mr. Speaker, I wish that the Member for Tabaquite were here, I would have sat down and given him a chance to explain that. The people of La Brea are fully behind the Alutrint aluminium smelter; they need it. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, some of those opposite would like La Brea to be hunters and gatherers, drawers of wood and hewers of coal, but they should be well advised that the first industrial town in the English-speaking Caribbean was La Brea. We have gone past hunting and gathering. We want to see, the same way we were glad for the people of Point Lisas, Couva, Chaguanas and what had happened to them with the Point Lisas industrial development, we would like to see the same thing happen to La Brea. And so I ask those opposite who are on this destructive path to keep down the people of La Brea, rise up and join with us for that aluminium smelter to be built now.

**11.45 a.m.**

It is extremely important for us to understand what the smelter means for the people of La Brea. We have paid the price and now we are ready to experience true development.

I would like to deal with Vision 2020. The last time we heard from the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs and he said that his ministry is on target to attain Vision 2020 goals. I want to say here this morning that the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education is on a similar vein. [*Desk thumping*] When we came into government in 2002 those pursuing tertiary education was less than 12 per cent. We had set a target of 45 per cent by 2010 and 60 per cent by 2015 and many people casted scorn on that vision. But do you know what happened? At the beginning of 2009, that figure was 42 per cent and counting, and we know that come 2010, 45 per cent would have been achieved. [*Desk thumping*]

As you listen to more and more Members on this side you would realize that the jigsaw puzzle is coming to fruition. [*Desk thumping*] This Government recognizes that every citizen in this country is blessed with talents, with abilities, though not of the same measure. We have different abilities; different talents. The Member for Mayaro could sing lovely; I cannot sing. We also recognize that we can learn at our own pace and that is why this Government has introduced a wide variety of programmes to cater for the variety of skills and abilities of our people, such as: MYPART, MILAT, YAPA, OJT, TTHTI, Retraining, MuST, YTEPP, and then



we have GATE and HELP to assist with the financing, and so on, to cater to the needs of our population. These programmes are sound, available and accessible to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, in our programmes we are not just looking at numbers; we are looking at quality as well. That is why, for example, the National Training Agency and the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago have taken such a serious place in our education portfolio. We all know that before this Government came into office, there were problems with jobs. There were many people who had their subjects and could not find employment because the employers were asking for experience, and this great Government, of which I am a part, introduced the On-the-Job Training Programme which was to help give our graduates the opportunity, while getting a stipend, to get the necessary experience and training. But no sooner than we left office, the programme was curtailed—was stopped by a United National Congress.

**Dr. Moonilal:** We did not stop it.

**Hon. F. Jeffrey:** You stopped it. But God recognizes, that, listen, this foolishness must stop and so in 2002 the population voted resoundingly for the People's National Movement to come back so that the OJT could come back. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, in the OJT Programme we cater for people between the ages of 16 and 35 and between 2002 and 2009, 53,043 persons were trained under this People's National Movement Government. [*Desk thumping*] Therefore, between 2008 and 2009, it was 6,753.

You know, they like to talk about the distribution. We have public and private providers. When we are looking at private providers, in central, there were 92; in the east, 83; in the south, 98; Tobago, 126 and in the north and west, 241. It just shows how well we operate in Trinidad and Tobago. We have equity in our distribution. [*Desk thumping*]

In 2009 we introduced the CVQ Level 1 as a pilot in administration at Petrotrin. The OJT Programme has been extended from one year to two years, commencing October 01 and we have raised the stipend from \$1,600 for those with two O levels, to \$2,000; for those with A levels and CAPE, from \$2,500 to \$3,000; for those with degrees, a first degree, it went from \$4,000 to \$5,000 and those with post graduate degrees from \$5,000 to \$6,000.

It is more than that. We have some success stories on the programme. We could take into consideration Marcia Murphy from east Trinidad. She was an OJT

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at Jaric Health and Safety Limited as a clerical assistant. At the end of her training, she was made permanent at the company and was later promoted to administrative manager. She now manages both the Trinidad and the Tobago offices. [*Desk thumping*] She is Jaric's international representative for safety conferences and she now holds a diploma in Human Resource Management. [*Desk thumping*]

I just want to use two more examples. Raquel Mohammed from south was an OJT trainee at Paramount Transport in the accounts department. She is now permanent as the accounts clerk in Paramount Transport. [*Desk thumping*] And lastly in this scenario, Gary Barclay and Vishaal Ramnarine were both OJTs at WIN TV as production assistants. Gary has been promoted to the supervisor of operations and Vishaal was promoted to master control. [*Desk thumping*]

We go on to the MuST Programme, the Multisector Skills Training Programme. As you know, it caters for people between the ages of 18 and 50 who are unemployed, differently-abled, re-entrants into a productive society, and so on. Between 2004 and 2009, 25,147 persons were trained under the MuST Programme. [*Desk thumping*] Do you know what? Between 2008 and 2009, the figure was 5,274 trainees.

I just want to give you a breakdown because I want the national community to recognize how the People's National Movement runs its affairs: In south, 1,174 trainees; in central, 1,601 trainees; in north/east Trinidad, 1,146; in north/west Trinidad, 1,181 and Tobago 172. We are meeting the challenges of unemployment. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, if you will indulge me, I just want to talk about some success stories. Abraham Nelson from Penal Rock Road in Penal, by his own admission, was a hustler on the block with no sense of direction. He was encouraged to join the MuST Programme and he joined it as a welder. Today he got his full TTNVQ, which is Trinidad and Tobago National Vocational Qualifications. He is now the foreman, fabricator and fitter where he works. That is another success story from the MuST Programme. [*Desk thumping*]

Veda Bissram was enrolled as front desk housekeeping at Bel Air International Hotel under the MuST Programme. She is now permanent and now pursuing a diploma in Culinary Management at THTTI. [*Desk thumping*]

We are trying to demonstrate here this whole question of seamlessness in our education system. From one, you could get into the other. Ryan Wallace enrolled in the MuST Programme doing bartending at Crowne Plaza. After his training, he was retained and later promoted to man the Sunday brunch bar all by himself. He,

too, is also pursuing a diploma at the Trinidad and Tobago Hospitality and Tourism Institute, another example of how they are moving. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, we are doing what we are supposed to do, educating our population. [*Desk thumping*]

I am going on to the retraining programme, so again we could see what is happening. Between the ages of 25 and 45 people who were unemployed/displaced are some of our major beneficiaries. In the retraining programme 63 different skill areas are offered, from agro-processing to agriculture; from autocad to desktop; from boat building and net repairs to desktop publishing; graphic design to television and video production, and on and on. That is happening in 52 centres in Trinidad and Tobago: 38 in Trinidad and 14 in Tobago, all evenly distributed throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Between 2004 and 2009, 25,147 persons were trained under the retraining programme and in 2008/2009, the figure was 5,274.

Success stories: Rayber Bowen joined the retraining programme after accepting VSEP from Caroni (1975) Limited. He did welding and later qualified as a certified welding inspector. He later joined the Certified Welding Inspector, Welding Equipment and Sales. He is now the project manager at Technical Contractors Support Services in El Dorado, Point Fortin and Point Lisas. He is also a shareholder in that company. That is how retraining operates. [*Desk thumping*]

Ricardo Sean Dowridge from the east did multi-media animation in the retraining programme and is now pursuing the diploma in animation at UTT, another example of seamlessness in the education system.

### **12.00 noon**

In other words, from the MuST and the retraining programs you can still get to university and get your education. That is PNM's education.

Dion Narine from South graduated from the retraining programme in air conditioning and refrigeration at Level 2. Do you know what happened? He resigned his job and opened his business. A very successful one at that. [*Desk thumping*]

Anthony Wong from Central Trinidad—we have Chinese too—He did woodworking and furniture design under the retraining programme. He has opened his furniture business in Central Trinidad.

Let us go on to the Helping You Prepare for Employment (HYPE) Programme because I want you to understand what we are doing in Trinidad and Tobago. Under the HYPE Programme, young people from the age of 17 to 25, those who either did not complete secondary school or who were unsuccessful at secondary school, we are catering for them because we believe that they are people too.

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They have worth. For the first three months we help those trainees in the HYPE Programme doing literacy and numeracy using computer applications and for the next nine months, we do skills training, physical education and psychosocial skills. From 2000 to 2009, 8,019 were trained under the HYPE Programme. Without the HYPE Programme those young people would have been lost in the world of work.

If you go to the Youth Training Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP) which caters for the 15 to 25 age group, from 2002 to 2009 there were 45,438 trainees, while in 2008/2009, the figure was 7,314. They operate in 14 disciplines in 30 centres throughout Trinidad and Tobago and community-based projects at 50 sites nationally.

I will talk about one or two success stories because it is important for us to understand how we give hope to our young people in Trinidad and Tobago. Neil Seepersad's mother died when he was seven years old. No father around. He was taken to a place called Las Lomas.

**Mr. Sharma:** You got permission to call these names?

**Hon. F. Jeffrey:** Yes. It is important so that we cannot be accused of what you are accustomed accusing us for. I am doing this deliberately. Neil Seepersad at age 17 returned to Laventille where he joined the YTEPP catering course at Malick Senior Comprehensive School. He recalled that for many years he had to walk from Gibson Trace over Trou Macaque Hill because he had no money for transportation. One day he practised making some sweet bread from a recipe he had learnt from the YTEPP class. It was the beginning of great things. He took those three sweet bread and went into his neighbourhood and they were sold very quickly. People began asking for more and as they begun asking for more, he continued to make more. Today, Mr. Seepersad has his catering business. [*Desk thumping*] He caters for Inland Revenue, NICB, Lever Brothers Credit Union and he was awarded the catering contract for security officials for the Fifth Summit of the Americas. [*Desk thumping*] This is the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

I do not want us to lose sight of the whole question of the quality of those programmes. Before the coming of the Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ), we had the Trinidad and Tobago National Vocational Qualification (TTNVQ). Now we have the Caribbean Vocational Qualification. We need to understand what happened with those two qualifications. Let us assume that you wanted to do a course in hairdressing or plumbing, before you can do that the National Training Agency would call some experts in the field to design the standards for the programme and organize the units for the programme.

After this is done they visit the training provider to see what the conditions are like such as ventilation, accommodation and equipment to ensure that OSHA's regulations are being followed. They also look at the qualification of the person who is providing the service. Apart from looking at that, they also train the providers as well as the technical instructors who have to be able to teach the trainees. They may have the skill but to pass it over they need to be trained. The National Training Agency conducts training programmes for the technological instructors. They also conduct training programmes for the internal and external verifiers to ensure that the quality of the programme is not watered down. We have continuous consultation with industrial training organizations. They are the ones whom we try to get to endorse the standards and programmes as we go from time to time.

As we go toward the Caribbean Single Market Economy, we want to have the free movement of labour throughout the Caribbean. What has to happen? We have to standardize all the different qualifications in the Caribbean. For example, somebody in Trinidad with Level 1 qualification in plumbing could go to Barbados or Jamaica and get a job if Level 1 qualification is required. Why? Because under the CVQ there is standardization around the region. This is one way of us moving forward as a region.

The CVQ is also a benchmark against international money. As we have seen from time to time, our graduates from our training programmes have been able to go to Saudi Arabia and North America and get good jobs. Why? Because the qualification that they get from Trinidad and Tobago is second to none. [*Desk thumping*]

We also have in the system some people who have worked for a long time as 20, 25 and 30 years but they do not have certification. What will happen to those people if they were to go abroad to get employment? No certificates. Under the Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), they now have a stake. What happens? The National Training Agency will do an assessment of the person and look at their skill. Where they are short they would bring them up to par. If they have what is requisite they get the Caribbean Vocational Qualification. We are leaving no one behind. [*Desk thumping*]

Education is serious business. The People's National Movement demonstrates clearly how serious we are about education. The Minister of Education will deal with that side of the secondary schools and the line Minister will talk about the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT), the University of the West Indies (UWI), Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses (GATE) and the Higher Education Loan Programme (HELP) for you to understand how comprehensive we are dealing with education in Trinidad and Tobago.

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If we are to achieve developed nation status on or before 2020, education and training would become the sine qua non for that to happen. As we try to address the whole question of efficiency, we know how our programmes have to be. From time to time the National Training Agency together with the industrial organizations has continuous dialogue to ensure that our programmes meet the test of time.

Once more, I use the opportunity to urge the Members opposite that Trinidad and Tobago need you. We cannot afford to have opposition like we have in those developed countries where you have a more mature society. They look at us for direction. This thing about opposing for opposing sake does not fit into the realm of us going to Vision 2020. [*Desk thumping*] Constructive criticism, yes. I look forward to seeing those on the other side finding it within their hearts to look at the Minister of Finance and point out some of the good things that are present in the budget and there are plenty. [*Desk thumping*]

We need to work together. This is Trinidad and Tobago. When we play football in the National Stadium, as my friend, the Member for Chaguanas West will tell you, we all wear red. We want Trinidad and Tobago to win. In this Parliament as we go toward Vision 2020, we want this whole nation to work together. We will sink our differences because we want our people to recognize that this Parliament is not divided. We are together.

Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity.

**Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar** (*Siparia*): Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] I do not know what is happening. I am sorry Mr. Speaker, the Chief Whip had indicated something else you had indicated to him. That is why I was uncertain but we are ready to go.

**Mr. Speaker:** Unfortunately or fortunately, the lunch is not quite ready.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** I am very much ready, hon. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** What we will have is appetizer.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Thank you very much. I listened courtesy the Parliament Channel and was appalled to hear the statement of the hon. Attorney General in this House this morning. There has been a judgment of the Supreme Court and the hon. Attorney General came to this Parliament and abused parliamentary privilege in my respectful view.

**Mr. Speaker:** No. If he were doing that I would certainly stop him.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Very well. The hon. Attorney General came to Parliament this morning under the cloak of parliamentary privilege and the words that he spoke, if those words are spoken outside he would have been guilty of contempt of court and he would have had to go to jail. He used the cloak of the Parliament.

**12.15 p.m.**

I am saying that he used the cloak of the Parliament. It is strike law. We have EC 101 and you have Law 101. It is strike law that when a judgment is given by the court of the land, you cannot comment negatively on that judgment.

**Mr. Speaker:** My understanding of it, especially since you raised the matter of privilege is that you can criticize the judgment, but what you cannot do is criticize the judge.

**Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar:** With due respect, Mr. Speaker, that is your interpretation of it. When I listened to the statement, in my view, it was an attack on the judge of the Supreme Court. With due respect, you are entitled to your opinion, but when we read that statement, I am sure it will be recycled and commented upon. In fact, lawyers will call over the weekend about that very judgment and the statement with respect to the affidavit of the Imam Abu Bakr and the allegations against the hon. Prime Minister.

They did not comment for the simple reason that this is the ruling of the Supreme Court and justice will take its course. My interpretation of what I heard is that the hon. Attorney General would have been in contempt of court if he had said those words outside of the Parliament. This is the very Attorney General, the titular head of the Bar in this country, who only recently received a vote of no confidence from the legal fraternity, who comes here today, under the cloak of parliamentary privilege, to make comments about the judge and the judgment. He said also that the court ruled that the matter contained within the affidavit was scandalous and irrelevant.

**Mr. Manning:** Correct.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** I have no problem with that, but because it is scandalous and irrelevant does not mean it is not true. [*Desk thumping*]

Further, the court ruled that Mr. Bakr was attempting to rely upon what would be in the law an illegal agreement, but it did not say it was not true. At no point has the court or anyone said that the statements were not true. They were allegations within an affidavit and any party is entitled to dispute the truth of

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those allegations, the judge having referred it now to the Commissioner of Police. It is a matter for investigation. Why is it so important? The matter is to be investigated. There are allegations made. These are very serious allegations.

Some time ago, in this very Parliament, I read the majority of that said affidavit. It is in the record of the *Hansard* when I raised the allegations from the affidavit, a public document. I read them into the record here in the Parliament. The allegations are very clear. They were allegations being made by the UNC with regard to that election. We saw with our own eyes and there were reports of activities that took place in the marginal constituencies especially—Mayaro, San Fernando West. The Member for Mayaro is here. The allegations concerned those areas and this is what the affidavit alleges; that Muslimeen power was used to intimidate, harass and frighten voters in the marginal constituencies so that the PNM would win the election. That is what the affidavit is saying. Nowhere has the court said whether it is true or not and that is the purpose of the investigations. I have very serious concerns.

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 36(1), relevance. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** One minute, please. I am allowing the Member to continue, bearing in mind what we are about. It is in fact Standing Order 63(6).

**Mr. Imbert:** As well.

**Mr. Speaker:** I do not know about "as well". That is what it is.

"(6) The debate, when resumed under paragraph (5) of this Standing Order, shall be confined to the financial and economic state of the Territory and the general principles of Government policy and administration as indicated by the Appropriation Bill and the Estimates."

**Mr. S. Panday:** That is it.

**Mr. Speaker:** So it has to deal with the general principles of government policy and administration as indicated by the Appropriation Bill and the estimates. All I am doing here is allowing a little balance. Hon. Member, I said a little balance.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** I thank you very much and I am guided, but I do recall that when I was here during the presentation of the 2010 budget, the hon. Minister in her budget statement was very clear about government's policy and about zero tolerance to crime. "I will not waiver", if I remember correctly. Here there is an allegation of a crime and we are saying that they are serious ones that, in the public interest, ought to be investigated; ought to be clarified.



I am sure the citizens of this country are very distressed to think that there may be possible criminal conduct on the part of the Prime Minister, therefore this matter has to be cleared up in the public interest, for the administration of justice.

I come back to the point that it is in the hands of the Commissioner of Police, we think. The hon. Leader of the Opposition, in his contribution, talked about the role of the police in dealing with crime and the administration of justice. Mr. Speaker, you will recall, in this very Parliament, we saw what some would call a subversion of the Constitution and the provisions that have been made for the appointment of a commissioner of police. The person selected by the Police Service Commission, in accordance with the law, was not given the post of Commissioner of Police and another person is acting in the post. Even with that, there are serious concerns as to whether they could have an acting person when, under the law, it would have been the Police Service Commission going through the same process to appoint an acting person.

So we have actors in every key position, but this one about the Commissioner of Police is serious cause for concern and we do not feel comfortable that there will be justice in this matter and that there will be an independent investigation. [*Desk thumping*] So, today, I call for an independent enquiry into those allegations, in addition to whatever the Commissioner of Police may be doing. [*Desk thumping*]

Already there is a problem because, for instance, the DPP may deny this document was sent to the Commissioner of Police, but the Commissioner of Police said—I read it and that report is correct—that he did not get it. The report goes further. When pressed, the Commissioner of Police then said he did not get it personally. So already there are concerns as to whether this matter will be properly investigated in the manner in which it should be done.

I am appalled at the action by the Attorney General, in a sense, to compromise the investigations by coming here to read a statement to say whether those things are or are not true. It is not for the hon. Attorney General to judge and, given his track record of judgment, we have serious concerns with anything he pronounces upon. We have actors in every key position: Commissioner of Police, DPP, Solicitor General, the Chief State Solicitor, the Chief Parliamentary Counsel. These are the most important positions under the Judicial and Legal Service Commission to have the proper checks and balances in the affairs of the State.

But we have a situation—and this is not for today. This has been happening for years where the key positions in the country are being held by acting persons.

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Those positions are given a security of tenure commensurate with one of the guarantees of independence of action and of thought in these very high important legal offices.

When there is a person acting today and you do not know how long he will act or if they will promote you and give you the post at the end of the day, where is the security of tenure; where is the guarantee; where is the buttress for independence of thought and action? So we have serious concerns with this issue and the other positions in the legal system.

Mr. Speaker, there are other matters I will raise with respect to the budget. If we are talking about the whole administration of justice, we have the very sorry state in this country where, in the operational Vision 2020 plan, the Government is boasting at page 30, where they have their projections and targets, about the backlog of cases being reduced by at least 90 per cent. It says that it is improving. There is a backlog of 933 cases in the High Court which has been determined. It is anticipated that the entire backlog of civil cases would be completed by the end of 2009.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard repeatedly about a backlog of cases in this Parliament. There are over 475,000 cases pending in the Magistrates' Courts. Where is the backlog? What is being done with that? The Magistrates' Court is the backbone of the Judiciary; it is the backbone of the administration of justice. It is the poor man's court. It takes the small claims, but it also deals with all serious criminal matters which go there first. Here, you have over 475,000 cases, which number has been climbing each year and there is the boast in this Vision 2020 plan about targets to eliminate that backlog. And they talk about 933 cases.

It is nonsense! Justice delayed is justice denied in this country. The poor man cannot feel he can go to court and get justice because his case is adjourned and adjourned and at the end of the day, when it has been adjourned for so long, you cannot find the witness or the witness is dead. The Justice Protection Programme in this country has totally collapsed; it is non-existent. One report carried was that there were seven state witnesses killed. The conviction rate is 1:200,000, 1 per cent. First, you cannot find the felons and, even if you do, they will walk free and that is the state of the justice system.

When the Judiciary requests money—and I have the statistics here—they get a pittance of what they request. And here we are, funding a Caribbean Court of Justice, with hundreds of millions of dollars, and two to three cases. You heard the hon. Justice of the Caribbean Court of Justice. He said this is the best job he

ever had. He can play golf and tennis and he said something about exploring the territory. We are spending the money there for two and three cases a year. The hon. Justice also said that they have not had a single case for two or three years. He was so overjoyed. We are spending millions of dollars at a time when we cannot afford to do it; when the economy has gone right down. On the other hand, the backbone of the justice system for the poor man, the Magistracy, has collapsed totally.

If you would like me to wind up—

**Mr. Speaker:** You have one minute.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** I am really happy that you are giving me time by degrees. Thank you very much for this first shot at my budget response.

I will continue with the administration of justice. We are talking about the money not being given to the Judiciary. Do you know what another frightening development is? I heard the hon. Prime Minister say that he now wants to create a Ministry of Justice. [*Interruption*] What is wrong with that? That will become a Ministry of Injustice because what the Prime Minister really wants is total control of the Judiciary. On that note, we shall return after lunch.

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

**12.30 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been said that the test of a government is how the government treats those who are in the dawn of life, those are the children; how they treat those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; and those who are in the shadow of life, the needy and vulnerable. When I listened to this budget, I could not help but think that the Government has failed every test of what could be attributed to any competent administration.

As the minutes stretched into hours, it became crystal clear that the Cabinet whom the Minister or Finance had given collective responsibility for the budget, is living on Fantasy Island and they have their own affable short man, Tattoo. On Fantasy Island you do everything that is wrong, but everything turns out right at the end and then they all live happily ever after. That is the Fantasy Island of the Cabinet. The harsh reality is that the rest of this country is not living on Fantasy Island. The only persons living the good life are Government Members and their

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sweethearts and I spell that Heart with an "H" and they are forcing everybody else into "Nightmare 2020", worsening crime conditions, worsening living conditions, poverty and oppression. How can we stop them? What can we do as representatives of the people? I do believe the first thing we must do is expose the official lies. They have set up a whole Ministry since 2008. It is called the Ministry of Information. Some say it is called the Ministry of "Misinformation". It is only by telling these lies and giving it a sort of official government stamp that they may be able to fool our people into going into oppression, slavery, indentureship and poverty.

In that budget presentation, the hon. Minister misled the House and attempted to mislead the nation. When we listened to the budget, it gave the truth to the Minister's own admission that she lacked training in finance. We can forgive the hon. Minister for that, but we cannot forgive the hon. Prime Minister for placing the Minister in that position. It is the country's misfortune to put a person who admits not knowing about finance and economics to manage our finances during this most difficult financial situation that the world has faced since the 1930s. God help us! We have to ask ourselves: How can we trust such a person to manage our money in these difficult times, when even Nobel Laureates are trying to figure out how to get the world out of crisis. The Minister, I suspect, at times, had no idea what she was reading half the time. Indeed, the Minister often giggled and read at the same time as if she did not care about what she was saying and/or she was not convinced of what she was saying. This adds to the perception that what was said was absolutely meaningless. In fact, Peter O'Connor in an article yesterday has dubbed the hon. Minister as "the cute giggling crusader" and suggests that the schoolgirl giggling fits, because the Minister was aware of how hollow her words were.

The Government has rested on the foundation of the Vision 2020 plan. That is the foundation of this budget, of Government's policies and operations. I submit respectfully this is nonsense; misleading nonsense. In the first place, the Vision 2020 programme was one that was put forward by many, many volunteers, interest groups and NGOs in all due diligence, but that was quite some time ago.

First of all, the official Vision 2020 operational plans have been ignored. I can give you an example, a very important one. There was a proposal that Government, Opposition and civil society members be appointed to an official committee to draft a new constitution and put this up for national referendum before the Parliament decides. Of course, we have not seen that. We have seen the various drafts of constitutional "deform" that are being put forward by the others on the other side.

Secondly, other major Government plans in the budget were never part of the Vision 2020 recommendations, but the Minister tried to insinuate that they were.

Thirdly, the Vision 2020 Committee has been disbanded for many years; so there is no independent follow-up, no revision and refinement of that original plan in the light of recent developments, especially the global economic crisis. We are going along on a plan, when that plan was predicated upon a different set of economic fundamentals and a different set of circumstances in the society. Therefore, those foundation pillars are flawed and should not be used now to guide this country out of economic crisis in which we find ourselves.

I find it somewhat amusing that, imagine after this Government pirated the Vision 2020 idea from the Government of Malaysia. They came up with their Vision 2020 in 1991. The Government—[*Interruption*] I said pirated—in 2009, I heard from the Minister of Legal Affairs, wants to claim intellectual property ownership of this idea. That application is bound to fail. You cannot steal from someone else and copyright it. I ask: Do you even understand what intellectual property is? Why would you want to do such a foolish thing? I understand the premise was that so nobody else in future could use this plan. Who is copyrighting? Who is going for the trademark, is it the Government or the PNM? Because if it is the government, whichever Government thereafter it is copyrighted or trademarked to the government. That is absolute nonsense when it comes to that. We see a budget predicated on rotten pillars that are collapsing.

We come to three hours-plus. The Minister delivered what is called a stale budget. The gimmicks in the budget are thoroughly familiar, like recurring decimals, because they have been repeated and repeated and repeated in budget after budget. We had the same failed flooding promises; the same failed agriculture promises, the same failed access road promise; the same failed business support promises; the same Tamana eTecK Park promises; the same IFC promise; the same CNG vehicles promise; the same failed tourism promises; same failed Scarborough Library promises; the same failed Scarborough Hospital promise; the same failed Shaw Park Cultural Complex promise; the same failed National Cultural Centre promise; the same failed National Oncology Centre promise; the same failed early childhood care centres promise; the same failed praedial larceny squad, now the rangers—my colleague has dubbed them the Caroni Ranger; the same failed rapid rail promise, which I see has been brought back. When I read the budget statement it was very—[*Interruption*] there is no rapid rail after years and millions spent. I could pick it up here and show you. The budget said that they were proceeding apace. I then heard the Minister say: No we are parking up this rapid rail; after millions have been spent.

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It continues, the same failed highway promises, San Fernando to Point Fortin. How many times we heard that in this House; San Fernando to Mayaro, dualling of the Churchill Roosevelt Highway from O'Meara to Wallerfield; the same failed WASA promises; the same failed pension reform promise; the same failed swimming centres. Mr. Speaker, we could go and on ad nauseam of these broken failed promises from the Government.

If that is not bad enough, it is when we come to implementation. Let me look at implementation by this Government. When it comes to performance and implementing there is a major credibility gap. We cannot believe anything that is said. How can we trust these budget presentations, when the record has been so poor? PricewaterhouseCoopers had begun reviewing government budgets in 2005. They did it up to 2008, noting the pitiable record of implementation.

In 2005, 18 of 100 promises were implemented; 28 of 137 in 2006; 27 of 117 in 2007; and only 12 of their promises were implemented in 2008; that is less than 10 per cent. If you were writing the SEA Examination they would have to keep you back and send you to remedial classes; 10 per cent.

PricewaterhouseCoopers has not done a review this year and I hope and trust it is not because of fear of reprisals. They have been doing it every year and we have been using it in the Parliament, because we have no other document to judge the implementation rate. They have not done it this year and I trust is not for fear of Government reprisals.

Veteran journalist, Kevin Baldeosingh in an article yesterday spoke of: Have those budget promises come through? He points, we have bundles of documents, and gave a detailed analysis, which points out among other scandals, that only 28 per cent of the 2009 Social Sector Investment Programmes were completed according to appendix VIII of the SSP. That is the Government's own documents. That is only with the Social Sector Investment Programme; nothing about the Development Programme. We do not know how many of those have been implemented, but the implementation rate has been pitiable.

When we look at the implementation rate it is really a little ludicrous to hear the hon. Minister actually boasting of repaving less than 1 mile of access roads.  
[*Interruption*]

**Mr. S. Panday:** 1.5.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** The Minister said that 1.2 kilometres of road was paved last year. She boasted about it, but at the same time admitted that there

were 500 kilometres needing rehabilitation. I cannot believe it; 1.2 kilometres is less than a quarter per cent of the 500 kilometres. At the price the Minister quoted, it will cost \$100 billion to fix the 500 kilometres of road. I am sure this is another budget promise that would not hit the road.

This Government has no embarrassment. The Minister giggles through these pronouncements and not a single reason is given to the national community or to this House as to why you have such a poor rate of implementation; not a single reason. You make these things and repeat these promises and do not tell the nation why you have failed to implement the majority of your programmes. We have to ask ourselves and the Hon. Leader of the Opposition did: Where has money the money gone? If you have not been implementing the programmes that were put in the budget and yet you are spending the budgeted moneys, then where is the money going? There is nothing you can touch, feel or taste to say that is where the money has gone. Where has it gone? Where has that money gone? My colleague for Caroni East spoke and told us of some of the projects. They had gone into the pockets of the PNM. That is where the money is going, which is what he told us. That performance has been so pitiful, they cannot perform. What do they do? They bombard us with propaganda. Here is my famous propaganda vote. I have done it again this year.

Contrary to the Minister of Information who sought to pre-empt me when he said: "That propaganda vote, we have dropped it and done certain things and it is Head 62." The hon. Minister is not here. It is not Head 62; let us start from there. There are 57 Heads of expenditure in the budget estimates. The Hon. Prime Minister, I am sure, knows and so does the Minister of Finance. Just for the benefit of the Minister of Information, there are 1 to 57 Heads of expenditure and the sub-item, which comes up for publicity is Item 62. He was right in that sense, but it is not a head. There are 57 Heads.

When we look at this, every year my constituency staff—I want to thank my constituency staff and the Parliament for providing us with constituency staff—Talitha, Usha, Nick, Arlene and Susan—*[Interruption]* I would thank the UNC because it was the UNC government that started constituency offices in this country—who spent long hours helping me to compile and commute out of each Head, the votes under four Items. These are entertainment, hosting, overseas travel and publicity. In the past, we had done this only for the Ministries and the departments from Heads 1 to 57. We had not done it for the statutory boards and authorities and we cannot do it for the special purpose companies because that information is nowhere in the budget estimates. Today, what we have done is

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complete the numbers for Heads 1 to 57 and for the state boards, statutory authorities and boards. When I say special purpose companies I am talking about UDeCott, RuDeCott, PSAEL; all 16 special purpose companies. I think a new one is being formed as we speak, number in the Ministry of Legal Affairs. For these companies there are no estimates; nothing. We cannot tell.

Listen to what is happening here. When we put all of these together the total this Government would have spent since they came into office in 2002 up to fiscal 2009, is just under \$5 billion.

**1.45 p.m.**

So, before when we did it—we did all the ministries and it was \$1.3 billion plus another \$200 million—up from 2002—2009, the Government would have spent on this propaganda vote, just under \$5 billion, and at the end of 2010 it will be over \$5 billion. Do you know how much more would have gone into these special purpose companies?

Do you remember when the hon. Member for Caroni East made a statement in the Parliament, UDeCott put out a whole page advertisement. They had ads in the newspaper and on the television. We have all of that taking place, and we do not have any idea of how much money is being spent.

I return now to what we have the information for. Mr. Speaker, just for us to understand the \$5 billion, what is the difference between million and billion? One million seconds is about how many days? It is about 12 days. If we are talking about \$5 billion, we are talking about seconds that make up 31 years. That is what you have spent. This is for you to get an understanding of the number, because these billions and millions are flying all over. Just consider them in terms of these seconds. So, for \$5 billion in propaganda vote, we are talking about 151 years. One billion is 31 years and the \$5 billion is 151 years in seconds. So, where are we going?

Last year alone, this Government spent \$46 billion—that was the budget—and that works out to \$127 million every day; \$5 million every hour. While this budget speech was going on for three hours, \$15 million was being spent in those three hours. With respect to the \$5 billion in the vote, \$1.519 billion is for Ministries and Departments, Heads 1 to 57 and \$3.5 billion are for the statutory boards and authorities. I did not see that before. Mr. Speaker, think about how many roads could have been rehabilitated; how many schools, hospitals, community centres, beds and school supplies we could have used this \$5 billion for. Instead, the Government wants to tax us now—I will come back to that—to pay for the excesses.



So, let us break the numbers down. I come first to frequent flyers. Who are the frequent flyers as shown by the estimates? Coming in at No. 1—it is not the Prime Minister—is the Ministry of National Security. I have all the worksheets and I am willing to share them, where we have compiled and computed these figures. In future, it will be good if we get these estimates in soft copy. It is going to be very easy for us to click and compute. May I suggest that we get soft copies of the documents so that we can give a better analysis. I am sure the other side would want that. Certainly, we would be able to search the documents. Coming in at No. 1 is the Ministry of National Security. They have spent from 2002 \$30.7 million in overseas travel. The estimates for 2010 are \$5.3 million. In spite of the hard times that is up from last year 2009 when it was \$3.5 million. So, it has been increased.

Coming in second place is the Ministry of Finance with \$21.2 million. The estimates for 2010 are \$3 billion, again up from the \$2.4 million for last year. So, are they cutting down at all in these hard times? No! Those are the numbers.

Coming in second place is the Office of the Prime Minister with \$27.4 million for overseas travel. Estimates in 2010 are \$3.7 million which is up from \$3.5 million last year.

Now, let us look now at the party hearties. These are the ones with the hosting and entertainment votes. I have combined hosting and entertainment because they both go together. Again, coming in at No. 1 is the Ministry of National Security; \$51 million for hosting and entertainment. The 2010 estimates are \$8.8 million and last year it was \$7.9 million.

Coming in at No. 2 is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with \$45.4 million, and the 2010 estimates are \$8.6 million from \$7.4 million last year.

Coming in at No. 3 is the Ministry of Finance with \$23 million, and the 2010 estimates are \$7.2 million up from \$3.3 million last year. Again, the Ministry of Finance is featuring in the top three.

We come now to the publicity pongs, and coming in at No. 1 is the Ministry of Tourism, having spent \$370.3 million. Are tourists coming to this country?

Coming in second place—I am not surprised about this one—is the Ministry of Health. Things are so bad, they have to deal with the propaganda—\$70 million in total. In 2010 the estimates are \$12.65 million.

Coming in again at the top three is the Ministry of Finance. Here we have for publicity, \$29.4 million in total, and in the 2010 estimates, \$7 million up from about \$4.7 million last year. So that has almost doubled.

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By far the latest portion of this propaganda vote for the Ministries is for item 62, publicity. When the Minister of Information talked about numbers going down, they have not gone up, they have gone up in these estimates.

When we look at the statutory boards and authorities, we see over \$2 billion of expenditure, and \$3.5 billion of the propaganda vote has been for hosting and entertainment. When we look at that, do you know who is No.1 in hosting? It is WASA. It is \$20 million, and in the 2010 estimates, \$3 million. When it comes to publicity, WASA is No. 2 with \$51 million, estimates in 2010 of \$7 million.

The NLCB is indeed No. 1 for publicity and we could probably understand, because they do have the online games and printing and so on. For 2010 the total estimate for the propaganda vote is \$814 million with \$252.7 million to be spent by ministries and departments and \$561 million to be spent by the boards. So, for 2010, we are looking at \$252 million plus the \$561 million which is approximately \$800 million.

Now, I do not know, but with respect to the special purpose companies, we are seeing expenditure which is exorbitant. We are in harsh economic times and we all accept that. I am saying that the Government cannot continue to live the high lifestyle in these harsh times. So, I call upon the Government to slash down that propaganda vote; cut down on entertainment; cut down on overseas travel; and cut down on the publicity. They have to cut down. The example should be set from the top. With all this money being spent, what is happening in the country?

All serious interest groups have expressed very grave concerns about the 2010 budget. The picture that has been painted is erroneous and misleading. The Minister attempted to say that Trinidad and Tobago is doing well by international standards, but she compared us to the most severe countries in the world which are in the centres of the financial storm. Instead, if you look at it, you should compare us to the energy producing countries—the oil and gas producing countries—where we can make apple with apple comparison and orange with orange comparison.

When we look at it, the IMF shows that oil and gas exporters of the Middle East and Central Asia which are economies like ours, on average, they grew in this financial crisis to 5.8 per cent last year, and they are projected to grow 2.5 per cent this year. They are not going to contract as us by 1 per cent. We are in recession, but those other petroleum economies are not. Even non-petroleum economies in the developing world have an average better than us. So, they grew by 6.1 per cent in 2008, and they are projected to grow by 1.6 per cent in 2009. So, they are growing and we are shrinking. Those are the economies we should be

comparing Trinidad and Tobago with, because they are most like our economy. You cannot go to the centre of the financial storm nor can you go to countries that are already below us in the rest of the region, in the Caribbean who do not have the resources that we had. We are not saying this because we are unpatriotic, but we are saying this because we must face the reality and we must make the right choices given the facts. We cannot lie and keep spending and doing the same things. We must come to grips with the situation that we are now facing.

Mr. Speaker, I had things on the misleading macroeconomic indicators, but I would leave those for my colleague, the Member for St. Augustine. I want to turn now to after billions of dollars being spent—in fact \$250 billion I think over these years, where are we?

If we do an environmental scan of Trinidad and Tobago, where are we? We have dropped in competitiveness because of the Government's wilful mismanagement. Trinidad and Tobago has dropped in the Economic Competitiveness Index a full 46 places since the UNC left office. The World Economic Forum statistics show that the overall ratio of competitive disadvantages to advantages is 4:1. So, I say do not listen to the Minister of Information or misinformation. He was comparing PNM last year with PNM this year. When you come to UNC to PNM, you will be comparing a rank of 38 under the UNC to a rank of 84 under the PNM. [*Desk thumping*] That is no comparison at all. Again, this is part of the Government's untrustworthiness in terms of what they say and the credibility gap that we have spoken about.

Now, when one looks at the money being misspent—I think it is in national insecurity—that has been one of the most expensive areas. I have indicated how much moneys have been spent, and I am going to come later with contract employment. The Ministry of National Security is one of the largest hirers of contract employees and we need to know why and where they are working. Are they police officers? I do not know. We have to find that out.

When we look at the billions of dollars that have been spent, Trinidad and Tobago which was once a peaceful country is now one of the most murderous countries on planet earth. Wikipedia shows us up as No. 8 most murderous in the world. Men and women are afraid to go out at night; to work late; to go for pleasure; to visit different areas; to go and withdraw and deposit money freely; to carry cash and valuables in public; and to allow their children to go about freely. How can your business grow and prosper in this environment?

Mr. Speaker, under the UNC, the murder rate went down every year from 133 murders to 92 in 1999. In contrast, under the PNM, it keeps rising every year and it

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is projected that it is going to reach 500 murders this year. Given this reality, the Minister's commitment to zero tolerance is in my respectful view a national and international disgrace. We have not caught the perpetrators of three bombings in Port of Spain, even though the hon. Prime Minister said he knows who is Mr. Big. We still cannot catch this man. We have not dealt with smuggling of cocaine in Government's diplomatic pouches way back in 2003 and 2004. We have not dealt with the alleged deal between Mr. Bakr and the Prime Minister which is to be investigated.

We have seen where the Prime Minister and his Government cultivate relationships with gang leaders. We have seen where the Prime Minister has prevented the Police Service Commission from appointing a Commissioner of Police, according to law and the national murder rates keep climbing. We have seen the expenditure of billions of dollars in the Ministry of National Security with no result, and that may require criminal investigation. We need to know who got our money while people in this country are dying and being terrorized by bandits.

I come now to migration. Every year since the UNC left office, more and more people are migrating. According to CIA World Fact Book 2008, people do not run away from a healthy economy with good macroeconomic fundamentals. Citizens who cannot go, want to run. They send their children abroad and tell them do not come back. There is where we are. The latest CIA World Fact Book figures ranks us at the 4th worst country in terms of the rate at which people are migrating. We are at 170 out of 173.

According to the World Bank Migration and Development Fact Book 2008, 28 per cent of our population—more than one in four—have been counted as having left this country. Even worse is that 78 per cent of our population—more than three in four with tertiary education—have left Trinidad and Tobago. We are ranked the 5th worst in the world in this report. So, we are spending all this money to educate the young and educated—I am sure the Minister of Education is trying her best—but then, what happens? They get the tertiary education and they are leaving, so we have to import professionals and skilled persons. Why are they running away? This is because the environment is inhospitable, unfriendly and downright frightening. [*Desk thumping*]

**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.*

**2.00 p.m.**

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House. I am looking at the environmental scan and I just spoke of the migration of our young and educated persons. When we turn to the Human Development Report as well, our ranking has fallen. Under the UNC, we were at 49th; we are now, in 2008, at 59th. We are doing worse in terms of health and wealth, relative to the rest of the world. That is what that ranking is about.

Our human poverty ranking has fallen from best performing in the developing world in 2001, under the UNC, to 12<sup>th</sup> in 2008, under the PNM. The Government boasts about its official poverty statistics. Mr. Speaker, I do not think they even believe their own bogus figures, because when they were giving out the smart card they used a higher monthly minimum, not the official poverty of \$655 per month, they used \$2,100 as the minimum for giving out these smart cards.

When we come to health on the environment scan, the promises are shameful when we see the realities. The *Eye Witness* newspaper reports on the deaths of babies, children, others, lack of beds, are horrifying. The hon. Member for Caroni Central spoke about some of those this morning. The evidence shows that we are moving towards Fourth World health care, not that of the First World, because life expectancy has fallen from 74.1 years in 2001, under the UNC; now under the PNM, life expectancy has gone to 69.2 years in 2008.

When we look at the proportion of children born under the PNM, United Nations states that over two times the proportion of children born under PNM, have less of a chance to reach age 40; 9.1 per cent will not; under the UNC, it was 4.1 per cent. None of it is good, but we are getting worse. The Criminal Intelligence Agency (CIA) Factbook knows that Trinidad and Tobago has the highest death rate in the Caribbean; the fourth lowest life expectancy in the Caribbean.

UNICEF 2009 report puts the infant mortality at 31 deaths per 1,000, up from 17 deaths per 1,000 births, which were under in 2000 and 2001; that is when we left office. So, infant mortality has worsened, child mortality has also worsened. Those are deaths before age five. It rose under the UNC, 20 deaths per 1,000 in the year 2000, and now 35 deaths per 1,000. You know, if you pick up this operational plan again, it is so wrong; this Vision 2020 plan.

Again, they are boasting on page 28 about reducing infant mortality. Infant mortality reduced by 38 per cent; infant mortality rate, 24.2 per 1,000 in 2002, has decreased to 14.89 per 1,000 in 2005. Here we are in 2008, where the books are telling us, the UNICEF report is putting as I said, 35 deaths per 1,000 for under five, and for the infants, 31 deaths.

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So, how can the Minister boast about building families? The reality is that families have been disintegrating under the PNM; poverty, crime, sabotage of the traditional unit. What did this Government do with the money now? I have told you about the propaganda. There is political patronage. There is HDC, URP, CEPEP, OJT, the State boards and the top public service positions, going to friends, family and supporters, regardless of skill.

This is where, in response to the Inter-American Convention Against Corruption, the Government is obliged to fill out questionnaires on a number of things dealing with corruption. One of those is, what are the hiring practices of the Government. The 2007 response to the questionnaire, which is the last one I was able to find on the Internet, I do not know if any has been done after 2007, but that one places persons employed by Government on contract and shows that number to be expanding from 801 in 2001, the UNC's last year, to 5,289 in 2006. That is only up to 2006, because we do not have the statistics thereafter, but I am sure they have climbed.

I could demonstrate they have climbed or people are being paid more, because again, when we look at the estimates, we would see where the money is going. In that same response, the Government indicated that some areas such as this kind of employment, advisors, prosecutors, consultants, public relations, communications, policing, and they said that employment is often not preceded by advertisements. This is our own Government. Our own Government admitted in their report, in that questionnaire to the IACC that employment is not often preceded by advertisements and the listing of qualifying criteria and expected duties. So, how did you find these people? How are you hiring them? That is why we keep saying that it is for the PNM boys and girls and their friends and family.

I spoke earlier about the sweethearts for today. So, Government has been bypassing the Public Service Commission. Let us get the numbers now. On contract employment and contracted services they have risen astronomically. Again, from 2001 to end 2010, this Government would have spent \$11 billion on contract employment. There is no oversight of this. There is no proper hiring and firing criteria. Again, this is what I spoke of earlier, that you do not have security of tenure, so you must do the bidding of your masters; you must do what they say, you cannot have independent thought and action, because you are on a string on a contract and you could be fired at any moment.

Ministries and departments, Heads 1 to 57, \$4 billion on Contract Employment and \$3.9 billion on Other Contracting Services. The statutory boards again, have spent quite a lot of money on contract employment. The Ministry of National Security is the second highest on the list of contract employment. So, their first highest,

and in the top three we talked about the propaganda vote and here in contract employment. I really would like that Minister, when he speaks, to tell us what you are hiring these people on contract to do. Why are you spending—for example, in fiscal 2010, you want \$230 million to be spent on contract employment. You spent \$200 million and the 2010 estimates go from \$40.9 million up from \$34.9 million in 2009. What is all this money being spent for all these years, over \$200 million? Who are you contracting and how are they contracted? How much are they being paid and what do they do, when crime is still at the situation it is in?

Education is very high on this list, and in fact, it is the highest but I do understand what is happening in education. The teachers were hired on contract when we opened all the new schools and the Teaching Service Commission could not have processed their applications in time for the opening of schools, so we began taking them on contract.

Mr. Speaker, with due respect, this is nine years later. These people have no security of tenure too; they have no benefits of a person who would be employed in the teaching service. I have heard them complain; I have seen their letters; phone calls and so on. They want to be regularized too. So, yes, you took them because there was a reason at that time, but something has to be done to regularize them.

We come now, having done part of the environment scan and my colleagues would do more, I am sure. I just want to spend a minute on output budgeting and input budgeting before I turn to the property taxes, because I really want to spend some time on that; it impacts upon the whole land law reform package that we passed in the Parliament. I need to speak about that.

The Minister spoke about output budgeting, but her own boasts contradicted her own commitments. Instead of output budgeting, that is assessing performance and outcomes and that is what is in the Vision 2020 plan, assessing performance by outcome, the Minister kept speaking about how much money the Government has spent. That is not output budgeting, that is input budgeting; how much money you are putting.

So, it is a contradiction in terms. The rhetoric of output budgeting was in the budget speech, but nothing is in place for doing output budgeting and assessing the performance in terms of outcomes. We can look, for example, at what we are getting for our money today under the PNM. The cost of the Brian Lara Cricket Stadium Academy; that is equivalent to an entire airport under the UNC.

In fact, the world travel awards Caribbean leading airport for customer service and so on, has given Trinidad an award. In 2007, the Piarco International Airport

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was designated and given by the WTA, for top performing airport in the Caribbean for airport service. That is the UNC legacy to this country, and no amount of talk about it, the frequent flyers are passing through it every day.

I come now to taxation, because this is a matter of great concern for all of us. You will recall, Mr. Speaker, the Americans have always spoken about no taxation without representation. We really need to take a stand against this taxation. I have seen one of our colleagues, a fellow attorney, Prakash Ramadhar, has been talking about no taxation without representation. He calls—we must take a stand; we must show we care—for people to wear black on Friday.

People are incensed by the taxation measures. If you remember, under the UNC budget, they were short speeches, you know, but you would recall under the PNM, any time there was a budget, you remember long ago, there was this scare, they knew what was going up. Cars lined up in the gas stations, because people thought taxes were going up; gas going up; people buying cigarettes and alcohol and stocking up, but we have come back to those days, because as a "fella" Stephen Kangalee puts it, taxation is endemic in the DNA of the PNM. They have brought back all these taxes. To what? To support the high flying lifestyle they have become accustomed to.

The motor vehicle taxes. The Minister very upfront and personal, told us, she itemized the 33 per cent increase on driver's licence, 50 per cent for the increases in motor vehicle tax on used vehicles, but the Minister was not forthcoming in that manner about the other fees and duties. I do not think anyone has been paying attention, but the Minister said, there would be a 75 per cent increase in all other fees and duties under the First Schedule of the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act.

**Mr. Imbert:** What is wrong with that?

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Nothing is wrong with it because you do not have to pay it.

When you look at the First Schedule of the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, you will see at least 20 transactions, all of which have now been increased by 75 per cent. Then we come to look at the property taxes. I want to say at the start, let us forget the nonsensical statement made by the Minister that the tax is not a tax on you, it is a tax on your property. What does that mean? The property would go and pay the tax. The properties are taxed on the citizens of this country. The reality is, it would bring a significant increase in the cost of living. It would have a devastating ripple effect on the entire population; none shall escape. Whether you are a property owner, a tenant or even a squatter, you would bear the burden.



Let us look at the residential properties first of all. Any increased tax on residential properties will result in property owners having to find more money to pay their taxes; higher rent for poor people who cannot afford a home. *[Interruption]* I understand you are asking about the squatters. There is a law that has regularized squatters and you cannot break down their homes. There is a law in this country passed in the year 2000, squatters and their homes are protected by the law of Trinidad and Tobago. *[Desk thumping]*

**Mr. Manning:** Squatting before a certain date.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Yes, yes, before a certain date. Before January 01, 1998. Those we will deal with. She was making the point that squatters— *[Interruption]* No, that was not the issue. The Member was fussing that squatters have to pay the property taxes. I am saying, yes, because you pay property taxes on house as well as on land. House and land, Mr. Speaker, I think that is the law, you know that. So, you pay on the house, on the building, and those squatters who have been regularized would be paying on their buildings.

Back to the residential properties. Property owners would have to find more to pay for their taxes, of course. There would be higher rent for poor people who cannot afford a home, because if you are renting, the landlord is going to pass that on to you, he is not going to take that on his own. Students from UWI who are renting from private owners will also have to pay more rent. There will be higher mortgage payments, because your property tax is included in your mortgage payment. WASA uses the annual taxable value of properties to determine the amount of water rate charged on your property. So, when you see this annual taxable value of property is increased, your water rate is also going to be increased. So, higher property tax, higher water rates, higher cost of living. At the end of all of this, of course, if you cannot pay, your house will be seized.

When we look at the industrial properties, increases on industrial plant and machinery, of course, that would have an impact upon the cost of manufactured goods that are being sold. They would be passed on to wholesalers, retailers, eventually to us, the consumers. When we come to the commercial properties, you would have increase in rents, tenants in malls, in small business and so on, that too will be passed on in the cost of goods and services. The price of goods and services obviously would go up.

For example, if you are running a supermarket or you are a grocer, and you have to pay additional taxes now on your property, much higher taxes, it is going to be passed on to the consumer, you are not going to bear it. The agricultural

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properties and increase in the tax on agricultural land. Why are you taxing agricultural land, when you say it is a priority to develop agricultural lands and have agriculture grow? You want to tax agricultural land. Why? When you do that now it is going to send the price of food up even more because that has to be factored into the cost of production of whatever you are growing on your agricultural land.

**2.15 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Finance put out a full page advertisement on September 11, 2009 to give clarification about how this new tax will be calculated. The increase with the new system of property tax ranges between an increase of 623 per cent for properties such as in Palmiste to 982 per cent for properties in Union Hall, San Fernando and going up from \$1,200 a year in St. Augustine to about \$9,720. The property assessment can be something that will go through this country and create great unrest. It has the potential for doing that. Everyone is going to be affected by this new property tax. On top of that there will be legal problems. There will be serious legal problems with this tax.

You will recall in the year 2000 the UNC passed the land titles legislative package— three Acts—Land Act 2000, Registration of Titles Land Act 2000 and Land Tribunal Act 2000. Nine years later these Acts have not been proclaimed and have not been implemented. We have a situation in the country where 47 per cent of all households do not have adequate title documents. Twenty eight per cent of all occupants do not have any title documents at all, and then you have approximately 50,000 squatters “persons to be regularized”, again no proper documents, no title; we know, we say land is money, land is life and access to land remains very important as a mechanism to overcome poverty, to generate livelihoods for households.

Access to land is important for social reasons, you have secure property rights, you buy in, you belong and you are part of this society. From a legal standpoint security of title is measured on the basis of the paper title, and that is what this whole package of legislation is for. So I ask why has it not been proclaimed nor implemented. How is that going to affect the property taxes? It will. You should have done that before you attempted to bring in these properties. You have brought the land reform package into the law and implemented it into the law.

In Tobago they have a serious problem about this. In fact, they have set up a special committee for Tobago to go first with respect to these. Only up to recently I remember Sen. Dr. Eastlyn Mc Kenzie, when she was here spoke of this on

numerous occasions, because all land in Tobago, the process was that it will be mapped and registered and so on. You would have a new registry in Scarborough; you would have a new land tribunal to deal with title and all lands in Tobago to be accounted for. What has happened is because you do not have that, there are serious problems because the titles date back to estates and date back to hundreds of years. Those titles are so dated back that there are people now who do not have any paper title.

So when you go to assess this property who are you going to assess the tax against? A dead man? That is the same thing here in Trinidad. A lack of documentary titles is prevalent throughout the country—Trinidad and Tobago—because of this concept known as family land, where land is occupied by successive generations of the same family but there are no formal or documentary titles, and honestly, Mr. Speaker, I do know you are well aware of this from your conveyancing practice. A lot of it just passed down through the families. It is recognized throughout the Caribbean but neighbours have done something about it, and so we are going to have problems with that assessment of taxing and so on.

I would recommend first of all that the property tax be withdrawn, be scrapped, be removed completely at this time. [*Desk thumping*] That WASA now install their meters of course, that you implement the package of land law legislation. Now we know that Government can, want and expects taxes. We expect taxation as when you say you will take the injection needle when you go to the doctor. It is necessary. It is a nuisance and it is necessary, but we cannot lose perspective. It is not about ideology or philosophy; it is about pragmatism at this time to survive the economic crisis. But do not go and prey upon the ordinary man or woman in this country to get your moneys to go and continue flying and entertainment and propaganda and contract employment and the host of other things to pay yourself these very huge salaries.

Whilst I am on that, given the harsh times we are in, the economic downturn, given that the Prime Minister's salary is about \$67,000 a month.

**Hon. Member:** What!

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** The other Ministers are about \$40,000-plus, non-portfolio another \$30,000-plus; CEOs—

**Mr. Manning:** Whose salary is \$67,000?

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** The Prime Minister's package, salary and allowances are about \$67,000 per month.

**Mr. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's salary and package is in the public domain.

**Hon. Member:** How much? How much?

**Mr. Manning:** The Member for Siparia just would not take the time to subscribe to accuracy. The figure is just totally wrong! It is totally wrong.

**Hon. Member:** How much? How much!

**Mr. Manning:** It is less than that.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** How much, \$65,000?

**Hon. Member:** Sixty six thousand.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** I have checked it you know and I have it in my document. *[Interruption]* Okay I will tell you how much it is. I will tell you now from the SRC report. *[Crosstalk]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** But that is joke to the bagmen. That is joke to what the bag men produce.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** The Prime Minister's salary package is over \$67,000 per month; Ministers over \$46,000 per month and non-portfolio Members also receive a substantial amount.

Mr. Speaker, when we go to the CEOs—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** No, I am repeating it because that was my information. If it is wrong then tell us what it is. *[Interruption]* I went into the SRC report—*[Interruption]* No, you are just wasting my time. It is, Mr. Speaker, what I have said. If I am wrong correct me!

**Mr. Manning:** You wrong. Let me show you the payslip.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** No, I do not want to see your payslip, thank you. *[Laughter]* We know the CEOs in these companies collect massive amounts of money. There was a story carried on TV6 by Sasha Mohammed about the CEO at NIDCO working for \$50,000 a month; taxpayers paying her personal cellphone bill of \$33,000 per month.

**Hon. Member:** “Oh good.”

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Mr. Speaker, we do not know all of these special purpose companies what the salaries are, so I am saying set the example from the top, from the Prime Minister to the Cabinet, to the stakeholders' cut the salaries now. [*Desk thumping*] Slash the salaries because we are in harsh economic times, you have to take the cuts. [*Interruption*]

So I come back to the property tax—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** I want to remind this Government of history with respect to taxes. You remember Dr. Williams introduced the PAYE tax collection. It required adjustment and we got the monthly deductions and so on with the pay cheques.

In the 1980s the NAR introduced a Value Added Tax, that created considerable resentment and, indeed, was one of the reasons Abu Bakr gave as part justification for the attempted coup. The Boston tea party way back in the US history was about taxes too, and we talk about the salt tax in India also, what happened there. You will remember Margaret Thatcher her undoing, she met her water with what? Poll tax. That was people per head in a household. And I am saying the property tax is not necessary at this time. A man's home is his castle, we could add it is his temple and it is much more than chattel. It is very threatening for the long arm of the state now to reach into that castle to attempt to extract moneys to keep up their high flying lifestyles. So, as I say, cut it and cut it now.

As I come to an end I just want to touch on something that is very simple. I understand that all of our institutions are being shaken. We are on this kind of verge of collapse and I have been told—I do not know if it is true but I understand—that the President whilst he is on vacation is considering resigning. I do not know if it is true, correct me if I am wrong. I do not intend to mislead the House. Not you, Mr. Speaker, but the Members will. You know what the rumour is; I am spreading it as bluntly as I can, the rumour is that he is being forced in a sense to resign. We filed this motion and it is before the Parliament. But you know also what some people are saying is tipped to replace the President—[*Interruption*] I will not bring the Speaker into this debate, Sir. I will not bring the Speaker into this debate.

**Dr. Moonilal:** What! What is this!

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** So, we talk about constitutional reform and constitutional deform. That is what it is, Mr. Speaker. The Minister talks about

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democracy in local government. This Government has postponed local government election for three years. You know it is not the first time the PNM did this. In 1956 they did it then too, they postponed it for nine years. I trust we are not heading for another nine years of local government election postponement.

As I close in the last few minutes that I have, first of all, I commend the Leader of the Opposition for his very comprehensive contribution in this Parliament. [*Desk thumping*] Secondly, I endorse the recommendations made by the Leader of the Opposition and I make my own—oh yes, there were a host of them. I would pass you a copy if you had not seen it. The recommendations that were made: I call today for Government to slash the propaganda vote. I call today for Government to slash their salaries; I call today for Government to scrap the property taxes that they plan to impose.

Finally, I say that the budget presentation was misleading and misguiding. The macroeconomic fundamentals are flawed and my colleague from St. Augustine will deal more with that. We cannot really believe what this Government is saying. When they say something is going up it goes down and when they say it is going down it goes the opposite way.

**Dr. Moonilal:** When they tell you something is to run.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** We saw, for example, the Minister saying something about agricultural production up, when you look at the Central Bank statistics, down. Talking about labour in the agricultural sector, up; when you look at it, down from the 40,000, down to something like 21.

So when they tell you something is going up it actually goes down and vice versa. That is where we come to the issue of the credibility gap. We must have the strength to endure the hard times that we are going to be put through. I want to assure the people of this country that we in the UNC will fight for you every single day. [*Desk thumping*] We are committed to ensuring this PNM Government is accountable, not just to friends and family but to every citizen. So to all of you there, to all the taxi drivers, maxi drivers, the public servants, the small and big businessmen, all of you who work to build this country, we say to you that our resources may be finite but our will is infinite and I am confident that if we come together and summon that great national spirit, we will meet the challenges of our time and write the next great chapter in our country's history. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Keith Rowley** (*Diego Martin West*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to join this budget debate against a particular background. I—without being too celebratory—think I have to make my contribution against the background

that this is my 22nd budget intervention in this Parliament. I also make it against the background of a lot of my colleagues who have been charged with the responsibility to run this country's affairs, and at last count I think 17 of my colleagues are making their second budget intervention.

Therefore, I think I owe it to them and the rest of the national community to really focus on matters of a budgetary nature since, so far in this debate, we have heard very interesting interventions, and relevant I might say; relevant because it strikes at the root of the leadership crisis in Trinidad and Tobago today. My good friend and colleague in his very spirited contribution spoke about the Leader of the Opposition as a man out on bail and we are hearing other matters of interest to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, but this is a budget debate.

I want to start my short contribution by saying I would like to have congratulated the Minister of Finance on this matter. Maybe by the end of my contribution I would be able to congratulate her if she can intervene and tell me why I feel so uncomfortable about presenting my intervention now. It is because for the first time as a parliamentarian, in my 21 contributions in this House. I have never had to make an intervention in a budget debate without this document: "*The Review of the Economy*".

I find it unacceptable for my Government to come to the Parliament to talk about a multi-billion dollar budget from last year, a multi-billion dollar budget for next year and the *Review of the Economy* is not available. You know a moment ago I found this document—I did not realize what it was until a moment ago when I opened it—and I realized that this leaflet purports to deal with the issue of the review of the economy. [*Laughter*]

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

If you go to the back page, it deals with the overall balance, the public debt, the official reserves, expenditure and the revenue. This, Mr. Speaker, cannot in any way prepare me as I have been prepared 21 times before, to deal with the issues that are in here.

In fact, the appendices in the *Review of the Economy* are the real backbone of what a budget debate is about. It should tell us what is happening, what has happened to the economy. This is 2008 and it goes back to 2003, so you can see what our state is by seeing what our trends and direction were from 2003 and so on. For example, this document talks about the debt. It is not in here, but I put it in. Public debt is 28 per cent of GDP and this document tells us it will rise to 39 per cent of GDP in 2010—which is the one we are discussing now—and will fall

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to 32 per cent of GDP in 2012. Now that should be the subject of this debate. What is going to happen between now and 2012, given our understanding of our own economy, our own circumstance, the global economic condition that will see either our economy grow against the debt that we are going to incur, that debt to GDP will be 32 per cent, or against the huge borrowings that have taken place in the last budget and the huge borrowings to come in the next budget, and possibly the one after that will see our debt to GDP falling in that way.

I suspect, Mr. Speaker, that any serious person looking at this debate from the outside, will condemn every single one of us in this House for the wrong numbers being put up, and the missing of the major issues which are the budgetary issues. We have not been dealing with the budgetary issues, and when this document purporting to be the Review of the Economy talks about debt to GDP falling to 32 per cent from 39 per cent by 2012, that should be a healthy debate in this House. I suspect that by Wednesday night, a lot of things would have happened, and we would not have dealt with the substantial matter.

Let me go to my constituency, Mr. Speaker. Last year, I had reason to raise a number of matters with respect to Diego Martin West, and I want to begin today by—I should not thank because it is not a gift—pointing out, identifying the progress that we have made in Diego Martin West with respect to the National Development Programme. The Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs I think can take some credit, for ensuring that the Carenage Waterfont Project, which was raised last year is progressing. Our major developmental project in the western peninsula is underway and is progressing relatively smoothly. I look forward to a speedy completion and that will change the face of Carenage both socially, economically and physically. That project is of great pride to all of us and that project is on the way. I am afraid that I cannot say much more with respect to development in the western peninsula.

Last year, I raised the matter of the Diego Martin playing field. Diego Martin is the major housing development area in the country. The Diego Martin Valley represents Diego Martin West, Diego Martin Central and some of Diego Martin North/East. It is the only area in the country that does not have a national sporting facility, national standards. Notwithstanding all that we did in 2007, I must report today, that after two years, the sports company is still in the foundation of that construction of that project. Notwithstanding my intervention with the Minister, the sporting company, and trying to identify the problem, Diego Martin must report that we still cannot play cricket on that ground, we cannot play football, we cannot have social events, we cannot enjoy the facility that we should have



because after two years, we are still in the foundation. I hope that during the debate, the Minister will tell us what is happening with respect to the completion of that project, and I hope that it can be completed during fiscal 2010.

Mr. Speaker, I took great satisfaction in hearing that the Diego Martin Highway and its congestion problems would be attended to in this fiscal year. But until I see in this Parliament, the documents that will allow the land acquisition to take place—because there are two little strips of land that are required to be obtained, so that the northbound carriageway can be built—until I see that, I will suspect that we may be here in the next budget debate talking about the Diego Martin Highway improvement to come. It is a simple solution. It is a construction project of no great magnitude which its absence is causing great hardship to the people of Diego Martin. I have been talking to the Minister of Works and Transport. I have been writing to him and I have been looking forward. I am optimistic that this year it will be done because when it is done, it will bring great relief to a large number of thousands of persons in the Diego Martin area.

Mr. Speaker, I also took note of the fact that the budget talks about a causeway, this is to link Westmoorings to Chaguaramas. I am afraid that I would be very surprised if this forms a construction project in 2010, because a lot of gestation work has to go on. However, I would like when the Minister is responding—because I expect that my colleague from Diego Martin North/East will enter the debate—to say something to the people along the roadway from Bayshore to Carenage, who for the last 25 years were told that no approvals will be granted for improvement of premises on that line because the road would have gone through there. Is it now that those persons will be told definitively that the road to Chaguaramas will no longer be along the existing Western Main Road orientation, and that the upgrade from Westmoorings will in fact be a causeway on the waterfront. If that is done, it will bring a lot of comfort to a lot of persons and as I say that, I want to call on the Government to let the—what is it called. There is a department that deals with lands reclamation on the coastline that has not been dealing with wanton illegal land reclamation from Westmoorings to Chaguaramas. The whole section between Westmoorings and Chaguaramas is largely illegal reclamation, creating a serrated coastline.

We need to enforce the law. We need to rectify that by having the department that deals with that, determine what the coastline should be; determine who will be properly granted reclamation licenses; and rectify a problem in the western area where persons have done reclamations in a haphazard way and are crying out for Government's intervention. In fact, so lax are we with law enforcement in this

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country, that in this situation there are people who are under court orders to cease and desist, but instead of doing that, they are building a bridge to Venezuela while the authorities look the other way and that needs to be attended to. Now that we are talking about a causeway, this goes hand in hand with that. So I expect that the Minister of Works and Transport would respond to that when he talks.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the schools, I have been in communication with the Minister of Education who has given me the assurance that work is to progress or to proceed very soon, initiated by way of design/build contract to build the secondary school in the Victoria Gardens area. This is a commitment that the Government made far away back in 2002. I am told it is to be done. I am waiting to see that. However, there is another matter of the Point Cumana Primary School where our children for the longest while are under substandard conditions, and this matter has been attracting the attention of the Ministry for the longest while and I pursue it year after year. I met with the Minister a few months ago on this matter, and again, I was given certain assurances that it is close. I know for a fact that we have invited tenders. My last communication with persons in the Ministry, indicates to me that we are having difficulty with respect to money. I was told that that is not the case, but however, in recent times I am hearing that even though tenders have been invited—contract is selected as the case might be—that we have money issues.

Now, I hope that this is wrong, Mr. Speaker. But the months are passing and I am not seeing the Point Cumana Primary School being constructed. It is a package of primary schools: Point Cumana, one in Laventille, one somewhere else and Paramin. I understand that they were all invited as a package group. Now, it will be very disheartening if I use that word, that we are having difficulty finding money to build these primary schools if that statement is true, but we are able to find money to— I understand these four primary schools in this package here are supposed to cost \$150 million. However, we are able to find a quarter billion dollars to spend on the upgrade of Maracas Beach.

It is not that Maracas Beach does not need attention, it is a question of the Government's priority. How could we say we cannot find money to build primary schools, especially ones like Paramin and Point Cumana which have been on the front burner for the longest while, but we could find \$250 million to spend on a beach upgrade? And when one looks at the beach upgrade against the background of what we have done before— A few years ago we upgraded Maracas Beach, I think NIPDEC did the work. It was a \$6 million project. By the time it was extended and overruns and so, it came to \$10 million, and I think we were all very happy about the new Maracas Beach and the new facilities.

What is it that we are going to be doing at Maracas Beach now for \$250 million, I do not know. But we are doing it against the background that our children, not getting their primary school because there is a funding issue. And as I say that, even without the Review of the Economy, it is my view that because of the general circumstances, local and international, 2010 will be a difficult year for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It will be a difficult year for the Government because it does not matter how we cut and thrust at the politics in this room, outside of here, the Government having committed to a number of goods and services and support for a certain lifestyle in Trinidad and Tobago. The Government does not have the availability of resources that we had in the not-too-distant past, and budgeting issues will cause a certain amount of lag time between availability of money and the spending of money, and so we are going to have problems during the year with respect to spending money and paying bills. So that is the background there against it.

I do not think we should be fooling ourselves. We are not alone on this planet. These are difficult times and it does not matter who is in office, these will be difficult times. But before you can agree to take medicine, you have to agree that you are sick. And if you keep saying I am not sick, then you will not take the medicine that is required. It is against this background of how we treat with what is available to us, that I want to draw, Mr. Speaker, your attention to one of the documents that we were provided with, if only to find out whether in fact we are doing the best that we can with the resources available to us. I was one person in this country who took serious umbrage many years ago, when Michael Manley, Prime Minister of Jamaica said that we were fortunate and we got oil money and it passed through us like a dose of salts. I took serious objections to that, but I am wondering now, if Michael Manley was alive today what he would have said. Because this document, Public Sector Investment Programme, the supplementary one—I was going through this document and I must say I was stunned, because I did not know it before. It confronted me for the first time when I read this document.

Mr. Speaker, I want to draw your attention to page 71 of this document to tell you, let us face up to what is happening at Petrotrin. I have heard the union talking about this as a union item and I did not pay a lot of attention to it. When I sat down to study the documents I realized what the unions were saying, and we have a big problem here. We entered a gas to liquids project, and this document tells us that the original estimate was \$850 million. It has been revised for \$1.324 billion, as a result of incomplete engineering at the start, omissions, technical issues and additional testing and project delays.

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So if we agree to embark upon a project, I would think that the cost of that project will go into the consideration as to whether in fact we do it or we do not do it. I must tell you, probably the highest paid people in the country are at Petrotrin—high quality skills. So I expect good quality estimates and if they do not have it, they hire people to do it. An \$850 million project and we are now talking about a revision to \$1.324 billion. That is one project. Another project—Ultra Low Sulphur Diesel Plant. Original estimate when the project was embarked upon, \$708 million. It has now gone to \$2.4 billion. Project administration—original estimate, \$192 million. That has now gone to \$427 million. Upgrade of the Fuel Catalyst Unit, the estimate there is now up to \$2.1 billion. The CCR Platforming Unit, there is not an estimate—\$665 million. It is now at \$1.592 billion.

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

The alkylation plant, was estimated when it was entered upon, at \$586 million; it is now \$1.8 billion. The offsite and utilities for this whole programme was estimated to be in the order of \$189 million in 2004, it is now \$1.7 billion.

What happened at Petrotrin that the estimates were so wrong, so far out, or worse, what happened that caused us to enter a programme where the total, when we entered the programme, was \$3.3 billion, and we took a decision, "Yes, we could afford that, \$3.3 billion."? Most of those programmes are not anywhere near completion. When we took a decision to go down that road, and it may very well be necessary because we have to go into the correct markets and have better products, we took a decision at a cost, at the time, of \$3.3 billion. Today, we are looking at a cost of \$9.3 billion. We have to digest that in the context now of, "De money done." We are now talking about raising revenue by taxation, "chirrup" "chirrup", household by household, land and building taxes, cigarette and rum taxes, as revenue raising measures. Do not be fooled by that.

When the Minister of Finance was trying to put this budget together, she did not do it herself; it was done by public servants. Public servants had arithmetic to do. When they look at the arithmetic and see the gap, they have to find money. So we are now in the period of trying to find money to maintain our lifestyle, to finish our projects; but the record would show that this is how we have spent our money when we had money. I do not care if it is my fault, your fault, Mr. Speaker, or whoever's fault, this is how we did it.

Everybody in Trinidad and Tobago, every single one of us, has a stake in this matter. There are people who always tell you, "I do not get involved in politics; I am not involved in politics," as though politics is something alien to their

existence. What they do not understand is that all the decisions affecting their lives in this country—all, every single one—is a political decision, [*Desk thumping*] made by politicians, either in the Opposition or in the Government. The question we have to ask ourselves is whether, in fact, we are making the right political decisions, whether the priorities are right.

There is a whole lot going on in this country. It is impossible for our Government to be spending so much money, with so much good intentions, and not do something good. There are a whole lot of good things going on in this country. If I had to identify one, I would identify the Government's investment in the next generation; the expenditure on our young people; the training programmes; the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) and the expansion in university operations. We are investing dollars in the lives of our people. That is good investment. Of course, we can cut out waste and corruption every day, but this is good investment.

When we spend money in the health programme to make available to the country things that are not available in the system or train people in skills that are not available, that is good investment. But it does not matter how good the investments are, we have to ensure that we identify the bad ones, isolate them and strive towards perfection. That is what good governance is, striving towards perfection. [*Desk thumping*] That is why I have a problem with persons who take the position that because something good is going on, we must not pay attention to some of the things going on that are bad.

I was a little concerned, in light of the fact, as I mentioned my constituency needs—I did not mention water. The whole of upper Diego Martin is a growing area. In fact, it is probably the fastest growing area in this part of the country; the upper parts, the hillsides, people are growing in the hillsides; it is either family numbers are getting larger or they are actually building houses.

When I first became MP in the area, the water supply was bad in those areas. Today, it is awful. In many instances, for a \$10,000 or \$100,000 or a \$2 million project, the project is not being done. There is one particular project in my constituency in Cemetery Street, where we have laid pipelines and brought great jubilation to persons in the area, because they saw the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) laying the pipelines. It is now three years and not one drop of water has been put in that pipeline. The people are now provoked and are laying threats to the Government, because of an absence of, one, an available water supply in the district and, two, even if water is brought into the district, there is not a pumping facility to pump the water to where they are.

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We were told last year that we were going to get this problem solved by way of desalination. I am not aware what progress has been made on that, I hope when the Minister of Public Utilities speaks in the debate he would tell us what progress is being made and what we could look forward to. There is a shortage of water in the western peninsula.

The Caroni/Arena supply that comes west, stops just in Cocorite. We get supplies from Chaguaramas, coming westwards to Westmoorings, Goodwood Park, and we get from wells in the Diego Martin Valley. The bottom line is that there is not enough water available. So as the population grew, the rationing got worse. Who used to get three times a week, now get twice a week; who used to get twice a week, do not get at all. Those are the conditions.

These people for whom the demand is only water or a primary school, have to be told about hundreds of millions of dollars that are being spent in a certain way, that may be you could have spent it differently.

I do not know what the story is at Petrotrin, and I am hoping that the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries would address this issue as raised in the Parliament today. What happened at Petrotrin with respect to those estimates and those out-turns? I know what happened at UDeCott. I want to use two examples of the main; one is the MLA Tower, the one that is attracting all the attention in the Commission of Enquiry. When that tender went out, there were prequalified contractors; two of them bid under \$350 million. The contract was awarded to a company at \$368 million, \$60 million more than two contractors who had prequalified. That tells us that there were two contractors who were deemed to be able to do the job and would have done it for \$60 million less, but because we had money and, for some reason, we could choose to spend \$60 million more on contractor third lowest in the bid, \$60 million more; not \$6 million more, \$60 million more.

Turns out we are now finding who they were and who they were related to and who they were defended by, but that is for another time and another place. The bottom line is, that was a decision by a state company to spend \$60 million more; no problem; money is no problem, "I can give you the job at \$368 million, even though you were only formed three weeks ago; even though you have no track record, you will get it for \$60 million more." I will tell you worse than that, Mr. Speaker.

When they were evaluating that bid, another contractor was prequalified and had, in fact, won the bid by virtue of his tender. He had a lower figure. The evaluator wrote—and when I read it, I could not believe my eyes—that the reason he was not recommending this contractor who had, in fact, won the bid, was because this contractor, by negotiation, will be given the Chancery Lane complex project.

So here was a contractor who prequalified, put in a bid, in fact, it was the better bid—under the law, in contract A arrangement, you cannot give it to the other person because you bid it on your terms, and this contractor had bid \$55 million less. The evaluator wrote, "We are not giving you this, you will get San Fernando, because we are in negotiations for you." What happened in San Fernando with Chancery Lane? With Chancery Lane, that contractor who, incidentally, did not protest—because if I was a contractor and I put in a bid, and I am the better bid by how much million dollars, and I am being bypassed when I won the bid and the valuation takes place, I would have something to say; not in Trinidad and Tobago. The contractor was silent.

Off course, the next thing we know, that said contractor is the highest bidder in San Fernando, and he gets the contract, [*Laughter*] at \$45 million more than the other contractor.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Oh my gosh!

**Dr. K. Rowley:** You think it ends there? The contract was awarded for \$296 million. I am going to quote briefly from a document that had been submitted by UDeCott to the very Commission of Enquiry that nobody wanted. That contractor is now \$181 million above the original price, the contract is now \$477 million.

**Hon. Member:** My God!

**Dr. K. Rowley:** I will tell you something else too; if I have time I will tell you more.

**Mr. Warner:** Take my time!

**Mr. S. Panday:** Take my time too!

**Dr. K. Rowley:** What is worse was that the individual evaluator who did the evaluation for UDeCott and came up with that story about not giving it to the contractor who won the bid, because he had to get San Fernando, that joker, that individual, in UDeCott board minutes, prior to that, had been minuted that based on his previous conduct, he was not to work for UDeCott again. Not only did he work for UDeCott again, but he was in a position to make those recommendations which were carried out by UDeCott. These two contracts alone, at the point of tender, were \$100 million more than tenders on the table. How many household taxes, how many \$1,000 increase in taxes or \$500 increase in taxes on households from Laventille, to Cumana, to Carapichaima, to Bagatelle, wherever in the country, have to add up to make \$100 million? [*Crosstalk*] How many?

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Dr. K. Rowley:** If you look in the budget review of last year, you will see where revenue from land and building taxes was \$104 million. We are now embarking on raising land and building taxes around the country; I am not even clear what the rise is going to be or what the figures are going to be, but we know there is going to be an increase because we are talking about revenue raising measures, and we have no budget review documents to give me an idea of how we are going to move from \$104 million to wherever it goes. I will tell you one thing, I am mad as hell about this.

**Mr. S. Panday:** "Yuh right!"

**Dr. K. Rowley:** Do you know why? I tried to prevent it. [*Desk thumping*] When I tried to prevent it, I was attacked, I was assailed and I was slandered. If I could not defend myself on the truth, I was slandered right here in this House by nobody less than the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** You are saying that you have been slandered by the Prime Minister. That, in itself, is blatantly against the Standing Orders. Perhaps you could rephrase that; certainly you should withdraw it.

**Dr. K. Rowley:** I withdraw it unhesitatingly. I will rephrase it. When I tried to prevent this, I had my character called into question in this House. I was asked to account for money that was never missing, in this House. That was done by the head of the Government, my Government. I have made no bones about the fact that I am PNM and I will remain PNM. I want to say something to "fellas" on this side. I have nowhere to go.

**Mr. Warner:** Like me and the UNC.

**Dr. K. Rowley:** "Dey throw you out already." [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, this document that I read here today, I want you to see it against—I want you all to read this book. [*Dr. Rowley displays book*] I am recommending this book to all Members of this House. It is a book by Michela Wrong called, *It's Our Turn to Eat, The Story of a Kenyan Whistler-Blower*. All of you must read it, and after you have read it you would understand what happened to Trinidad and Tobago.

When we had money, we had friends and carpetbaggers from China to Malaysia, and unlike the last batch of persons, who were filling their bags under the UNC, who made the mistake of putting the money in Cayman and Nassau and



Miami, that mistake is not being made again. The mistake is corrected, so now even if you see the document and it is screaming at you in your face, it is in Chinese, so you cannot even read it. And that has happened to Trinidad and Tobago today and I am required to keep silent. For me, silence is not an option. Holding office is not the point, it is not an option as a citizen to have the responsibility to point out that we are doing the wrong things.

**3.00 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, I was surprised in the budget debate after all that has transpired in that commission of enquiry; it is on the Internet, the public is scandalized. My colleague, the Member for Caroni East was talking about that galvanized mausoleum they are building by the Princes Building Ground. [*Laughter*] It looks like a mutant, aeroplane engine. Has absolutely nothing to do with Trinidad and Tobago, not ship, shape nor Bristol fashion to do with Trinidad and Tobago.

He was talking about the cost of it and the Prime Minister got up, interrupted him and put in the parliamentary record that it is costing US \$60 million. The Prime Minister is head of the Cabinet, this matter has been one of great contention yet in *Hansard* we are being told it is US \$60 million.

Mr. Speaker, I want to go back again to the record arising out of the commission of enquiry because it takes a commission of enquiry for you, the parliamentarians, Cabinet Members and the people of Trinidad and Tobago to know how your money is being spent. This document, the first page there is a table, you see this table, Mr. Speaker, the first item on this table submitted to Professor Uff is the North Campus of the Performing Arts, which is the one on the Princes Building Ground: Shanghai Construction Group, contract date, May 12th, period, 20 months. It should have finished January 07 this year, it is rescheduled to finish September 12 this year which was a couple days ago, it should be finished. But the relevant point I am making is that the original contract value is \$441 million; that is not US \$60 million. This is what UDeCott is saying to a commission of enquiry, yet we are being told in the Parliament that it is US \$60 million, \$441 million, and the projected completion is \$468 million, and that is likely to rise beyond that.

I am asking, who is misleading the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago? Why is the Prime Minister ending up in a situation where he can get up in the Parliament to contradict a parliamentary colleague and put the wrong figure on the table when this document is available?

The Government has probably \$20 million worth of lawyers in the commission of enquiry.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** We taking him to the Privileges Committee for misleading the House.

**Dr. K. Rowley:** Mr. Speaker, I can tell you without fear of contradiction that every statement about these projects being within budget and within time, every one is a wrong statement. So now we have come to the point where we have to try to find the money to stand in the same place, not going forward you know, but to stay in the same place, we are looking to find money.

Recently I was very troubled, I met one of our major oil company executives in Houston and he was coming to Trinidad, and he told me we are now paying our attention to Brazil because we think that Trinidad and Tobago is no longer interested in us, so our investment arrangements is with Brazil not Trinidad and Tobago, and that had me very worried. Because against the background of low prices in the energy sector, low production of oil and a lot of negatives, the one place we do not want to be is when people are losing interest in us as an investment location. But the people in Trinidad and Tobago wherever they are located, whoever they are, are now called upon to pay from our pockets for the fun and games that were had by others.

As a matter of fact, one major executive when he was asked about his term in office said he had fun, fun at the expense of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The Minister of Finance put out this document and the only problem I have with it, is that it talks about FAQs, namely facts; that is an acronym that is used in the university environment, but I want to point out to SEA students, do not spell facts like that; this means facts and questions (FAQs) but they might think it means the spelling of facts. They worked an example to show that a house that is \$800,000 in actual value worth a rental of \$2,000 a month will see a tax of \$648. I want to tell the Minister of Finance that every house on the Diego Martin Main Road is over \$1 million in valuation, every one from the oldest, and many of those households will see their taxes raised from one hundred and something dollars or less to \$648 according to this example. An extra \$500 is going to be a major burden on many households in this country, it can be viewed as not a lot of money and to be told that in New York they pay 10 per cent, or in Texas they pay 20 per cent, that is not solace, that is provocation, \$500.

Look at the hurt our pensioners felt last year when they had to give back, or stop receiving those few hundred dollars when the Government made an error in paying them and they got their lifestyle adjusted by a few hundred dollars more.

Mr. Speaker, I know whole streets in Woodbrook where pensioners live, and as a result of our economic change over the last 25 years, the house they built 40

years ago is now a multimillion dollar property which never came on the rental market, they are now going to have to pay, based on what the house is worth or what it can be rented for. Some of them are barely making ends meet on their current income, but they are being called upon to fill the void that has been created by those for whom \$50 million more in this contract and \$60 million more in this contract was no big thing. They had the opportunity to act on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and a \$50 million here, or a \$60 million there, or a billion here did not matter. At the end of the day it is the pensioners, the poor people, all of us who are now being called to put our shoulder to the wheel.

Mr. Speaker, I have great difficulty, I do not like to pay money to insurance companies even though I have to pay, whenever I write the cheque, I write it with a certain amount of—I do not like to write this cheque. When I write a cheque for my lands and buildings tax increase, I am going to feel worse and say a lot of bad things about some people in this country.

Mr. Speaker, we have to understand that this country is not to be taken for granted. I am glad to hear that the Government is reviewing the position of the Rapid Rail. I was in the Cabinet when that decision was taken and I supported it at the time because at that time we were looking at galloping increases in LNG. I remember as Minister of Planning and Development, I was called to a meeting by senior executives in the local oil company to have a little breakfast chat with them and I went because I was the Minister and they wanted to talk to me because I was responsible for putting together Vision 2020 at the time, and I left that meeting a little bit peeved because I felt they were a little out of place.

When I got to the meeting, they told me the reason I was called to the meeting was because they wanted to make sure that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago would know what to do with the moneys coming to us from the gas and the offshore oil we had found, bhp Billiton. I took great umbrage at that, that these people could believe that they are more concerned about the people of Trinidad and Tobago than the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and they had to chide me to be careful how we spend this oil bonanza that was coming.

I left the meeting feeling a little annoyed, but in hindsight, I have to humble myself and say they were right. Because based on what I just told you about how we spent some of the money, these people were alerting us not to do what others have done. We are not the first set of people who got bonanzas and blew it, and whether we want to accept it or not, while I said earlier there are a lot of good things happening in Trinidad and Tobago, there is a lot happening that requires serious attention.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. ROWLEY]

*Monday, September 14, 2009*

Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend to the Government that we back up a little bit, face reality, call a spade a spade and begin to go the road we are faced with now in 2010. Denial is not an option that will do us well and for holding persons in positions except if they are being held in front of certain cells, I want to call again on the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to put the priorities in such a way that the people will see that it is all about a quality of life thing.

Most people in this country if you ask them what they want from the Government, or what they want from the Minister of Finance, it is something in the local area, something in their backyard, something in their neighborhood and I can tell you that much of what the Government has done has brought no political credit to us even though it should, because we spent money on some grandiose things and it should bring us some credit, but in fact, it is bringing us anger. There are many angry people in this country today because they believe that their small priorities have been displaced by other priorities. I would strongly—

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Dr. K. Rowley:** Mr. Speaker, by authorization I have agreed not to go beyond the 45 minutes, so I would not take too much of the extension but I need a few minutes if you would crave my indulgence just to wind up.

We cannot go back now and undo what we have done, but we certainly can do things differently so as to make sure that the small priorities are at the spear of the arrow as we go forward. The things that influence people's quality in life, the small aggravations which, in many cases, cause small money, a high lift pump, a retaining wall, a drain, the paving of a road, those things.

Mr. Speaker, last year October, and I am glad the Minister of Health is here—my mother-in-law had reason to go to the Port of Spain General Hospital. She was 88 years old and when I went to see her she told me she wanted to go home because she prefers to go home and die than to go back into the bathroom of the Port of Spain General Hospital.

**3.15 p.m.**

The condition in the bathroom was such—and I do not care whose fault it is, but a citizen of this country must not feel, especially in her last days, that is it

better to go home and die from her condition than to have to go back into the bathroom that she just came out of. These are not things that we should take for granted as given. We can fix things like these. One hundred thousand dollars could fix a bathroom and make it look like the Hyatt's own, or even \$1 million, for that matter. A hospital bathroom should really say cleanliness; it should say health; it should say welcome. That is not the case. When you stand up in the car park at the Port of Spain General Hospital and you look up at the windows, you say to yourself, "Breeze blow through these windows onto a patient; the patient will die from what he catches here, not what he came here for." We could hire people to clean these things; create jobs.

The last thing I want to touch on is the question of housing, just to correct a picture. The Government has said that we are going to return to providing 8,000 houses per year; that was the original target and we are going to return there. But we must understand what has happened. The Member for Caroni East, I think it was, or it was—he was quite mischievous, as he normally is, when he said that we said we were going to build 10,000 houses and multiplied the number of years by 10,000 and said it is seven years, so we should be short of so many houses. My colleague will understand that is not correct.

When we spoke about 10,000 houses per year in 2002, it meant that we were going to be embarking upon this exercise. So, clearly, from day one you could not deliver 10,000 houses. You had to put things in place. As a matter of fact, the NHA was not in a position to even do 1,000 houses, as the UNC would confirm, because you did 400 houses. At NHA we had to lay the foundation to get to a position where we can, on an annual basis, start the construction of 8,000 houses. So we got 2,000, then to 4,000, then to 6,000 and by 2007 we had so ramped up the organization and prepared the land, and so on, and had things in place that we could have—and we did—started construction on, I think it was 8,024 units. So in 2009, if your target is going to be met, you have to start every year an additional 8,000 units.

What has happened is that you virtually started no construction in 2008 and virtually none in 2009 and the budget, as read by the Minister of Finance, commits to starting 2,000, which is 25 per cent of the required number, in 2010. So it means that the commitment would be 2,000 for that three-year period, because none was started in 2008, none in 2009. So although there is work going on, on houses that were started in 2006/2007, by not starting new construction on that scale in all of those years, that is where the programme would have fallen back and the commitment to get to 2,000 would mean that we have to continue ramping up again to get back to where we were in 2007.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. ROWLEY]

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Finally, I want to take issue with this assistance that we are going to give—or attempt to give—to our Caricom colleagues. I do not think anybody in Trinidad and Tobago would object, or has objected to reasonable assistance to our Caricom colleagues. We are all in the same boat and we can assist in Trinidad and Tobago, and we must and we did, assist wherever we can. But I have a problem when I am now hearing that the policy is that we would deny certain economic development in Trinidad and Tobago, let those developments go elsewhere so that they can have them. I do not know that that is a well thought-out policy. We, as a people of Trinidad and Tobago, have spent billions of dollars on BWIA and we do not know how many billions we are spending on Caribbean Airlines; what we do know is that Trinidad and Tobago carries that can and we have carried it from the beginning, and the very existence of BWIA, or the very existence of Caribbean Airlines, that in itself is a great contribution to the people in our neighbouring islands. [*Desk thumping*]

So to go and say now that we are going to be doing C checks in Grenada, I wonder if this has been properly thought through. Who in Grenada has the skills to do C checks on a jet aircraft? If you do not have these people in Grenada, it means that the people from Trinidad who are doing it, will have to migrate to Grenada with their families, of course. If they do not do that, and the facility is in Grenada, it means that Grenadians, having the facility, will go and hire people from all over the world to come to Grenada to do it, including Trinidadians. So we are going to give up, probably the only positive side of BWIA, the engineering side, encourage it to be moved to Grenada so that maybe we will hire foreign expertise, or result in local migration to Grenada so that a serious piece of our economy in which we have invested billions of dollars, will now be operating in Grenada for their benefit? I say we will do much better for Grenada by forgetting this madness and helping them in some other way. This does not make any sense. It makes no sense, and I take comfort in the fact that it is not going to happen. I cannot see this happening.

And quarrying, I am wondering where this came from; quarrying in Dominica. The fact that a handful of people in the area of waste and excess, when you were wasting money—it was not just the Government, you know; it was being wasted in the private sector too. The fact that you could bring rock from Nova Scotia to put on a road in Trinidad and Tobago and still make a profit should tell this country that something is radically wrong in the country. The Government's existing position, as outlined here last year by the Prime Minister himself, was that this Government has entered into an arrangement with a Malaysian company on a five-year holding fixed year contract to provide crushed rock, one million tonnes a year on a take-or-pay contract.

This is Government; this is a contract; this exists today. Right now quarries cannot sell their product and if that contract is executed, where does this shortage of rock come from? And what is worse, to the extent that there is a shortage of rock in Trinidad, the Government, through the THA, had just spent almost \$100 million in the quarry in Tobago, where there is an endless supply of raw rock to be crushed to supply any need in Trinidad; crushed volcanic rock of the same quality as Dominica, except that you do not have to pay to haul it from Dominica to here. Because however it is done, the people of Trinidad and Tobago will pay the haulage from Dominica to Trinidad and Tobago. And all that will do, is that those within the country who remain in the quarry business, they will pitch their price just below the price on the port, so all it will do is push the price of crushed rock up, because if it is coming from Dominica, and I am producing it in Trinidad, I will just sell just below the Dominican price.

But crushed rock is not to be hauled around the world. Crushed rock is the largest volume of material used around the world, of any material—crushed rock—and the key to it is, you want it as near as possible to its utilization. Sometimes you open a quarry on the road bank where you are building the road to remove that haulage cost.

So why is it we are talking about going to invest in a quarry in Dominica? That is not how to help Dominica. That is a bad idea and it runs counter to what we have already committed to. Because if the Dominican quarry is to supply us with rock, what then happens to our commitment to take-or-pay? Is it that somebody will just get paid for having not produced the rock in Trinidad, so we can use the rock from Dominica? I do not know. It does not make any sense.

I am saying that there many, many, many ways that we can help the people of Dominica, Grenada, St. Vincent, Barbados, but what has been outlined in the budget has not been properly thought through; it is bad business; it is bad for the people of Trinidad and Tobago and I do not think it should form part of our forward movement.

I raise these points not really to upset anybody; I raise them to let the people of Trinidad and Tobago know that while we are playing the fool and focusing on minor matters, there are major matters to our detriment that go unattended. I call on the Government and the people of Trinidad and Tobago to mind your business.  
[Desk thumping]

**Mr. Subhas Panday** (*Princes Town North*): Mr. Speaker, I wait with bated breath to hear the debate on the validation of the Uff Commission. Today I see in

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the headline: "Five killed in a party". It is with great sorrow that I extend my condolences to the families of those young persons who have perished at a party in Curepe last night or night before; people between the ages of 17 and 27. I am certain that all Members of this House would extend their condolences to the families of those people.

Imagine in this country, after spending over \$18 billion on the Ministry of National Security, we come here today, while debating a budget, with a headline: Five gunned down; mass murder. That is PNM; that is the incompetence of the PNM. But on behalf of all those families, I am calling upon the authorities to take every step possible to hunt down those brutal murderers and bring them to justice. Those persons who have been killed, you hear the Government and in particular the Prime Minister saying, when Tecia was killed: "You don't know, yuh know; I know; I know what you don't know." But I want to tell him today, when one reads the newspapers, one sees those are innocent young persons, productive persons, who merely went to a party; were at the wrong place at the wrong time, who have been killed. [*Interruption*]

Hear what the PNM is asking: "You believe that?" That is what you will ask? Have you no shame to ask if I would believe that those young people were at a party—innocent people—and they got killed? That is what you will ask me? Not only that. We are calling upon the Judiciary, DPP's office and all limbs of the administration of justice, when those persons are caught, that we fast-track the trial, because all those mothers, grandmothers who are crying blood today, we owe them something. We owe them justice. That is why today I call upon all the authorities. I know the PNM does not have the will to deal with crime, but as a Member of Parliament, we are calling upon the authorities to deal with this issue.

That is gang! What kind of murder is that? That is mass murder. Have you ever heard madness like that? And that must be laid at the doorsteps of the PNM Government. We have to do something about that. We cannot allow it to proceed.

The hon. Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West said that the Leader of the Opposition could not speak in the budget on two occasions and he gave the reasons. I want to tell that Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West that Franklin Khan, the Member for Mayaro, spoke much better than you did. Eric Williams spoke better than you did.

**Hon. Member:** The point being?

**Mr. S. Panday:** But they are not here today. You find out why. So when you are trying to insult people, the Chairman of your party, where is he?



**3.30 p.m.**

What makes me cry for those persons who have been killed at the hands of gunmen in such a brutal and boldfaced manner is that crime, murder and mayhem are so rampant in this country. When this budget was read, I am certain that everyone was sitting with bated breath to hear how the Government and national security will deal with crime. This population had to sit in pain and agony and wait for almost 2 hours and 19 minutes in a budget debate to hear the first mention of anything that deals with crime.

One would have thought that the important aspects of the important things that affect the country would have been up front in the budget. It was not until page 31 of the budget statement you heard anything about crime. What is so painful in the hearts of those about persons whose children have been killed is that when the budget was read you would be shocked at this Government which spent over \$19 billion it said, they glossed it over in less than six paragraphs and treated IT in a very cavalier manner. When you are spending over \$40 billion and \$4.9 billion in national security, it is incumbent on the Government to tell the nation what plans it has to spend this money and deal with crime and how it is committed and affirm to deal with crime. What did you see in this budget? This population was insulted by this Government. It is not only that this Government is incompetent and indolent but also boldfaced and brass-faced and insults the population although they are enduring such pain and suffering.

When the hon. Minister delivered the budget she said, "I don't care about you, man." The Government does not care about crime and put it on the front burner. She said and I quote from page 31:

"Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Security will address these recommendations in his contribution."

Is that the way this Government intends to deal with crime? Crime affects everybody. It does not affect those persons who are crying now in Curepe, Princes Town and other parts of the country but crime affects the whole country. Crime affects the economy. You are talking about budget for \$44 million or whatever million, billion, "ah cyah call those words, dey too big." And yet you are not dealing with crime. Is this Government numb to crime or is it numbing the country further? Is the Government not considering what is happening? Crime affects the economy as a whole, as some persons have said. Most of our business people are packing up and going. They are running their businesses from Miami by telephone, fax and Internet. They are afraid to live here. When you talk about a budget and taxation you are destroying the economy by causing our business people to run away from this country.

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Not only that. What about tourism? Are you deaf or you just do not care a thing about crime? The Canadian, Swiss and British governments have advisories on the Internet warning people who want to come to Trinidad and Tobago and have money to spend in this economy that would help it to develop. Do you know what they are saying? Be careful! Do not go to Trinidad and Tobago. Be careful how you walk the streets. Walk in groups. Do not walk alone. Keep away from certain places. They are actually telling their people that Trinidad and Tobago is no longer a preferred destination for tourism.

One would have thought that the Government would have taken those advisories very seriously. When they spoke some time about diversifying the economy, they so want to spite agriculture because of the kind of people in agriculture, they said that they would diversify the economy within the energy and tourism industries. Much money was spent in developing hotels. Mr. Prime Minister, do you remember when tax relief was given to the hotels to retool them? The Government lost money in taxation to allow hotels to go forward. Do you remember that taxes were dropped on hotels? We spent money in the hotel and tourism industries because we thought that the tourism industry was a line of diversification of the economy away from our hydrocarbon resources.

Having done that one would have thought that when you see advisories you should see red flags and take steps to deal with crime and be firm with it so that the economy would survive. What they did? They have done anything save and except spend money, pelting money at crime without any proper thinking, planning and commitment. They believe that as a former Member who has just spoken that pelting money is the answer to everything. No thought put in the process. We are spending money and we would deal with crime.

Let us look at the statistics and see what is happening. "Someting wrong with all yuh PNM. All yuh missin some tings up dere." Look at the statistics. When the UNC was in power in 1996, they spent \$896,000 and there were 106 murders. In 1997, the spending dropped to \$856,000 and murders went down to 101. There was a Member for Arouca who said, "Oh!" They put up their hands and gave up. I say, "All yuh have polio." Look what is happening here and you are not lifting a finger. In 1998, the UNC government spent \$844 million and the murder rate went down to 97. In 1999, they spent \$1.03 billion and it went to 92. What is wrong with you all? The UNC did not spend that kind of money but it showed an intent to deal with crime. The UNC hounded the drug traffickers. In a weekend the UNC hung how many, sending the message we intend to deal with crime.

This PNM believes that merely by throwing money they would give the impression that they intend to deal with crime. The PNM came in what year? 2001. \$1.378 billion—[*Interruption*] This is the problem we have. It seems to me that this will not end in a debate anymore, because I would have liked to debate with you. What the PNM is doing is that they are trying to run us out of the debate, hiding all the Ministers who have important ministries and after we finish speak then they would come there and have a monologue hoping to deal with the country. "What all yuh get today, none ah dem fellas could come and recover from dat." Nobody will believe a thing those Ministers say after today or tomorrow or Wednesday, because the facts are on the table. You bring OJTs to answer us and the real Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and the Minister of National Security, where are they? [*Interruption*] "Dat is PNM mam. Doh geh vex. Dat is PNM we talking about."

In 2001, \$1.378 billion and 151 persons were killed. In 2002, \$1.4 billion and 169 murders. It is going up. In 2003, they kept spending money and it went up to \$1.68 billion and the murder rate went up to 229. In 2007, it reached \$3.759 billion and the murder rate went to 383. In 2008, \$4.569 billion and 550 persons were killed. For this year so far in this budget, I think that it is \$4.9 billion again. When this was prepared for me last week, it was 355. Today, when I saw the newspapers it is 372. Spending money alone is not the answer or is it that these moneys are spent and people are getting big contracts and the moneys which are being spent are not filtering down to the people? Something is wrong. We call upon the Government that merely buying OVPM and things like that would not help. We must have a plan.

Mr. Prime Minister, you play so much politics with this crime. Before election you had all kinds of crime consultation. You set up a crime and justice commission. You told the people that. We ask you: Had they given you recommendations? If they have given recommendations, have you followed them or is the Government playing the fool? If they give you recommendations and they were not successful, why did you not disband them? Why do you keep them there to continue giving you recommendations and nothing is happening? Is it that you are not following the recommendations?

Everybody has given this Government assistance in how to deal with crime. The Law Association gave 40 something recommendations and the Criminal Bar gave 40 something recommendations a few years ago. We have given recommendations as to how to deal with crime but the Government is not listening. It wants to fool the people by saying that once we spend this money we

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are dealing with crime. They come here with platitudes. The Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, oh, crime is everything everybody concerned about. We agree with him. Everybody is concerned about crime but the PNM that has the power and authority to deal with it is not dealing with it.

If one looks in the budget one would see much bravado. In a six paragraph thing on the budget hear the bravado. Page 31 states: "National Security is one of the fundamental responsibilities of any Government." I say yes but you are a failure. "The Government acknowledges that the current level of lawlessness in our society is unacceptable." Everybody knows that. Where are you plans to deal with it? You had Mastrofski from Penn State University. When Mastrofski came you spent \$80 million on Mastrofski for advice and recommendations. The question we ask you here: Did you follow the advice of Mastrofski? Our information is that most of the recommendations which were given to you by Mastrofski, you threw them away because you really do not want to deal with crime. What did Mastrofski say? Mastrofski said that in these model stations make sure that the stations are fully manned. What have you done? No Minister of National Security. Instead what they did was that they took away manpower from the various police stations and made the model police station a laughing stock.

**3.45 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, this is what happened. Now they are saying that Cameron Ross has come and he has given over 300 recommendations. I say if he is giving 300 recommendations on the administration of justice and national security, it means that something is wrong. For him to have 300 recommendations of things that need to be put in place after you have spent so much money on Mastrofski; that someone else can come and make 300 recommendations means that what you are doing is wrong.

You have given Mastrofski \$80 million and he has taken the money and gone. He has gone and the crime rate continues unabated. How much money are you giving Cameron Ross? How much will he cost this country? In any event, when Ross makes proposals and recommendations, will you follow them? My view is that he is merely a red herring. Nothing will come of it. You are spinning top in mud.

I would like to tell the hon. Prime Minister that these people from metropolitan countries have a different society, a different culture. They are textbook people from Penn State University. There are great retired policemen of this country who know about policing and who are now outside. There is one; I think I saw him the other day as a lawyer in Chaguanas, Mr. Syracuse Liverpool, a good policeman. Why not ask the policemen who were there and who have

knowledge; who know the ground; who know the footworks; who know the minds of our local criminals—why not talk to them? Why do our own people not deal with our own problems? My view is that the number of good policemen who were at the top echelons of the police service and who have now retired are willing to give assistance. They laugh at you. They say: look at those people, instead of asking for people from Trinidad who know how to deal with criminals, they bring foreigners, spend one heap of money and in so doing demoralize the police service.

Government acknowledges that the current level of lawlessness in our society is unacceptable. This is what they say:

"We will not waiver from our zero-tolerance posture towards criminal activity: from the traffic violator to the kidnapper; from the white-collar criminal to the drug trafficker, the message to the criminals is simple: you will be found and brought to justice and you will feel the full brunt of the law."

I ask the hon. Minister of Finance and the hon. Prime Minister, the Uff Commission has produced substantial evidence; compelling and cogent evidence has been brought in the public domain; if this Government is really serious about white-collar crime, look at the Uff Commission and do not wait for recommendations from them. Call in the police; call in the Director of Public Prosecutions and let us deal with it. No. Instead, they are playing footsie with the Uff Commission.

What about the Estate Management Company? Evidence came before this Parliament by the hon. Member for Caroni East where he said that the honcho, the big man in EMBD, was demanding bribes. Do you know what they did, Mr. Speaker? They sat there and let him fly out of the country without an enquiry. The sum of \$1.2 billion has gone.

I do not know how true it is, but I heard on a radio programme last week that some big boy from UDeCott flew out of Trinidad and Tobago last week Saturday at 11.30 a.m. with eight suitcases. I do not know if that is true and if we are going to allow this to happen.

In addition to that, I spoke sometime in July in this honourable House about a type of corruption, PNM style, that concerns the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission (T&TEC) and the OWTU. It deals with the street lighting programme. I have spoken about it on many occasions and I will continue to speak about it until either I get hoarse or they listen.

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The PNM Cabinet appointed a man as chairman of T&TEC and there was the street lighting programme and the kind of corruption the Member for Diego Martin West spoke about is the same modus operandi in the criminal activity. They know about it and this shameless Government, when you talk about it, they pretend not to hear. On July 27, I spoke about this. Do you know what they did? That Member for Chaguanas East responded and pretended that I said nothing. You do not want to hear about it. You are covering up the corruption.

**Mr. Speaker:** I do not want to interrupt you in full flight, but I had spoken to you before about referring to "that Member". It is "the Member".

**Mr. S. Panday:** Mr. Speaker, my English is a little bit rusty. The hon. Member for Chaguanas East refused to respond. [*Interruption*] I will repeat that until I drop dead.

Mr. Speaker, sometime ago, the T&TEC board took a decision to buy certain light poles because it contained certain chemicals that were dangerous to society. It was poisonous material. [*Interruption*] Leave it? That is what you all want. Do not be afraid. When I am finished, I am giving the notes. I have all the notes here. I will give it to the Attorney General. I walked with my envelope. It has the name. I will hand the Government today all the information about the corruption. This went through already and the PNM tried to cover it. I want the nation to know what we did.

This chairman of T&TEC decided to buy those light poles at any cost. He decided to spend the money, so they ordered the light posts which contain chemicals which were dangerous to the environment and they did not want the rest of T&TEC to know what was happening. They did not want to have full board management.

At T&TEC, it is said, that if there is a divisional head, he can give a contract for \$100,000. If it is the tenders committee, it can go from \$500 to \$5 million. However, if it is the general manager, he can go up to \$500,000. Do you know what they did at T&TEC? For a very big contract, they broke the contract into small fractions so that it would not have to go before the full board scrutiny. They are so boldfaced, Invoices Nos. 19025, 19206, 19027; one would have thought they would have some shame and break it on different days and let some time pass; let some air pass through the corruption. Instead, every single purchase order was one after the other; Same day, same time, same book; They were just turning the pages and breaking up the contract.

Because the chairman was head of the board of T&TEC, nobody could investigate. They purchased 17540 south pine poles and the contract was \$459,780. That is PNM. Next, they purchased 17540 for the same figure. They

were just skimming under the \$500,000. The other one was 177,040 feed poles for \$465,215. And that is the way they continued.

What is frightening about the corruption in the PNM is the intensity of the corruption. Do you know from whom they bought the poles with poisonous chemicals? They bought it from a firm called Klumb Lumber Company of Post Box 2406, Mobie, Atlanta 36652, USA; as though they were so hurry to make this bribe.

While the things were going on, T&TEC sent a letter to the First Citizens Bank to use its authority to debit its NSDP US dollar account No. 1461158 and remit the amount by telegraph transfer for value on that day. They wanted the money to fly. They also asked to debit their T&TEC NSDP fund dollar account No. 1455690, for all local charges and all foreign charges at the account to the beneficiary Club Lumber.

I do not drop bombshells on people, but this information I got from the OWTU. So the moneys flew out immediately. OWTU did some investigations and found out that a relative of the chairman of the board of T&TEC was also importing material from the same company. We wonder if the poles had the length and quality and if it was value for money.

That is PNM style. "Thief" brother "thief", the PNM will protect you. That hon. Member says that PNM takes care of its own. Remember they told Dansook that. The hon. Minister of Health, when the Franklin Khan scandal came out and he went to Dansook, did Dansook not go on the papers and say that the hon. Minister of Health told him not to be afraid, fix up, sign the affidavit, say "he lie" because PNM takes cares of its own? Do you know what that hon. Minister was saying? PNM has institutionalized corruption and they would never investigate a PNM.

When they ordered the poles, they ordered a certain number of poles and 133 extra poles came which they did not order. Do you know what they said? Klumb Lumber Company said that those fellas down there foolish; the way they have money easy, send some more and they will pay. Do you know what they did? The 133 extra poles came and exactly what the company said they would do, they did. Instead of sending it back or not paying for it, they paid for it too. Poles which they never ordered came to them and they paid. The PNM knows about this. Everybody knows about this. That is why today I will be giving you the data. I have to see what you will do.

#### **4.00 p.m.**

Further to that, they wanted a place to rent for the street lighting project. Do you know what they did? T&TEC put an advertisement in the newspapers. They

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are institutionalized and adept in corruption. They worked everything as though it is working properly, but are pushing the fork underneath. They advertised for a very small space and because of the smallness of the space only one firm applied. Do you know who is in that firm? The T&TEC Chairman's sister had an interest in the firm, but when that person tendered they tendered for, instead of 2,000 square feet, 20,000 square feet. When they applied for the 20,000 square feet, do you know that they did? Although they had a tender on the newspapers they reverted the tendering specifications and they rented the place from that person.

Today, they come in this Parliament, which is frightening. I am frightened for the poor people in Trinidad. They are closing down the Ministry and setting up the Revenue Authority. That authority is going out there to assess your homes based upon rents. Do you know what is happening? I do not know who in that place would have paid \$83,000 per month rent? If the Government is in "bobbol" and the Government goes next door to this place and pays \$83,000 per month, regardless of whatever computation the Member for Diego Martin West has indicated, whether it is 10 per cent as your annual rent and then 3 per cent, that is plenty money. The Government will use its own corruption and pay very high rents and take advantage of the poor people. Do not interfere with the people's properties, because we shall call upon all the people to stand up and march against the Government, not only because of what the Member for Diego Martin West spoke about; the pilferage and wanton corruption. If they deal with that corruption they do not have to pay any taxes.

There is another aspect of corruption, which is where the PNM is paying high rents for properties. The "fella" next door will stand the bounce because they have information on the rent people are paying next door. They would put your property at that rent and they would continue with it. Eventually they rented the place for \$33,000 per month. When some hue and cry was made, I think they moved it. They went across the road.

There was another issue with T&TEC with respect to a \$600 million programme. I feel approximately \$300 million of that has gone into corruption. Many more people in Trinidad and Tobago could have been given street lights and electricity bills could have been cheaper. Because of the wanton corruption perpetuated by the PNM, they now have to deal with the people. There is also evidence that needs enquiry, apart from subdividing the contracts and breaching all procurement procedures.

The foreign used car industry went down. But before this, the street lights came unassembled and they used one and one-half inches of piping for the street



lights. How is it called? It is called luminaires. The Member for Chaguanas East knows. Do you know what they did? T&TEC unilaterally changed the specification from one and one-half inch luminaires to two inches, so that all the old materials in the company, with which the chairman's sister is associated, were utilized. Millions of dollars went that way. What is sad about this—hear the kind of orders they had US \$76,000; US \$71,000; US \$75,000; and US \$76,000. All that is what went as corruption by this PNM Government.

One would ask the question: Does the PNM know about it? The answer is: Indeed, yes the PNM knows about it, but the PNM, as the Minister of Health says, takes care of its own.

Today, the hon. Attorney General came and spoke about that matter with His Lordship Justice Narine. I want to tell him that the Oilfield Workers' Trade Union wrote the Acting Commissioner of Police and the Acting Commissioner of Police has not acted. He is only acting, but he has not acted upon the complaint. They detailed the complaints. The letter went on March 03, 2009; six months ago, and nothing happened.

Not only that, when they realized that the PNM Government was covering up, they decided to go directly to the Commissioner. On October 15, 2008, the Member for Chaguanas East received a letter from the OWTU on corruption at T&TEC. [*Interruption*] Hold on. He refused to act and T&TEC gave him all the information, which I have just given to you. What T&TEC called for—I want to call for that same thing:

“Further and notwithstanding the resignation of the Chairman on October 08, 2003, we remain totally convinced that numerous improprieties, irregularities and questionable dealings by a few senior managers and board managers exist in the conduct of T&TEC's business.”

Although the chairman has gone, his boys who were involved with him in the corruption are still there. We still have them. We can still investigate them. What did you do? Tell us what you did.

“In view of the aforementioned, coupled with the recent disgraceful public disclosure of the corruption, the union is therefore calling upon the hon. Minister...”

[*Interruption*] My time is not up as yet.

“not only to investigate the charges and take appropriate decisive action but also to conduct an internal thorough audit into the operations of the street lighting unit.

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We, on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, now call upon the Government to institute a forensic audit and a commission of enquiry into the corruption in T&TEC.”

There has been no response, of course. Then they sent the same letter to Mr. James Philbert, Acting Commissioner of Police, in March 2003. What happens hon. Minister?

Sen. Wade Mark started to prod. Do you know what Sen. The hon. Mariano Browne said? He said: “We did the enquiry.” It was a hush-hush enquiry. They said: “Well, tell us what are the terms?” Hear what the PNM said: “We have de report, yuh know, but we doh want tuh release it. We looking at it.” Look, the evidence is here. “Whey yuh have tuh look at again?” There was wanton corruption in T&TEC. Hon. Attorney General, you were not here when it happened and I take this opportunity, Sir, to pass you the documents pertaining to the corruption to see what you will do. Anybody here? Sir, could you kindly pass this to the Attorney General for me?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Do you have a copy?

**Mr. S. Panday:** Yes, I have a copy.

*[Parliamentary attendant passes envelope to hon. Attorney General]*

Now you have the evidence. I have passed today the evidence which I had, to the hon. Attorney General, to deal with the corruption and I have not lied on anybody. I have not dropped any bombshell on anybody. I merely produced for you the evidence, hon. Attorney General.

**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.*

**Hon. Jeremie SC:** Just a word to the Member for Princes Town North. I have not seen what is in the documentation, but the Minister of Public Utilities has passed a forensic audit to me to look at.

**Mr. S. Panday:** That would have been some time ago, because that statement was made in the other place a long time ago. Now that you have said that you have it, make it public. *[Interruption]* Nobody can be gracious to me? “Here is not ah tea party. Ah doh wah no graciousness here.”

Mr. Speaker, to show what a joke this budget is, I go back to the budget. You know what he is telling me? It is not a tea party, so anything I ask for my constituency, I would not get. I would keep on begging. “Yuh could hit meh as hard as yuh want.” I would keep on begging you for things for my constituency. Princes Town North is one of the poorest constituencies in the country.

When the Government destroyed Caroni (1975) Limited, most of the people of Princes Town—[*Interruption*]

**Ms. Kangaloo:** You cannot say that. He did not say that.

**Mr. S. Panday:** “All yuh ears have wax?” Most of the people in the outskirts of Princes Town suffer extreme hardship because of the Government’s callous behaviour in closing down Caroni (1975) Limited. We are asking the Government, especially the Member for Chaguanas East, all the NSDP forms which we have submitted to you, not to victimize the people because of me. Thank you very much.

Imagine I asked—there is a place called Nohar Road and the people are begging for water. They are talking about Vision 2020 and there are people without water. There is a place called Coolie Block also called Ghandi Village, Princes Town. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Abdul-Hamid:** Dharamdas.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Dharamdas Trace; he knows. “Ah beg him. Ah say: Oh God, de people down there, 300 of them, begging fuh water.” The people are willing to run the pipe, just like the people in Diego Martin. Do you know what he said? “Put yuh pipe dey nah. We have no water tuh give yuh.” That is 2020 vision. Is that 2020 vision? [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Abdul-Hamid:** On a point of order. The gentleman is not telling the truth; no such conversation took place.

**Mr. Speaker:** That is not a point of order, but you could ask him to intervene.

**Mr. S. Panday:** I want to ask him, since he likes to jump up: Would you not say that you told me that there is no water available for the people? [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Abdul-Hamid:** Sir, I do not remember any such conversation with you. The words that you are saying do not represent the truth, Sir.

**Mr. S. Panday:** “Ah doh want to be ah lawyer, be he have ah lump of something floating in he head. He cyah remember.”

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Mr. Speaker, to show how this budget is “ol’ talk”, it has no depth. By the way, hon. Attorney General, we hope that you make a public statement on that forensic audit that has come. We wait with bated breath.

**4.15 p.m.**

I feel nothing will come out of that report. Do you know why? The person who made all the deals was the campaign manager for the constituency of Princes Town North. Mr. Speaker, they put lights all over, like in a cemetery. There are places that did not need lights and they put lights there. As a matter of fact, they did this thing on a Friday when we were sitting in Parliament. The shadow Minister for Princes Town went down there on a Friday, in the absence of the Member for Arima who was the then Minister of Public Utilities and they put down lights like they are mad. Like they have light on their heads! That is why I feel nothing is going to be done, because he was extremely close to the Prime Minister's wife, Sen. The Hon. Hazel Manning. Anywhere you see Sen. The Hon. Hazel Manning in the campaign, he was under her dress tail all the time.

**Mr. Speaker:** You are capable of much better than that. Withdraw that statement.

**Mr. S. Panday:** I remove him from there, but he was like a “tick” under the hon. Member. I want to find out, why did they not take any action? Is it because they are really protecting themselves or he has something on them and he may squeal? The OWTU believes that the former Chairman of T&TEC has a lot of things on you all, and he will squeal. That is why they do not want to deal with the matter. Today, we challenge the Government to deal with that issue and all the facts that are before them with respect to the former chairman.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister said the Government will act to eliminate criminal activities at all levels, especially gang-related activity. Today, I want to tell the hon. Prime Minister—the man who went into that party in Curepe in that bar was a gang member. They all know how many gangs there are, and this Government, after being in power for so long, has allowed a gang member to have a massacre and massacre the people. Do you know why I am saying that you are making a joke of this? Do you know why I am saying that you do not really care about the gangs? You have boasted that you are coming with gang legislation, where is the gang legislation? [*Desk thumping*] We are waiting for the gang legislation. I do not know what legislation they are going to bring, but if they bring the gang legislation, they will be giving the police officers powers of preemption. If for example, you hear a gang leader is going to put down a “wuk”, you could take them on the grounds that you have information that they are going to move.

Mr. Prime Minister, do you know when crimes take place? It is on weekends. I have looked at the history and most of the crimes take place on weekends. If we had this gang legislation, the police could have acted on a Friday evening and put things in place. Where is the gang legislation? We wait with bated breath for the gang legislation. That is why I am saying that if you spend this \$4.9 billion on crime, and you do not bring the supporting legislation or you do not take proactive measures, you are wasting money and spending it in vain. You are giving the impression that you are only spending money, because certain persons are going to benefit from it.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister said that the delivery of the six offshore patrol vessels will assist with drug interdiction and anti-smuggling operations. I ask this Government—they are talking about spending billions of dollars on OPVs and helicopters and so on—you all are making a fool of this and people are being killed. They are laughing. The nation is going to see that you all are jokers. [Interruption] You do not know what I am saying. That is the density in the PNM. They cannot understand. Keep on laughing! You all have security. Do you know why? You all are protected. Do you know why? You all do not care about the people who are outside there and are under pressure.

Mr. Speaker, on June 29, 2009, there was a headline, “New crime busting Unit to hit the streets”. It says to expect to see from tomorrow cops on bicycles and motorcycles on foot patrols and some even dressed casually in short pants patrolling the streets of Trinidad and Tobago hunting for lawbreakers. [Laughter] The 250 strong unit in two weeks is going to hit the streets in areas throughout the country from 7.00 a.m. That is the Government's latest effort to control the escalating crime rate. The new multimillion dollar crime fighting strategy is aimed at reducing robberies, murders, violent crimes and serious crimes will be under the direct control of the Commissioner of Police. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, this was expected to come on stream on June 28, 2009. Where are the bicycles? They are spending millions of dollars on vessels. They have spent millions of dollars on Mastrofski—wasting the money. We cannot even get bicycles on the roads. If you cannot do such a simple thing, can you do anything? The criminals are laughing at you all. The criminals think that you all are jokers. After three months, there is not a single bicycle on the road. My instruction is do not hold your breath to see any bicycle on the roads in the near future. While that is going on, there is a letter dated September, 2009. It says that these bikes would go through Port of Spain with police officers and so on.

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Mr. Speaker, after June 2009, hear what happened in September, 2009! There was a security alert from DOMA. It says:

As a matter of urgent public interest, we wish to issue for your immediate consideration, a security message regarding the increased number of crime reports we have received over the past 14 days.

That was from the end of August to the first week in September. It continues:

Apart from the constant and tragic loss of lives due to gun violence and the horrific number of accidents on the roads, we are also receiving countless reports.

It went on to warn people and said to be careful and protect yourself. So, while the society is endeavouring, and they are frightened, the PNM has promised those bicycles and security and there is none up to now.

Mr. Speaker, I move on now to another section which deals with crime where it says that they are going to increase the fines. I have never seen something like this in a budget before. It says that they are going to change the fines in the schedule. They gave examples of the fines, for example, overtaking on the left side of the road, et cetera. I have never seen this in my life where you are going to change the fines in a schedule and you did not say what are the fines, but you gave examples. Did the hon. Minister really read what happened? I am going to read it so that Members will see the comedy and joke in it. It says:

“Mr. Speaker, I would like to enumerate some examples to the proposed amendments to these penalties. Use of a vehicle without park lights; improper overtaking on the left side of the road...”

It says:

“Mr. Speaker, in an effort to maintain order and safety on our nation's roads and to deter road traffic offenders, the Government will significantly increase the penalties under the First Schedule...”

I want to inform the hon. Minister that there are 79 offences under the First Schedule. It continues:

“...I would like to enumerate some examples to the proposed amendments to these penalties...”

Is this how you legislate? The use of the Priority Bus Route will increase from \$200 to \$2,000. When you are legislating to impose penalties, you must be specific. You do not say that you are going to deal with the penalties, but you

must say how you are going to do it. In the circumstances, I want to inform the hon. Minister of Finance that she needs to review this area.

This Government is called barrel scrapers. The reason they are barrel scrapers, at this stage, is what the hon. Member for Diego Martin West had said—they have wasted the money while they are in office and now they have to scrape the bottom of the barrel.

Hear how this Government intends to make money? The Government intends to make money by people breaking the law. They are saying: “You know, if they break the law, I am glad, my budget will balance and I will get \$40 million from it.” You said:

“This measure is expected to contribute an additional \$40 million to Government's revenue and will take place from January 01, 2010.”

This is the first time I have seen budgeting like this, which is on the premise that people will be breaking the law. That is the kind of society that you are creating; that is the kind of society that you are envisaging. Instead of counselling people, this is what you are doing.

Mr. Speaker, according to the Member for Diego Martin West, somebody wrote this for the Minister. I am asking the Minister to read Chap. 48:52 on page 13—*[Interruption]* Hon. Minister of Education, you do not understand what you are doing.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member, the Member is on his feet and you should know better.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Do you think so, Mr. Speaker? The Minister should look at the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic (Enforcement and Administration) Act, Chap. 48:52 at the fourth column on each page, and the Minister is going to see the fixed penalty ticket system and that there is a point system. If you gather a certain number of points based on tickets, it could be dealt with, for example, under suspension. If this Government really wants to deal with crime and lawlessness on the streets then it would have introduced the regulations. The law is here. Look the law! *[Law book in hand]* That is the law. Why the Government did not introduce regulations to put the law into effect? This law was passed in 1979 and amended in 2000. We have a ticket system, so why do you not pass regulations to deal with the ticket system? They do not care. You could ask the Member for Diego Martin North/West. Where is the breathalyser? The breathalyser law was passed so long and so many persons have been killed on the streets. Why did you not introduce the breathalyser law? The UNC government had passed legislation and we said that for drunk drivers—

**Mr. Speaker:** It is time to sip some tea. The sitting of the House is suspended for that purpose and we will resume at 5.00 p.m.

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

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

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**Mr. S. Panday:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. This PNM Government is so steeped in corruption, and they do not want to deal with it. They want to make sure that none of the institutions work. While all this crime is taking place, up to today, we have not had the appointment of a Director of Public Prosecutions. This Prime Minister, for reasons known best to himself, blocked even the acting appointment of Carla Brown-Antoine. He said he did not want to give the reasons, because if he “give” reasons he might embarrass them.

He further went on to say that he does not want to give it to them because if they get acting appointments, they feel they would get the job. What nonsense to hear from a Prime Minister! The Judicial and Legal Service Commission thought that same person was a person of such character and such competence, they made her a judge. They spit in the face of the Prime Minister.

Prime Minister take notice, the institutions are standing up against you. This Prime Minister wants to keep everybody acting, so he could have them on a string. We do not have a permanent chief parliamentary counsel. Why? Maybe this nonsense with the Uff Commission would have been dealt with; it would not have occurred, if we had a chief parliamentary counsel to deal with the matter, but this Government never wanted the Uff Commission to work, that is why they are not appointing persons who could deal with the matter.

They also had not appointed a chief state solicitor. We asked the Prime Minister, the PNM: Why are you not appointing those important offices in the country? Why? The answer has to be that they really do not intend to have the judicial system and the administration of justice working. After four years, imagine this Government cannot have a commissioner of police appointed. What is wrong with you? What is wrong with this Government?

You know, the last time you thought that Mr. Stephen Williams would not have toed the line—but they do what they call—they destroyed him. You want to keep Mr. James Philbert as an acting commissioner all the time, so maybe that is why he came out yesterday and said—Carla Brown-Antoine said, she sent since May to him—and a commissioner of police could come and tell this country, "I



did not get the report". And when they did tell them about it, he said, "not personally".

Why do we have to humiliate a commissioner of police like that? This Government is humiliating the Acting Commissioner of Police, and the reason why he has to behave in such a way is because he is an Acting Commissioner of Police. They have emasculated the Commissioner of Police. You know, this Government is so wicked. We heard that since Ms. Carla Brown-Antoine was appointed or to be appointed a judge, a vacancy again arose for the appointment of an acting DPP.

There is a gentleman named Roger Gaspard, one of the hardest workers in the DPP; somebody of the same character and the same ilk of Carla Brown-Antoine; a person whose character is impeccable; a person who works very hard; a person who stands up against Queen's Counsels and Senior Counsels. I saw him perform in the Chandra Narinesingh case, where they humiliated him; people fire kicks and thing, pretending to want to kick him, and he stood his ground on behalf of the administration of justice.

Why is the Prime Minister objecting to Roger Gaspard? Say it! Because I know, all the judges know, all the practitioners know, there is nothing to say about Roger Gaspard. Nothing could be said negative of Roger Gaspard that would humiliate him, and I call upon the Prime Minister today, to say why he is objecting to Roger Gaspard for being appointed.

What they want is a DPP who would do your bidding. I wonder if this is the reason why they lick up Carla Brown-Antoine, because she stood up and said, acting DPP got the acting back in May and she gave it to the commissioner since May. June, July, August, September, you tell me he cannot get that in four months? What happened, he was out of the country? Something is wrong with that. This PNM does not care about crime because their bread buttered.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there is another area which I have responsibility for, but time has run out on me; that is local government. All I want to say about local government today is that reform on local government is not Vision 2020, is the vision of a megalomaniac. He wants to control it. The Prime Minister wants to put his heels on local government and destroy it.

Imagine if there is a vacancy of a councillor, you must report to the Prime Minister, who would send it to the President. Why he wants that? He wants to lead a government that would give general and special directions to councillors. You know what he is doing? He is destroying all councillors, because they would

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say people vote for them; people say look, I want a drain there. They are the real representatives of the people. They are on the ground. You know they cannot order a drain for you. He, in Port of Spain, through the special purpose committee, a Minister would say, do it there. People want something here; do it there.

The reason they are building the 66 community centres, is PNM party groups they are going to make, and you would say then, you see those community centres, they would make recommendations now to the regional corporation and to the Minister and they would get things done.

So, you have councillors being elected; they holding office and they would not have power. This is a part of the plan. They would say community councils, NGOs, they would talk and the Minister would act. So, when you have these special purpose companies, that is a recipe for corruption. If the Member for Diego Martin West thought that UDeCott is corruption, "oh gawd" "them special purpose companies" committee is the height of corruption.

You know what they do, Madam Deputy Speaker? Exactly what the hon. Member for Diego Martin West said. When four persons applied for a contract, they write out the contract for them, and they divide the contract, and the ones that you applied for, they do not give you that, they give you another one. You know what happens? They take 30 per cent, and the "fella" who bringing the message, he wants 3 per cent. [*Interruption*] That is true!

Madam Deputy Speaker, as you indicate, time is up on me, my friends would speak about the other matters. On the last occasion the hon. Prime Minister, in the last budget debate, asked the Member for Diego Martin West, "Where the money gone?" Well, Mr. Prime Minister, you heard this evening, where the money gone. You know where the money gone now. [*Desk thumping*] You know who "tief" the money. You know who pilfer the money. "Doh mind dey is your bagman", you know where the money gone. All we are saying is, if they bring back that money, the amount of money they "tief" during the last two years, there would be no need to raise any taxes in this budget. [*Desk thumping*] There would be no need to hurt the poor people with the property tax. As a matter of fact, bring back the money "all yuh thief" and we sure there would be no need for taxation.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

**The Minister of Health (Sen. The Hon. Jerry Narace):** Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. I would first like to congratulate the Minister of Finance for a very well articulated and skilfully delivered budget presentation. [*Desk thumping*] She highlighted in her budget presentation a point worth

repeating: The health of the nation is inextricably linked to our overall development. Before I go there, I sat here this evening and I listened to a number of speakers speaking and it is a sad day for Trinidad and Tobago, when all some people can do is wish this country bad. It is indeed a sad day, and I condemn that behaviour.

Let me tell you why. When we look at the largest economy in the world, the United States, it is projected to run a fiscal deficit of \$9 trillion over the next decade. Its unemployment rate is currently 9.5 per cent and increasing. Here in Trinidad and Tobago, a very small country, we have attained full employment and we have hardly felt the effects of the global meltdown. It does not end there.

The G7 economies are projected to contract, by about 4 per cent this year; unemployment in the United Kingdom is the highest it has ever been in decades, and the growth rates of the economic power houses of India and China have dropped. That calls for us in this Chamber to really thank God for fortuitous circumstances that we have been able to manage in the midst of a most difficult world crisis, and manage to keep this economy going at the rate it is going. [*Desk thumping*] For that, I want to congratulate the Minister of Finance, all Members of this Government for being sensible enough for having the fortitude, the courage, the wisdom to say— In every country there are good things and bad things, but what this Government is saying, regardless of those difficulties, we are marching on to Vision 2020, to make Trinidad and Tobago a developed nation before 2020 or at 2020. [*Desk thumping*]

I had hoped that it would not have been necessary for me to come to this House, but there are some misinformed and erroneous statements which are misleading to public and I wish to take the opportunity to correct some of them. Let me start about budget allocations in health.

In health the budget allocation for 2007 was \$2.9 billion; in 2008, it went to \$3.2 billion; 2009, \$3.6 billion, and for the coming fiscal year, it is \$3.96 billion, almost \$4 billion. Madam Deputy Speaker, that is clear testimony that this Government has placed health care, the people's health, the nation's health as a major priority.

I also want to quickly make this point that we take health care for granted in Trinidad and Tobago. We take what the Government is doing for granted. I am sure that all Members of this honourable House, as indeed members of the national community, are currently looking at their television sets and seeing the United States President, fighting for his life, trying to bring something that we have, to people in the United States. More than one-third of the United States

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citizens are now without any health care and therefore, they are left to fend for themselves and that is something he is trying to change. This Government recognizes that that is no way to treat people and therefore, we are looking at treating with that.

The Opposition Leader spoke about the St. James District Health Facility (DHF), and I know he was not feeling well on that day, so I would not worry to treat with it. Suffice it to say, that the St. James District Health Facility was delivered this year. It is completed and it is functional.

I see the Member for Caroni East did not speak on health on this occasion. I do not know if there was a portfolio shift, but that clearly might be for good reason. I come now to Dr. Rafeeq, my good friend. I am sorry he is not here, because Dr. Rafeeq is someone whom I have some respect for. He spoke about beds and I just wish to answer a few of the questions that they raised.

**5.15 p.m.**

I want to just tell Dr. Rafeeq that—you know, I feel sorry for him sometimes, because I know he does not believe what he is saying. From the time he has a policy that he brought to this House and took that policy and when that policy was advanced into legislation and the time came to vote for it and he had to hide, he should realize then that his credibility had been shot.

Let us just talk about the issue of beds very briefly. I want to say that only yesterday at Mount Hope we opened a new ward with 24 beds and there is another 24 coming in two weeks; we added to the paediatrics specialty units another 20 beds; the neonatal wards another 35 beds for a total of almost 100 beds within the last two years. [*Desk thumping*] Very quietly we are doing our work in the Ministry of Health and we are trying to get that bed issue dealt with. I accept that beds continue to be an issue and that is why I am going to share with this House some of our infrastructure achievements.

The Member for Caroni Central said that there is nothing happening and it is just a lot of “ol’ talk” and so on. Whenever you do that you give me an opportunity to come to this House and say for another time all that we have done in the last two years, and therefore people would recognize the good work that the PNM is doing. So, when you make those statements it really does not do you any good.

Let me start again by correcting the issue with the St. James DHF. It has been completed and is fully operational. In fact, during the last two years we have completed the Mental Health Wellness Centre at Pembroke Street; the St. James

District Health Facility; the La Romain Health Centre; the Debe Health Centre; the Oxford Street Enhanced Health Centre; the new neonatal ward at Port of Spain; the new paediatric A&E Department at Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex; the new paediatric specialty unit at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex; a new orthopedic ward at the Port of Spain General Hospital; the Barataria Mental Health and Wellness Centre; the San Juan Health Centre; the St. Madeleine Health Centre; a new ward at St. Ann's Psychiatric Hospital and two new wards as I spoke about, one yesterday and one to be completed in the next 14 days.

Madam Deputy Speaker, that is testimony to a Government at work. You cannot disagree that that is serious delivery from the PNM Government that my friends would like to bash so much. [*Desk thumping*]

Let us talk about our upcoming year. He raised the point about the Chaguanas Health Centre. In October—next month—we are opening the new refurbished Chaguanas Health Centre. The Siparia Health Centre will be opened officially—and that is the Siparia District Health Facility—in November 2010. I am sorry that the Member is not here. The St. Joseph Health Centre will be completed and operational by February 2010; the Morvant Health Centre will be completed in 2010 and two health centres in Tobago also to be completed by 2010. By no means, by no stretch of the imagination one can say that the Ministry of Health is not at work.

It is with great pride and joy that I say that the Scarborough Hospital, the construction and being equipped as well is scheduled to be completed in April 2010. That is just seven months again. [*Desk thumping*] On Wednesday I will be going to Tobago with a team and our task is to have the shortest possible commissioning of that facility so our brothers and sisters in Tobago can step up to First World health care as promised by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

I heard the Member for Caroni Central talk about the Point Fortin Hospital. Not only have we finished the design brief, not only have we sent out the RFPs, not only is money provided for it in the budget, but we are in the process of selecting a preferred bidder. The administrative offices have already been relocated, because we are building it on the very site and the new temporary location to accommodate the construction is scheduled to start in the first quarter of fiscal 2010. [*Interruption*]

We have started the relocation. If you want to use the same site you have to relocate the administration, you then have to build something to take the current patients and the operations and then the site would become available. So all of that is in train and we are in the process of selecting a preferred bidder. I am

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committing that between the months of November, December and January, the first quarter the Point Fortin Hospital will be well off its mark. [*Desk thumping*] Also in the first quarter we are going to see the recommencement of the National Oncology Centre.

Again, we have put out RFPs; we have gotten bids and our state-of-the-art Cancer Care and Treatment Facility is going to start in the first quarter of this coming fiscal year. That too, is a great achievement. But what is of particular importance are our two world-class renal dialysis centers. A preferred bidder has been selected; the Cabinet has approved it and we are now just finalizing the contract, and again, in the first quarter two world-class renal dialysis centres will be built; one to be located on the compound of the San Fernando General Hospital and the other on the compound of the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. So, in the first quarter the Point Fortin Hospital; two renal dialysis centres and the oncology centre all starting in the first quarter and the Scarborough Hospital will be completed. I just thought we should correct that.

Only this morning at FGP we were looking at the Arima Hospital where we have held discussions with the Ministry of Finance and we are coming to an agreement to facilitate a second or third quarter start up in the coming fiscal year. We are looking at a BOLT arrangement and we are pursuing that. Of course, the Sangre Grande Hospital will be phased in thereafter.

I want the population to be aware that as we seek to bring all of these projects to completion that it would mean greater efficiency, greater ease of burden on all facilities and would provide further specialty services. That is what this would mean.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Through you, Madam Deputy Speaker, would you give us an idea of what you said the intention was to have a hospital in Central Trinidad? Have you shelved that idea? You mentioned in one of your parliamentary statements here that your intention was to have a central hospital for the burns unit.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** It is just a matter of prioritization. As we prioritize we are going to bring all of these facilities including the Chaguanas District Health Facility, and as I said, early in October. In fact, I can tell you, on October 07 we plan to open the refurbished Chaguanas Health Centre, so we are looking at those things.

San Fernando: The San Fernando General Hospital, we are currently in negotiations to ensure that we continuously improve all our health care facilities, including the San Fernando General Hospital and in the San Fernando General Hospital we plan to commence for the coming fiscal year, work on the roof, the mortuary, the lab; critical care centres which will see another 18 ICU beds and we

have already started the repainting of the San Fernando General Hospital. If you look we are now trying to ensure that all of our health facilities throughout the country are constantly upgraded and constantly brought into a state of good repair and great comfort.

As we seek to transform health care in Trinidad and Tobago or to transform the health sector, we must be mindful that with all of these facilities it is our prevention and our health promotion that will make the difference. Therefore, we have done a great deal of work in terms of health promotion and educational activities, and of course these things are critical to the reduction of chronic non-communicable diseases.

The risk factors for CNCs include tobacco use, the abuse of alcohol—and on the Government's budget the Government really sought to point people in the direction that will change their lifestyles, will change their ethic and will change the culture and, of course, things like inappropriate diet and obesity. So some of these things are what we are looking at.

Madam Deputy Speaker, with the support of the Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute we are looking at the evaluation of all meals at schools and so on, so that we are able to ensure that our children get nutritious diets and diets that will serve them well into the future. We have also done a number of promotional activities to make sure students understand these things. The Ministry will be seeking to promote healthy lifestyles and behaviour change among school children through the implementation of smoking prevention for the adolescents, adolescent health screening, healthy school environment, adolescent mental health and the conduct of a national school nutrition quiz, et cetera.

At the community level the ministry will coordinate and implement healthy communities initiatives targeting social determinacy of health with an emphasis on at least 20 communities. In addition, the ministry will implement structured health education programmes for community members through village community councils, existing adult education programmes and local government to build health skills for prevention and control of chronic diseases.

A workplace wellness programme will be piloted at the ministry with the aim of creating a supportive environment at the workplace to promote the adoption and maintenance of healthy lifestyles. We are also looking at establishing 20 point-of-care testing centres and we will commence the roll-out in November. As we open the Siparia DHF, it will be the first one of our 24-hour results in terms of the testing and screening. So, when you go to a health facility and you take all of

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your various tests we propose that in 24 hours you will have your results and we are looking to do that—

**Miss Panday:** No.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** I know you cannot believe it. We are hoping to complete that exercise at 20 centres across the country within six months, so if we start in November, somewhere around April or so we should have completed the national roll-out of these centres. These testing sites and so on will assist us greatly. We are also going to be using all kinds of communication technologies.

Let me just say I hear people talking about this PR. The communication technologies and strategies to reach more sectors of the population—I do not know whether we look at the television or we do not, but if you look at France and see what is happening with H1N1; if you look at the United States; if you look at Buenos Aires and if you look at Britain, you will see a number of countries are struggling with H1N1 and our strategy is—but I will talk about that very shortly. So therefore, we are going to continue with the traditional media such as the television, radio and print and our idea is to bring information and education to people so that they can live better lives and they can understand health promotion. Because at the end of the day we can do how much we want, if people do not understand that they must take responsibility for their lives then all of these acute care, tertiary care and secondary care would be of no value and it is important that we make that point.

**5.30 p.m.**

We have launched a magazine called "Live Well" and we have sent it to every home, so that they can ensure that they understand some of the diseases.

In fact, I was just discussing with the Minister of Finance, and the Minister of Finance was saying that if we do not get the promotional activity going and the educational activity going, we really are going to be in a serious problem.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I agree with you.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** Diseases such as diabetes, cardiac, hypertension, all of those diseases. Therefore, it is with great pride again, that I speak about our new programme, "Healthy Communities Implementation Programme", where we are going to start with these community health caravans. These caravans will be going out to all the varies communities and they will use a health care format to bring health to the communities with a range of health programmes, including services and programmes to sensitize and create awareness. We are going to



identify local health needs and concerns. In other words, we are going to these communities and stimulating an interest in health promotion, wellness, education, testing and screening, so that we can have people recognize the importance of that.

Madam Deputy Speaker, let me just say that we plan to commence this in September and the first place we will visit is St. Mary's Village in Moruga; Bangladesh; Guaico, Tamana; Pinto Road, Arima; Maloney, Success Laventille; Beetham and of course, we are going to be ensuring that these communities recognize the importance of good health and we are going to try to reach out to them.

Our first 20 stops will include Arima, Arouca/Maloney, Caroni East, Chaguanas East, Couva North, Fyzabad, La Brea, Laventille West, Lopinot/Bon Air West, Naparima, Oropouche West, Port of Spain South, Princes Town South/Tableland, San Fernando East, St. Ann's East and St. Augustine, and that is only the first set. Despite what you think, it is very clear that our mandate is to look after all the people in Trinidad and Tobago, and that is only because we care about the people of Trinidad and Tobago. So, whilst a number of people want to preach doom, gloom, want to do all kinds of things that are not consistent with our plan of moving Trinidad and Tobago to a First World status in the shortest possible time, we are clear, and certainly at the Ministry of Health we are clear.

You know, my good friend from Caroni East read a number of letters and I said you know what we should do? We should read some of the other letters. So I decided—kudos from the Green family. This came all the way from London. This was printed in the—you saw it?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yes.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** Thank you very much. Here in London, they were talking about the great—*[Interruption]* Exactly. In the BBC West television news, in a small television programme, reviewing the situation with the British couple who were attacked in Tobago, the Green family members were interviewed on television and one family member stated, "Anyway, they seemed to have done a jolly good job over there, *[Desk thumping]* the surgeons and medical staff at the hospital. Thus congrats to the surgeons and medical staff in Trinidad and Tobago", and so on. But you know that was not enough. The High Commissioner to Trinidad and Tobago from England said he had been directed by his Prime Minister to write and say, "We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude for the professional and excellent service offered by your Ministry, in particular the members of the staff at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex during the hospitalization of Peter and Miriam Green. *[Desk thumping]*"

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No, but it is all right, you know. I think this is not about me, this is about the staff. This is about the system, this is about the management. This is not about me. This is not about the Prime Minister. This is about what we are trying to do for the people. So, I think if we could have an even hand as we seek to do that—but the one that really warmed me is yesterday. While we opened this new ward—whenever I go to the hospital, I always visit some of the people. I did not every realized that they took a picture of it. The lady's name—and she has given me the authority. In fact, she told me I want you to say this—is Miriam Gafoor and her sister right here is from Toronto. [*Picture was displayed*] She said, "I cannot believe what I am seeing here. If I get sick I am coming to Mount Hope." That is what the lady said. [*Desk thumping*] That is what the lady told me and I have her authority to say that. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** One out of a 100.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** No, no, no! Madam Deputy Speaker, I have so much here. In fact, it is appearing in the newspaper, San Fernando doctors, treatment at Mount Hope. I know why they are getting scared. If I was in the Opposition and I saw the kind of strides they are making in health care—I look around Trinidad and Tobago and I see the kind of strides being made, and worse, if I look at the political education I would be as scared as you are. I would be scared too. But I want to tell you—[*Interruption*] Because you see, the statement is vox populi vox Dei. You understand? People are seeing. So my dear fellows—I do not want to read all of these. I did not plan to talk very long. I would not go into all of this, but just to say as I have said before, a small country, full employment, the economy is solid, nobody has not lost their credit card, things still going relatively good while the balance of the world if they are not drowning in unemployment, they are drowning in deficit; if they are not drowning in deficit, they are drowning in swine flu. All through we are doing well.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I cannot help but wonder, and I am always one of those who—I am an optimist and I pray for the day when parliamentarians would realize that you come here to represent people, and that you come here not to pelt as much mud as is possible. I say all parliamentarians. [*Desk thumping*]

Once, the very Member from Caroni East I came here hot and sweaty and the Prime Minister said, "Go and drink a tall glass of water." I said, but I am not thirsty. He said not, but you better cool down. You know, it was one of the greatest pieces of advice that he gave me because since that day—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Manning:** [*Inaudible*] Gopeesingh that.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:**—I chose not to be nasty, not to pelt mud. I would admit we have some way to go, but every time—no, hear what you did. You caused me to outline for the whole country to see that we are serious about prevention; that we are serious about infrastructure; that we are serious about our programmes, that we are even-handed in what we do, that we are visiting all the communities, that we are going out to look after people's needs, that this is a Government that cares about the people, and therefore—*[Desk thumping]* I mean, that is what you are doing. So if that is what you want to do, I need not have been here this evening, I have a House to talk in. No, but it is fine. If you are happy, through you, Madam Deputy Speaker, then you could imagine, we are happier. Because if we could make the Member for Caroni East happy, then we know we are on the right track. When the political leader hears that tonight, he is in trouble.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would not even talk about H1N1. I would not talk about it, but suffice it to say, we did—*[Interruption]*

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** You did a good job at that, but a poor job with the dengue.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** Again, he is saying now that we did a good job. *[Desk thumping]* *[Laughter]* Again, he is saying that we are doing a good job, but I want to tell Trinidad and Tobago that hope is alive and well because if he could recognize that we did a good job and he commends me publicly—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Abdul-Hamid:** Stand up and say it.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Madam Deputy Speaker, we appreciate the work that you did in the H1N1 to the benefit of the country, but you did a poor job with the dengue. *[Desk thumping]* You did a poor job with the dengue and you must accept that you made a mess with the dengue and you learned your lesson through the dengue epidemic, but lives were lost. Almost 32 lives were lost and that was unfortunate. When you went on to say six, that was wrong. You know you learnt your mistake.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I know a "fella" who went to the races once and he bought a ticket, and after about 18 days on the race track he is still holding on to that ticket and saying, "I wonder when I will be able to cash this." *[Laughter]*

**Mrs. Gopee-Scoon:** Is that you?

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** I think you need to get a new ticket, that ticket is now spent. So, I am really pleased that—I would not worry to go through all of this, but I always think that as a responsible Minister and a responsible Government, we must not lose the opportunity to warn Trinidad and Tobago that

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it is not over. We still have maybe two or three more months to go. We have the possibility of a second wave, and therefore, I advise all members of the national community to continue to take the advice of the Ministry of Health and I would not comment on what took place on the reading of the budget. I would not comment, I will leave it alone.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I do not know if you recall the theme of this budget. The theme of this budget spoke to efficiencies and challenges and I want to once again congratulate the Minister of Finance. The Minister of Finance accepted what was facing us. She stepped up to the plate and she said, "You got to become efficient and we got to face our challenges", and that is exactly what the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is doing. So too, we have taken our cue, and at the Ministry of Health we have been doing that. Over the past two fiscal years, I can say with conviction, that we have been reviewing contracts to ensure that we get value for money, that the RHAs have been reviewing their relationship with their suppliers to improve the terms and conditions of agreements, and to improve our procurement practices, the RHAs have gone through an exercise of rationalization of their human resources to ensure optimum utilization of staff. So therefore, we continue this year to base our initiatives and activities across the sector on the same principles.

We are constantly auditing, we are constantly checking and I am sure you know by now whenever there is any complaint, be it clinical, be it financial, be it HR, the Ministry of Health takes a very proactive position in ensuring that we audit and continue to audit both those which we receive reports on, as well as a continuous approach on our own.

You know, Madam Deputy Speaker, when the Member for Chaguanas West is holding on to a toilet, you know things bad. [*Laughter*] But I am almost minded to say that sometimes people can find themselves just there. I am sorry that the Member for Siparia is not here. I want to say that when we work, we work towards outcomes and we work towards performance and measurement indicators. That is what we are doing. We are working towards outcomes and performance and measurement indicators. So we want to know for every dollar spent, what kind of return we are getting. We want to know what is happening at each of our institutions. We want to measure the way you treat people. We want to measure how many beds per days, how many days a patient requires. We measure all those things and I can tell you that once a month the RHAs sit around a table with the Minister and we go through institution by institution, and Regional Health Authority by Regional Health Authority to account to each other

to say how we are spending that money. That is what we do. We also look at some key indicators. The Member for Siparia is not here, but I want to remind the Member for Siparia that she spoke about infant mortality rate per 1,000 live births. In 2001, the rate was 18.5 with a total of 335 deaths—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** What are you quoting from?

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** CSO figures.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** [*Inaudible*]

**Sen. The Hon. J. Narace:** Yes. CSO Population and Vital Statistics. In 2005, it had fallen to 266.

**5.45 p.m.**

The infant mortality by hospital: In Port of Spain in 2001 it was 68, by 2008 it had dropped to 45, decreased by 34 per cent. In the San Fernando General Hospital, in 2001 it was 98; by 2008 it had dropped by 63, down 36 per cent, and in the Mount Hope Women's Hospital, from 100 in 2001, to 55 in 2008, a decrease of 45 per cent. Clearly the Member for Siparia produced some imaginary figures which were totally inaccurate.

In terms of maternal mortality rates, same document: In 2001, it was seven, in 2005, down to six. In terms of neonatal mortality rates, in 2001 it was 271, and that is just under a month per 1,000 live births; it was down to 232. So clearly the figures that were advanced by the Member for Siparia were all wrong. She got them wrong. The figures I have advanced are the correct figures and, therefore, it is, again, a very bad story.

When we treat with the dollars spent by the Government, when we treat with the health care system, we look at outcomes. I can call for you all the surgical procedures and show that in Port of Spain there was an 83 per cent increase between 2001 and 2008. At the Eric Williams Hospital there was a 33 per cent increase between 2001 and 2008; at San Fernando there was a 12.2 increase between 2001 and 2008; at Mount Hope, a 15 per cent for the same period; Point Fortin, a 38 per cent for the same period; Sangre Grande, a 41 per cent, same period, and Tobago, a 65 per cent; a significant increase in surgical procedures between when you left and the end of last year.

There were a number of admissions at various hospitals; in 2001, 5,000; 2008, 13,000, an increase of 147 per cent. Sangre Grande, 4,977; by 2008, 7,788, an increase of 56 per cent.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** They are getting more sick; that is wrong.

**Hon. J. Narace:** He has made a good point. We have now really championed the prevention and wellness programme and it is critical. I accept that, Member for Caroni East.

In Tobago, there was a 24 per cent increase. I could give you all the HR changes; I would not go through all of that, or all the other statistics I have. Suffice it to say that we are now checking, accounting and becoming transparent, getting outcomes, data and statistics. *[Interruption]*

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I am happy, Minister, and this is very good. There have been a number of investigations which you had asked for, as far as patients' problems were concerned. It would be nice at some time to give the country the reports of some of these investigations. Many times you say that you would investigate certain things: The death of so and so, and so forth. Generally the population does not have an idea of what has happened. The way that people look at you would improve a little more, if you report on some of these investigations. I gave you one on ACI and the CAT lab, I wrote you a letter; therefore, we look forward to that and the corruption area there.

**Hon. J. Narace:** Let me just say that a lot of these reports which came in were passed to the Medical Council, in some instances, because in some instances there were legal implications and ramifications. Sometimes it is not as easy to make someone's condition public. But suffice it to say that I passed them to the Medical Council and we try to get them to take the appropriate action.

In fact, I held a discussion with them and said that if it required remedial work, then let us see. We want to reform people; we want to help people; we do not want to lose good doctors who may have made an error for some reason. We want to help to reform that doctor for whatever purpose it might have been, even if it was negligence. We want to make sure that once it was not malicious, we could work accordingly with that.

I will send the real figures for the Member for Siparia, who had some imaginary figures.

I know that the Member for Caroni East raised the issue of the Gladys Gaffoor Report. It is important to let him know that the technical committee examined over 400 and something recommendations; 50 have been completed, 54 are nearing completion, 74 were deemed long-term initiatives and have been dealt with accordingly. The remaining 241 have been assessed and the valid ones have been incorporated into the Ministry's transformational plan.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Could you give us an idea?

**Hon. J. Narace:** Some of the specific recommendations: The launch of an 811 number, delivered; the commissioning of a strategic management report from PricewaterhouseCoopers, delivered; an HR training plan which includes the award of scholarships worth \$100 million, delivered; amendment of the Pharmacy Board Act, delivered; development of a health information system kidney unit, delivered; upgrades of facilities and equipment, delivered, and continuing to deliver; improving customer service, delivered, and continuing to deliver; improving the communications dimension of the Ministry's functions, delivered; improving service at A and E departments, delivered, and the regulation of prehospital emergency care in Emergency Health Services and Ambulance Bill, delivered. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, we have delivered; we are delivering and we will continue to deliver, only because we continue to care. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Moonilal:** That is a good end. [*Laughter*]

**Hon. J. Narace:** Do you want me to stop? I would stop, you know.

I want to tell you what a pleasure it is to be in this House in such a cordial way and getting congratulations from the other side; it is very, very pleasurable.

I remind members of the national community, Members of this House and everyone that we are very focused on our three strategic objectives: They are productive population through preventive care; the creation and maintenance of a First World health care delivery system and to develop and manage a comprehensive population base public health system. These three strategic objectives are what would see us to a First World system.

We know the strategies: Institutional reform; strengthening of vertical services; strengthening of the Regional Health Authorities; upgrading our facilities and infrastructure; skilled development and availability; providing quality service; developing our information technology; rationalizing our health financing and continuous improvement on all levels.

I could have told this House today about the excitement taking place in the Ministry of Health with respect to our e-health card and the NHS, but I choose not to do that. Suffice it to say that it has been most clearly established by the Member for Caroni Central, the Member for Siparia, the Opposition Leader and the Member for Caroni East, who did very well to only speak for about six minutes on health, that the Ministry of Health is doing extremely well. I want to take this opportunity to thank the Government for the confidence it continues to

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repose in health. I want to also thank the Minister of Finance for her support. I want to thank the Prime Minister for his support. I want to thank all those health care professionals who, on a daily basis, I observe stepping up to the plate and stepping up for Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Let us get some reality now.

**Hon. Member:** Ohh!

**Miss Mickela Panday** (*Oropouche West*): Why are you crying? I have not even started and you are moaning and groaning.

Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you for this opportunity to join this debate. To hear my good friend, the hon. Minister of Health, say that the Opposition wishes this country bad, is insincere. I know he definitely does not believe that.

**Hon. Narace:** Are you aware that Members of the Opposition called in a rating agency and suggested to them that it downgrades Trinidad and Tobago?

**Dr. Moonilal:** "Who tell yuh that?"

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** That is not so.

**Miss M. Panday:** Hon. Minister, wherever you are getting your information from, it looks like the same place where you got the infant mortality rate information. It is incorrect. I know you know that. Members of the Opposition would not do that.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** That is an irresponsible statement.

**Miss M. Panday:** It is an irresponsible statement, hon. Minister. We are good friends, and you know that is not true.

Madam Deputy Speaker, contrary to the popular belief that my colleagues on the other side have learned nothing since their 22 months of inception, I beg to differ; because in light of their contributions so far, it is now clear to all and sundry that they have not just learned, but they have mastered the art of manipulation, deception and propaganda, [*Desk thumping*] and, of course, passing blame to everyone, but themselves.

During one of my contributions in this House on a particular Bill, I cannot remember which one right now, I painstakingly went through the definition, the meanings of the words "caring" and "prudent". Today it appears, like everything else, Members opposite either were not listening, they did not understand or they



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simply do not care. I believe this is the crux of the 2010 Budget, really like all other budgets before.

Based on the premise of the 2020 propaganda that has been drilled into our psyches since 2001, and I quote:

"By the year 2020, Trinidad and Tobago will be a united, resilient, productive, innovative and prosperous nation with a disciplined, caring, fun-loving society, comprising healthy, happy and well-educated people and built on the enduring attributes of self-reliance, tolerance, respect, equity, integrity.

In which...

every citizen has equal opportunities to achieve his/her fullest potential. All citizens enjoy a high quality of life where quality health care is available to all and where safe, peaceful, environmentally friendly communities are maintained.

All citizens are assured of a sound, relevant education system, tailored to meet the human resource needs of a modern, progressive, technologically advancing nation. Optimum use is made of all the resources of the nation.

The family as the foundation of the family contributes to its growth, development and stability.

There is respect for the rule of law, human rights and promotion of the principles of democracy.

The diversity and creativity of all its people are valued and nurtured."  
[*Crosstalk*] [*Desk thumping*]

In theory, fantastic; in reality, what absolute nonsense. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. S. Panday:** Rubbish!

**Miss M. Panday:** Today, in a court of law, not one iota of that statement would be able to stand up, because of the entirety of its untruthfulness. [*Desk thumping*] This budget is yet another example of that.

This Minister of Finance had the audacity, in her introduction of her budget statement, to say, and I quote:

"This is the second budget of this administration in which we continue to implement a progressive programme of development..."—and this is the beautiful part—"intended to improve the quality of lives of our nation's citizens."

But whose lives was she talking about?

**Dr. Moonilal:** Her own!

**Miss M. Panday:** I challenge this Government to show the indicators of people, of citizens of this country, not Canadian, not Chinese, but actual Trinbagonians whose quality of life has been improved by either this budget or any of its predecessors. I think you would find that they are unable to do so.

In saying so, I want them to know that when we talk about indicators of actual citizens and people in our society who have benefitted or whose quality of life has improved by this budget, or any of its predecessors, we are not talking about their lives. We are talking about citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. I want them to show us whose life has improved over the last eight years.

**6.00 p.m.**

I think you will find that they are not very many people. In the last year of the eight years of this PNM Government, actually you will find that quite the opposite has happened. Which citizen in this country can honestly say—regardless of race, colour, creed, gender, political affiliation, religion—that in fact, the opposite has not happened and their quality of life under this PNM regime for the last eight years has not actually worsened.

Madam Deputy Speaker, either because of spiraling crime, water shortages, bad roads, unreliable electricity supplies, traffic and the list goes on and on. And now to top it off, as if things cannot get worse or our future in this country could not look bleaker, as this budget proposes to improve the quality of life of our citizens, we now have to bear the burden of Government's debt. We have found ourselves in a debt crisis, and we the citizens have found ourselves with all our other worries that we have to deal with having to bear that burden.

And that, Madam Deputy Speaker, is really what this budget symbolizes to me; the dark, dismal reality of having to deal with a country now in debt. So we now have to ask ourselves after all the fancy words and rhetoric, why are we in Trinidad and Tobago boasting—because the Finance Minister has been boasting—that we escaped the financial crisis while the rest of the developed world was buckling under it. And to quote her word she says: “Because of the Government's prudent and responsible stewardship management of the economy we did not suffer under the financial crisis.”

Why then, Madam Deputy Speaker, are we now in a deficit of nearly \$8 billion for the financial year 2010 and sectorize in 2011? How could this be, Madam Deputy Speaker? [*Member coughs*]

**Hon. Member:** You have the flu too?

**Miss M. Panday:** You are really quite amusing Madam, you really are. I wish they would get up and respond in an intelligent way instead of wasting everybody's time. They have wasted our time for the last eight years.

I want to ask you, Madam Deputy Speaker, how can this be? Why are we facing an \$8 billion deficit when there was a huge injection in this economy which the Minister of Finance accedes to from the year 2005 and I believe to 2008. This Government needs to explain to the people of Trinidad and Tobago why it needs to borrow money that we the taxpayers would have to feel the brunt of paying back?

This Government needs to explain to the youths of this nation, after having experienced the gas boom, why we the youths of this nation now have to be saddled with the debt that they have incurred because of mismanagement and irresponsible spending?

**Mr. S. Panday:** Answer that.

**Miss M. Panday:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I have gone over the Minister's budget over and over again and every time I do, it angers me more and more that we in Trinidad and Tobago have found ourselves in this position. More annoying though, is the fallacy and almost untenable situation statement rather, regarding real GDP growth that was made.

She says we also expect the recovery in economic growth in Trinidad and Tobago to be gradual. Our projections for real GDP growth of around 2 per cent in 2010 rising to 4 per cent in 2011 and 5 to 6 per cent in 2012. She goes on to explain this imaginary growth by saying we see these growth projections as easily achievable but does not say how.

Based on the global outlook—nice big words—and the economic policies that the Government intends to implement over the next few years, she says we envisage that the world recovery will increase the demand for energy products.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Minister speaks about expecting a 2 per cent growth in GDP in 2010. My question to the Minister is: How exactly did she arrive at these figures? And does she actually understand what it takes to achieve this? Because, to simply state that we envisage that the world's recovery will increase the demand for energy products which will positively impact both product prices and petrochemical sector, is not good enough.

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The question is how did they come to this conclusion? Did they take into consideration the emerging new suppliers such as Russia, Norway, Iran, Qatar? Did they take into consideration that gas is a commodity which has many substitutes? Because remember, Madam Deputy Speaker, she said that we envisage that the world's recovery will increase demand for energy products, and I am asking—and that is how we are going to get to that 2 per cent growth—how did she come to that conclusion?

Did she take into consideration these—did she take into consideration more importantly Obama's energy plan? You continuously say that Mr. Obama is the greatest thing since sliced bread. I believe that he is the greatest thing since sliced bread for the United States, but not necessarily for us in the developing world and I think the Minister should perhaps take some time to read that energy plan before she makes such untenable predictions in GDP growth based on—[*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, did they not realize in making these projections saying okay, we are in this deficit of \$8 million, did she not realize that if they failed to achieve this 2 per cent then we would find ourselves in a worsening situation of debt? I say this because we on this side—and I speak for the youth and women of this country—debt is something that everybody can realize it and even on a personal level once you enter a cycle of debt, unless you find a way to come out of it, it begins to trap you and you start to become buried underneath this debt situation.

What is really important is that this nation—because we need to stand up and really think seriously—needs to realize that we are in a debt situation that we may not—and I am hoping that we will—but we may not be able to get out of, or it is not going to get better unless, of course, this Government makes some changes.

To say that we have entered a period of debt which the Minister describes as a temporary situation is to make a statement that she is unable to justify because she is unable to say exactly how we are going to come out of this.

To state that gas prices would rise without any practical evidence of that and in the face of contradicting evidence is to be foolish. Would it not be wiser to say; if gas prices were to rise, that would be a wonderful benefit, but if it did not, we in the Government have an alternative plan? What is their alternative plan? All the Government has to do, Madam Deputy Speaker, and it still can do it in this budget, is to simply adjust their policy to avoid going into another deficit into 2011.

Madam Deputy Speaker, even though they have chosen to take what I describe as the cowardly way out to hide the economic review document, it does not take a rocket scientist to calculate that with debt to GDP ratio inching the 50

per cent mark—if debt is \$50 billion in what we call real terms at 8 per cent interest, this country will be paying interest of \$4 billion and this is why I am saying to you we have found ourselves in what you call a debt trap. It is not just paying back the money you have borrowed, but it is actually paying back interest on that money. But of course, the shadow Minister of Finance will go into greater details of that. [*Laughter*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, the problem with debt however, when you really finish paying debt, it is really the interest that kills people. And I only say that in the context, I do not want to go into the finance of it. Like I said, my colleague, the Member for St. Augustine, would. My point is that it really takes away from providing the goods and services for people.

Therefore, Madam Deputy Speaker, we need this Government to change its policy because if it does not, public debt will rise. What do I mean when I say adjusting its policy to avoid us getting into a vicious cycle of debt that we may not be able to come out of, the Government needs to simply diversify and I know a number of my colleagues have spoken about that; stimulate the domestic economy by diversifying.

You see, Madam Deputy Speaker, the PNM has never had its priorities right and that is really what it boils down to. And in this honourable House we see this time and time again, and I say again, it is either they do not listen, they do not understand, or they simply do not care and this has resulted in their failure. But they are excused, the reasons for their failure, or their statement that it cares which Minister after Minister makes, is that it wants to blame the UNC for it.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you can be forgiven once for being out of touch with the needs of the people, twice cannot be coincidence. It has to be a conscious and deliberate act of neglect and an overt showing of disinterest in the well-being and happiness of the people of this nation and so, it really is an insult to all of us to continually state that you are a caring and prudent Government. When you say that, you need to tell that to the children of this nation whose future is now to carry a burden of debt caused by your mismanagement.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I remember in a message to the nation on, I believe it was the 46th Anniversary of our Independence, the hon. Patrick Manning, the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, said:

"It is the determination of this Government to continue to build a foundation for our children and their children upon which they can build a future."

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How could this be, Madam Deputy Speaker? I say so in light of what the hon. Minister of Health said earlier on when he corrected the Member for Siparia on her statistics.

I am not sure where he got his statistics from, but I want to quote my own, and, for the record, he can research it if he likes. My statistics are from the UNICEF Statistics of 2009 under the State of the World's Children Report and it states that in 2005, 868 males, 680 females under the age of 5 in Trinidad and Tobago have succumbed to diseases and other causes of death to infants, that is a total of 1,558 infants. And shamelessly, despite Government's constant pronouncements, UNICEF claims that the figures keep growing under the PNM and by next year, it is estimated that approximately 1,663 infants in Trinidad and Tobago under the age of 5 will succumb to diseases and other causes of death to infants; children, the vulnerable in society who cannot help themselves.

**6.15 p.m.**

Furthermore this country's ranking in the under-five mortality rates has been perpetually worsening under the PNM. For the record, I want to explain, the under-five mortality rates—I am not sure if the hon. Minister was speaking about the same thing, but this is the rate at which children under the age of five die as a result of disease or some other cause.

Since the PNM came into Government they have completely reversed the positive trend established by the then UNC government. You see, this Government loves to do two things: Ask what the UNC did when they were there—and that was eight years ago, and if you look at what eight years ago was in real time, a child who was 10 would now be 18. But they want to sit here and ask what the UNC did or what the UNC failed to do. So two things they like to do is ask what the UNC did, firstly, and, secondly, they like to do comparisons of themselves, of their Government, to countries that are doing worse than them, not really countries that are equal to them in either demographics or population or anything else. [*Desk thumping*]

You see, with the largest economy in the Caribbean, with the highest level of income in our nation's history, with more resources than any other Caribbean country, Trinidad and Tobago, under the current administration, has been out-performed by 10 Caricom neighbours and I want to tell you who they are: Barbados, Antigua, St. Vincent, St. Kitts and Nevis, Dominica, The Bahamas, Grenada, Cuba, Jamaica and the Dominican Republic, and that source, so that you can check it, you can get it on the UNICEF website, 2009, State of the World's Children Report—10 Caricom countries

beating them. Why should this be the case? It must be because they either do not listen; they do not understand or they simply just do not care.

Another problem that this Government has failed to address is that of teenage pregnancies. This is something which is swept under the carpet but something that continues to haunt this nation. It is estimated by 2011 there will be 1,741 births by teenage mothers. That source again is the CSO Table that the hon. Minister was reading from: "Population Distribution by Age, Group and Sex, State of the World's Population." Why then is no discussion taking place by the Minister of Social Development on this issue?

Although it is a fact that their Vision 2020 document realizes teenage pregnancy as a concern, why then has the Minister of Finance not addressed this in her budget? Why have the concerns of the youth of this nation been given no consideration in this budget? Is the Minister aware that 15,000 children—I brought this up in this honourable House before and I wish to highlight it again because it seems to have fallen on deaf ears. Is the Minister aware that 15,000 children age five to 14 years of age are engaged in the worst forms of child labour in this country? And you speak about Vision 2020? It is estimated that 3.5 per cent of children ages five to 14 years, that is 15,071 children, were counted as working in agriculture, scavenging, stocking goods, car repair, washing, construction, fishing and begging.

Children also work as shop assistants, cosmetologists, domestic servants and street vendors, according to the UNCHR, the UN refugee agency, in 2007, and this was found for Trinidad and Tobago; right here in Trinidad and Tobago under the worst forms of child labour.

The Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development and the Ministry of Social Development are currently responsible for enforcing labour provisions. However, according to the US Department of State, they said enforcement is weak because there is no comprehensive government policy on child labour and there are no established mechanisms for receiving, investigating and addressing child labour complaints.

Furthermore, although the Ministry of Social Development—I have read their National Plan of Action for children. This ministry has identified shortcomings with respect to child labour in T&T. In fact, I pulled it out of their National Plan of Action for children and they identified:

1. An absence of comprehensive information on child labourers and potential child labourers;
2. Lack of public awareness on issue of child labour; and

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3. Absence of linkages between child labour and overall human and family development.

Tell me then, why is it taking this Government so long to put these measures into place? Is this how they "nurture" a caring society? Where is the provision in the budget which shows that the Minister intends to address this critical issue in fiscal 2010? It does not exist.

Crime in this country clearly does not discriminate, as even the most vulnerable groups of our society have not been able to escape the ravages of crime. Are you aware that since 2006—and these are only the reported ones—there have been over 70 reported cases of children being abused, exploited, murdered, raped in Trinidad and Tobago? This Government is putting our nation's future, our nation's children at risk. They remind us on more occasions than we would like to hear, about how much they care, but their apparent neglect and lack of interest in improving the lives of the children of our nation tell us differently. It tells us the truth of their concern.

The Minister failed the children in her last budget and she has failed the children in this budget. She once more, in her budget, confirmed her Government's lack of concern for future generations; the same lack of concern and contempt they illustrated last week Friday, Madam Deputy Speaker. I think you were here when the Member for San Fernando East, if I remember clearly, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Social Development and the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs—last week when I asked where is the gender policy or where is anything on gender, during their rant last week—according to them, the reason for not addressing such issues is because it is a budget and budgets do not deal with or address those issues. [*Interruption*] You said it was a budget. So if it was a budget, it means that it is a budget that does not deal with that. [*Interruption*] Please explain. Please. I give way for you to explain what you meant then, Mr. Prime Minister, through you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Manning:** What is that?

**Miss M. Panday:** You see, when specifically asked about gender issues and gender policy, which was, I must say, shamelessly laid the Friday before the Monday and they had a whole year-plus—when specifically asked, the Prime Minister proclaimed—and, Mr. Prime Minister, I will get the *Hansard* and check it—you proclaimed last week Friday, this is a budget. It is for this reason I am so happy you are here, Mr. Prime Minister. You insinuated by saying this is a budget, so therefore, what I was saying was stupidity.



I want, for your knowledge and, of course, the rest of your Government, to teach you something, to enlighten you— [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*]

**Mr. S. Panday:** Take that! Take that!

**Miss M. Panday:** I want to teach you about something called—Members for San Fernando East, Port of Spain North/East, Port of Spain South, Diego Martin Central—I want to teach you today in this House about something called gender budgeting. You may not have heard of it. It is not a separate budget for women, rather it is a dissection of the Government's budget to establish its gender differential impacts and to translate gender commitments into budgetary commitments. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. S. Panday:** “Yuh hear dat? Yuh hear dat? Take dat!”

**Miss M. Panday:** This is not good enough—I have done copies for you. I want to tell you:

“The main objective of a gender sensitive budget is to improve the analysis of incidence of budgets, attain more effective targeting of public expenditure and offset any undesirable gender specific consequences of previous budgetary measures.”

I want to continue so that you know. A case study in Zimbabwe by Dorothy Adebajo— you should read it, Member for Diego Martin North/East.

**Mr. Imbert:** How “yuh” spell that?

**Miss M. Panday:** A-d-e-b-a-n—you do not know her?

**Mr. Imbert:** No.

**Miss M. Panday:** But you did not even know what gender budgeting was, how would you know her? She is a specialist on it. [*Laughter*] Of course, you would not know who she is, Mr. Prime Minister. I will read you a tiny bit more and then you go and do your own research. She says:

“If there is one indicator of a government's commitment to social justice, it is its allocation of budgetary resources for women. Often governments and institutions are very quick to tick on a checklist...”

That is what you did.

"that they have signed and ratified...”

And this is what you have done.

"international instruments and put policies and laws in place...”

**Mr. Manning:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the very distinguished Member for Oropouche West for giving way. In doing your gender budgeting, is how you described it—and thank you for the edification on this matter—how did you allocate the resources that were allocated for scholarships? In terms of gender budgeting, how did you allocate it?

**Miss M. Panday:** Member for San Fernando East, I am going to use the words of the Member for Diego Martin North/East: That is why you there and we here. That is your job; that is not my job! [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*] That is for you to do. “Doh ask me to do yuh wuk!” In 2012, I will show you how to do it.

It is such an important thing; it is very, very close to my heart and if I could just say this one. Really and truly, gender budgeting is something beautiful that we could look at; it is something that was first introduced by Australia, India and many other countries. In the Caribbean they are actually looking at it. It goes on to say:

“If there is one indicator of a government's commitment to social justice, it is the allocation of its budgetary resources for women. Often governments and institutions are very quick to tick on a checklist that they have signed and ratified...instruments and put policies and laws in place to promote social justice for women, but they seldom match this with the necessary budget allocations that actually translate the signature into transformation of women's lives.”

Really and truly, that is the overall goal of gender budgeting. It is really to reduce gender inequalities and promote gender sensitive development policies for poverty reduction and the improvement of the welfare of women, men, boys and girls. Because evidence suggests—and I mean you can really get so much. You must know about Helen Leadbetter.

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

That is the first piece of Leadbetter legislation that Obama had signed. It is important because evidence suggests and this lady, Helen Leadbetter stated that the economic gains of gender equality lead to increased input and better development of people's capabilities.

Sadly, even though we have enlightened this House on a new theory, I do not expect anything to be done. The reason for that is I feel that this Government either does not listen, does not understand or simply does not care. Contrary to what the Minister of Finance and the rest of the PNM will like us to believe, neither this budget nor any of its predecessors in the last eight years have done

anything to improve the quality of the lives of women, children and the elderly in this country as a whole. In fact, today, if you ask them—that is how you really tell. It is not these crazy sorts of facts and figures that they bring out. You have to go to people and ask them. If you ask the youth and women of this nation what successive budgets have done to improve the quality of their lives which is the function of a budget, they would actually say to you that they feel that their lives have worsened. The lives of the youth and the women of this country have degenerated to a level never really seen before in this country.

This Government speaks about construction and continuing the design and building of 50 early childhood centres; upgrade of facilities for the computerization of primary schools; construction and other infrastructure works on several primary and secondary schools. Yet in my constituency and many others I can speak for in the southern region, there are still children who should be going to primary schools who are being schooled in temples which themselves are dilapidated. These temples and dilapidated buildings of all sorts are acting as substitutes for schools.

Not only that. On one hand in this country you have a shortage of water during a particular time of the year and on the other hand, you have flooding destroying people's homes and farmers' crops. Most of the roads in Oropouche West are beyond passable. This Government clearly—I mention those things to you in light of everything that I have said before, because it comes back to what I have been saying. I believe that this Government clearly does not have its priorities right. It is my belief that this is because they have totally misunderstood the meaning of infrastructure. To them that means big buildings and hotels, et cetera, to the basic schools, not housing children in temples but building schools. To them it is the Hyatt.

To the average citizen in this country it means providing the basic amenities as water, roads, schools and hospitals. That is what infrastructure is. That is how you start on a foundation of building towards developed country status. The Brian Lara Stadium Complex whatever you want to call it, is not a priority because right across the highway we have the Mannie Ramjohn Stadium. We in this country need hospitals not smelter plants. Farmers need subsidies to feed our nation so that we are not dependent on imported food. They need access roads; proper drainage and protection from praedial larceny. More than just words they need. They need action from this Government and that is what should be their priority.

When all is said and done first and foremost, the people of this nation need to be protected from the criminals. The young and the old alike, male and female, if we fail to protect our citizens we would find that we are losing our brightest, most

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capable and competent which would help us in the development of our nation and achieving our Vision 2020 goals. Today, the youths of this nation have lost all commitment to the society. They are seeking what they see as a better life in a foreign country.

I want to reiterate all that has been said before by the hon. Minister, sorry sir, Member for Princes Town North, soon to be minister and then he would tell the Minister of National Security what to do. I reiterate and say that it is imperative that this Government put the safety of our citizens first. Hotels and fancy buildings can all come after. No one is saying not to build them it is just about prioritizing especially now that we have found ourselves in a deficit. I plead with the Minister to deal with the real challenges facing the people of Trinidad and Tobago as crime, corruption, poverty, agriculture, health, education, flooding, water shortages and food prices. Revisit and reconsider your budget after hearing the views of us on the opposite side who have listened to the people.

I am sorry to say without being rude that unlike you, the PNM Government, we have heard and heeded the wishes and needs of the people. I plead with you, Madam Minister, remove those aspects of your Bill that seek to punish the law abiding; remove the aspects of your Bill that seek to punish those who have finally sacrificed and bought a home with this wealth tax and all those others who have suffered and will continue—unless you change your policy—to suffer under this PNM Government if you continue to ignore the pleas of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

There is time for you to urgently address the real challenges facing our people and to get your priorities right finally. You know what they are. There are so many documents, I can barely lift them. They know exactly what they are and claim to know what the solution is. I beg of you to please do something about it. Do not permit yourself to act only in the interest of your party, but in the interest of us all as a nation. This is your obligation. I ask you to please act in accordance with your duty, PNM Government, Member for San Fernando East, Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara and my colleagues on the opposite side.

Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Social Development (Hon. Dr. Amery Browne):** Madam Deputy Speaker, it is indeed a pleasure and privilege to be able to contribute to the 2009/2010 national budget debate in this honourable House. Let me take this opportunity to wish Ramadhan Mubarak to the Islamic members of the Trinidad and Tobago community. I also wish to extend best wishes to the Member of Parliament for Couva South and wish him a full and speedy recovery and return to

active service. [*Interruption*] I am not aware of any illness or diagnosis for the Member for Couva North.

It is said that one must give honour where honour is due and right from the start I commend my dear colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance on another brilliant presentation of the national budget for our beloved nation. She did an excellent job. Speaking on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, the Minister of Finance has delivered a fiscal policy that is quite outstanding in many respects. It is responsible and responsive to the current economic realities of Trinidad and Tobago and that is exactly what the citizens of this country demand from their government.

It signals our determination to increase lawfulness both on and off the roads of Trinidad and Tobago. Her budget and our budget demonstrates the keen insight of government into what is required to further stimulate enterprise and job creation, in critical productive sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing and construction. It represents a firm commitment to achieve sustained improvements in the services that we deliver to the public and that the public expects of us across a wide range of government agencies.

The budget is completely consistent with Vision 2020, the overall vision and national development strategy for Trinidad and Tobago. It is part of an ongoing demonstration to our citizens that the nation's resources are being prudently managed and that the future is in excellent hands with the honourable Prime Minister, the Cabinet and Government of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] The budget is one that is infused with realism and at the same time it offers us great hope that this twin island republic will continue to improve in every way, in every respect, every day, every month and every year with the People's National Movement in charge. Indeed, we are working very hard to strengthen efficiency and address the challenges that confront a young nation as it develops.

In sad contrast to all this and that very laudable budget and presentation thereof, was the very repetitive, dull and erratic response of the hon. Leader of the Opposition. His was a presentation that was riddled with factual errors; personal attacks; name-calling; desperate leaps of logic and bereft of ideas. [*Interruption*] I could not agree more. Even the Opposition Members of Parliament sat silently and pensively during that response, as we bore witness not to the fire of past years, but to really, pensive, but to really a puff of smoke, noxious and bilious from the start right to the very end, tinged with name-calling and a careful selection of only the most negative bits of data designed to attack the psyche of the very people we were all elected to serve. [*Desk thumping*] What a manner of opposition!

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I am going to be very charitable and noble today and not take after the Member for Oropouche West, but I would just flatter her by describing her as a chip off the old block. I see her sighing with relief. It is a sad example of followership gone wrong that Opposition Member after Opposition Member has stood to offer platitudes to the very man that each of them directly blames for destroying their collective political future, by importing the greatest Trojan horse into their camp in the history of the politics in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. A powerful and determined Trojan horse.

In the face of those internal pressures, no one can honestly expect that the Opposition will offer a constructive response to the measures announced in the budget. No one can expect that they will offer any alternative vision for the development of Trinidad and Tobago. I heard maybe, an effort at a vision described by the Member for Oropouche West when she screamed that the youths have lost interest in the future of Trinidad and Tobago. I tell you Member, that you do not speak for the young people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] When you describe young people who have lost interest in the future of this country, you are speaking for the criminals. You are not speaking for the law abiding. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*] Control yourself. It is no surprise to anyone on this side that in spite of all that venom and attacks against our hard-working Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance, all they have to show is a 4 per cent rating in the most recent poll.

**6.45 p.m.**

I have been made to understand that those who said none polled higher than those who—I hear your pain, Member, but you feel it. Member for Oropouche West, if you are looking for positive and visionary leadership, look no further than the Member for San Fernando East. It is a very stark contrast to the bile that is spewing. It is a very stark contrast and it is on display right here this evening.

On the one hand, the people are offered a constructive, sincere, strategic approach to nation building; on the other hand, they are offered the cynicism, negativity and complaints, with no meaningful solution or recommendations whatsoever. When offered those two choices, the people will always choose the former.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the PNM continues to offer the population the audacity of hope and the UNC continues to offer them the audacity of hopelessness. That contrast is quite evident in the reality that the Opposition has never offered the people of Trinidad and Tobago any strategic development plan or properly elaborated vision for the social sector. It has never happened.

I listened very carefully to the Member for Couva North, and the disjointed shopping list that he squeezed in the last 30 seconds of his response to this budget. It was the same shopping list that the Opposition offered the last time around when the Minister of Finance presented her budget. It was the same shopping list that they offered to the population in the 2007 general election. The population remembers that quite well. The population will never fall for such a wish list. They rejected it in 2007; they rejected it last year and they will reject it this year for a number of very important reasons.

Let us look at the characteristics of that wish list. It is reckless because it defies the basic principles of accounting. It is not rooted in any long-term planning model or developmental philosophy and it is clearly without vision. The shopping list he offered in the last 30 seconds of his presentation fails to answer the basic question of how it would be paid for. Even more fundamental than this, it has not even been costed by the Opposition, and therefore cannot be construed as responding to the fiscal realities of today. Yet we get an attempted lecture from the Member for Oropouche West about gender-based budgeting and so on. They cannot even cost their own wish list and list of 30-second proposals.

On the other hand, this Government has always demonstrated that it has the best interest of the citizens at heart. In keeping with our Vision 2020 pillar of Nurturing a Caring Society, we have diligently pursued social sector objectives throughout a range of ministries, including the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Development.

This has resulted in one of the strongest social safety nets in the English-speaking Caribbean and Latin America, with some of the highest levels of grants and support programmes for vulnerable persons, a very low poverty rate in relation to most of the developing world and an increasing range of genuine opportunities for those who wish to improve their station in life. That must be acknowledged by all in this honourable House.

Our very ambitious social sector objectives are being pursued through this scientific review, expansion and upgrade of social development programmes, with the implementation of new systems of monitoring and evaluation, new systems of data and record-keeping and processing and new systems of administration.

Our objectives are also being pursued by the implementation of targeted new programmes and modern poverty reduction projects and by the development of policies that discourage dependency and encourage empowerment and development of our

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citizens through extensive outreach, creating bridges between people in need and the opportunities they can use for their meaningful advancement.

In recognition of the need to be more in touch and responsive to the needs of our citizens, the Ministry has embarked on the decentralization of the delivery of social services. This process is currently under way in the first of 14 regional offices, which is now being established in Sangre Grande. In this fiscal year, a modern building has been secured, appropriate systems and procedures have been developed and terms of reference finalized for a wide range of new staff positions.

Simultaneously, a multi-disciplinary team is preparing a submission to the Cabinet that outlines the details of the proposed social service delivery agency. We have been already in meaningful dialogue with the Public Services Association and I salute the openness of that union in working in partnership with us toward the right formula. We recognize that the public service, as it stands now, is not the best vehicle for service delivery and the model that is emerging leans very heavily on local, regional and international experiences in how best social services can be delivered.

The decentralization of the delivery of social services is an ongoing exercise. Progress is being made and it shall redound to the full benefit of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. The Sangre Grande office and the others to follow in north, south and central Trinidad and Tobago will be one-stop shops with none of the current silos that exist between divisions of the Ministry and even between Ministries. This arrangement will also ideally position our staff as close as possible to communities to conduct more extensive outreach and intervention with vulnerable individuals.

But the Ministry is not just waiting on decentralization to have its full impact over the next two years. Over the last fiscal year, staff from all divisions has been exposed to training in quality customer service. Senior staff has been trained in client focused leadership and emotional intelligence and a comprehensive EAP programme has been instituted across the Ministry of Social Development. New divisional leadership has now been put in place in key divisions such as Social Welfare, the targeted Cash Transfer Programme and the National Family Services Division.

The effectiveness and timeliness that is envisioned through the decentralization of the delivery of our social services must be underpinned and supported by the appropriate IT framework. An Integrated Social Enterprise Management System (ISEMS) is a web-supported database that makes information on cases available to all relevant social service authorities and agencies no matter



where they are located. Furthermore, ISEMS will allow cases to be tracked and managed and administrative processes to be vastly hastened. It will also provide timely and accurate data for evaluation and planning.

During the last fiscal year, tender documents were prepared, Cabinet approval obtained, technical and financial packages were received and processed and the highest ranked firm is now before the Central Tenders Board for selection. We are making progress towards the phased implementation of this project as permitted by resource availability and, again, we aim to shorten waiting times, to have faster application processing and responses and a more positive experience for clients and staff.

I turn now to the issue of poverty, which is currently receiving focus in countries around the world, especially in the current economic climate. Poverty levels have been documented, surprisingly, to be on the rise in some developed countries such as the United States and Russia and in many other developed countries.

When this administration resumed leadership in 2001, the available data indicated that 35 per cent of the population was living below the poverty line and the country began to recover slowly from a period in which absolutely nothing was done by a very callous UNC administration to assist the poor. They were probably too busy with their airport scandals and entertaining their short pants men. Within a few years, under a new government, the 2005 report on the survey of living conditions revealed a poverty rate of 16.7 per cent and an indigence level of 1.2 per cent, a very dramatic change from the 35 per cent that was documented previously.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to tell you that the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment is currently analyzing data from the 2009 household budgetary survey which will provide even more up-to-date and current data on levels of poverty in Trinidad and Tobago. The progress which we have made thus far is based on several factors: a comprehensive range of grants, virtually all of which have been increased steadily over the last nine years by the Government and is based on the implementation and improvement of a number of innovative poverty reduction programmes and on the relentless expansion by this Government of education, training and capacity building opportunities for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

One aspect of our poverty reduction effort focuses on addressing poverty from the community level and another aspect focuses on reducing poverty at the level of the household, family and the individual.

I will start to talk about our poverty reduction at the community level. At the community level, our poverty reduction programme has established regional,

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social and human development councils in 12 communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago. A thirteenth council will be subsumed under the Sangre Grande Regional Office for Decentralization that I referred to earlier. This year, all of the councils were reconstituted; all the membership of those councils was retrained and a special programme of orientation was conducted and completed.

During fiscal 2009, the programme funded 54 additional community projects across Trinidad and Tobago, touching the lives of thousands of citizens, each project actually being managed by civil society organizations operating right at the grassroots level. These projects range from agriculture to homemakers learning information and technology, to projects for young entrepreneurs, as well as life skills development projects.

During fiscal 2009, 44 microenterprise loans were offered for small business capacity building and training at the community level in the amount of \$350,000. This Government is well aware that knowledge is power and the Ministry of Social Development Poverty Reduction Programme also empowers persons at the community level by providing them with access to computers, the World Wide Web and training in computer skills and literacy.

The work of our rural community-based telecentres was expanded and 14,000 walk-in clients across rural Trinidad and Tobago were served and 170 additional persons trained during fiscal 2009.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I had the pleasure of being part of the Ministry's opening of the Piparo Telecentre just a few weeks ago. I wished the Member for Princes Town North would have been here. He failed to accept the invitation to attend even though the people were very anxious to see him. It was opened a few weeks ago, again providing another rural community with access to critical technology and information for the purpose of businesses, communication and education. We are not stopping there. The groundwork is being conducted for new telecentres planned for areas such as Penal/Debe, on Ramkissoon Street in Penal, San Juan/Laventille, on the Eastern Main Road, Tunapuna/Piarco and La Brea.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, whether you live in town or country, concrete or bush, the PNM is taking you into a new age of access to the modern world.

**7.00 p.m.**

At the level of the household and family, we have also been treating with poverty reduction and nutritional support. A very successful Chilean approach to poverty reduction known as the Chilean Solidario programme was adopted by the

Ministry of Social Development in 2006, with the implementation of a monthly debit card transfer to indigent families, aimed at assisting them in meeting their very basic nutritional requirements.

It is a matter of public record that, at that time a significant number of clients were inherited from the SHARE programme without the full conduct of case investigations, or the application of a standardized threshold or means test to determine eligibility. The result was an unfortunate stigma on genuine cardholders who are sometimes treated with skepticism when they enter the grocery or the shop. That is not something that we can tolerate.

In the interest of efficiency and expansion, a complete review of the TT Card Programme was completed. In fiscal 2009, we have worked with the new director to develop and apply new systems of monitoring and evaluation and a standardized means test that takes into account a number of parameters, including household income, assets, housing and household education. This comprehensive review was conducted by a team of professionals that was procured by a competitive process, led by a UWI-based professional. We are now in a position to effect a 35 per cent increase and some significant arrears to only the genuine cardholders. I think this is where the Member for Couva North, in a brief foray into something that could be considered social, fell off the tracks completely, because he made some very misplaced pronouncements with regard to who would be receiving the increases and who would be receiving the arrears. These amounts will be received not next month or next year; but in the month of September 2009, which is excellent news for the genuine cardholders of this programme. All these measures have been extensively shared in the public space over the last two weeks and have been the subject of several very positive editorials and other commentaries in the newspaper and the media. Even the barber at Wesley's in Woodbrook is now very well informed. The only person in the country who seems to be completely ignorant of the proper information on this programme is the hon. Member for Couva North, the Leader of the Opposition.

In his attempt to treat with the TT Card issue in his budget response on Friday, that attempt was desperately ill-informed and bereft of the truth and it only exposed his complete and utter ignorance of social programmes that affect the small man. I wonder if the type of cash transfers he might be more familiar with are of a different nature altogether. [*Interruption*] No, that is not what I am referring to.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I regret to—[*Dr. Moonilal stands*] I tend to listen to my senior colleagues and he has advised—inform that—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Moonilal:** Please. Thank you very much. I just want to ask a question before you move away from the Smart Card matter: Whether you are in a position to tell the House the expenditure for 2009 on that programme and what would be 20 per cent of that expenditure that your Ministry has admitted was misspent or corrupted away?

While I am on my feet, because I may not want to disturb you again, what action, if any, have you or the Ministry taken against any person, department or unit for that problem that you have identified in the public domain?

**Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** I mentioned the barber at Wesley's, but even sitting here and receiving the information, the Member for Oropouche East is still bewildered. It is amazing, truly amazing. Before you go to probe into measures and actions being taken against persons, first of all you need to bear in mind that some of these individuals were brought in on referrals from community organizations, faith-based organizations and others. The profile of a number of these individuals is also going to be very interesting for Members of the Opposition. I see the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla sitting up in his seat; very, very interesting. I regret to say that some of the 19 per cent who were deemed ineligible to continue holding the card have been aided and abetted by Members of the United National Congress. I do not say that lightly. *[Interruption]*

**Dr. Moonilal:** Point of order. You are imputing improper motives.

**Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** You had your chance. I am coming to your answer. In fact, one Member of the Opposition—let me share this with you—some time ago, came to me and told me of a family that he knew of who had multiple cards and others he was aware of who were abusing the programme. When I immediately asked him to provide the details so that action could be taken, he refused to provide contact information or information of any type. This is aiding and abetting. To this day, he has been protecting those people. *[Interruption]* No, I am not calling any names. Who the cap fits let them wear it. To this day, he has been protecting those people and then they stand in this House and pontificate about crime and lawlessness. *[Interruption]* He gave you three bogus names, well it seems to be the signature.

Bearing in mind—*[Interruption]*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Standing Order 36(5)? I think, having regard to the debate, I would give him some leeway on that.

**Hon. Dr. A. Browne:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker; wholly relevant intrusion. Bearing in mind that the circumstances of a family or household may have changed suddenly with the death or illness of a breadwinner or the loss of

employment or with other scenarios, an appeal period has been approved by the Cabinet and those who have gone through great lengths to avoid the review process, have until September 18 to come in and submit themselves for processing, otherwise their card shall be blocked. I am advised that the cardholders that were rooted out included UNC councillors, but they want to run with the hares and hunt with the foxes; classic UNC strategy. They want to hunt with the foxes—be careful what you wish for, Member for Oropouche East—and run with the hares; classic UNC strategy.

The sterilization of the client list was a mammoth exercise that involved many thousands of interviews, home visits and detailed verification that took just over one year to complete. Its completion heralds the initiation of the developmental phase of this very important programme. Already cardholders households have begun to benefit from grow box training, financial and budgetary planning, family planning and the provision of technical and vocational skills in a very focused and targeted manner. The idea is that one or more than one member of the household must be a participant of the country's many capacity building and training programmes. In fact, a growing number of the 110,000 clients who receive some form of monthly assistance from the Ministry of Social Development are now enrolling in the wonderful training programmes of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. That is Vision 2020.

A cadre of social workers, case advisors and human development officers are being recruited to ensure that recipient families benefit from direct counselling and advice under this TT Card Programme on issues such as parenting, preparing for a job interview and how to make informed choices in the grocery and in other aspects of human life. Those households that can, will be supported to graduate out of the programme within two years, provided that the change in circumstance allows them to pass all of the criteria.

The benefits of this approach are many. Through this exercise, we have been able to remove the stigma that the indigent face when using their TT Cards. We are able to give increases and arrears only to genuine cardholders. The unit has, as of this month, been able to reduce processing time to one month for new applicants during the month of September and is working to reduce this period even further.

We are now able to initiate aggressive outreach activities in vulnerable communities. So, it is not a case of staff sitting in an office waiting on people to come in and apply to the programme, but the conduct of aggressive outreach activities in vulnerable and all communities, targeting the indigent and ensuring

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that every single applicant is subjected to the same standardized entry criteria, no matter who they are. That is the true vision of this particular programme and that is in keeping with the Chilean Solidario model which has worked very well in reducing poverty in some parts of Latin America.

In addition, the Minister of Finance and I have been involved in discussions with the Supermarket Association and a number of financial institutions that are poised to offer preferential service and access to TT Card holders. They indicated they would be in a position to do so, once the sterilization exercise has been completed. There was a very innovative pilot project with the Minister of Legal Affairs for Christmas, last year, when special packs of chicken were offered to holders. That was just a pilot. We can certainly look forward to preferential access and support to the genuine holders of this card in the future.

I want to share with you that 86 per cent of the cardholders are female citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. When they talk about gender budgeting I am not sure they recognize that it is present in all aspects. When we talk about CEPEP and all the range of social programmes, we would recognize that women are benefiting to a tremendous degree at all levels of the approach of this Government.

I also have to mention the fact that the Ministry of Social Development seeks to ensure that the welfare of our older citizens is also well enshrined and senior citizens continue to enjoy a comfortable standard of living. Over the last decade, the Government has consistently increased both the quantum of the Senior Citizens Grant and the qualifying income ceiling for the receipt of the grant. In effect, what we have managed to do is increase the number of older persons who qualify to receive the grant as well as put those persons in a better financial position to maintain a reasonable lifestyle in what some consider to be their twilight years.

At this point in time, 71,000 persons are in receipt of the Senior Citizens Grant, with 5,500 of them being new recipients that were added in fiscal 2009. The current annual disbursement of the Senior Citizens Grant is in excess of \$1.5 billion per annum, by far the highest it has even been in the history of Trinidad and Tobago.

At the start of this decade, the grant, then referred to as Old Age Pension was at a quantum of \$720 and the qualifying income ceiling was \$8,600. Today, the Senior Citizens Grant is at a maximum of \$1,950 and we have increased the qualifying income ceiling to \$33,600. These increases, over the past nine years, increase of 271 per cent in terms of the grant and 389 per cent in terms of the income ceiling, speak volumes about the commitment that this Government has made to securing the livelihood of older persons.

It is worth noting that during the period 1995—2001, this part is very interesting, the various NIS benefits, including the NIS retirement benefit, were in fact used to both determine which older persons would receive income support and NIS was also used in calculating the amounts that qualified seniors would receive. That is a fact for the public record. When they were in office, they had the opportunity and ignored the opportunity to devise a form of income support for seniors that was independent of their actual income but, of course, they failed to do so. They can now call for such a scheme, because they are in Opposition and can say anything and do not have to back it up. They know full well with that approach, the wealthiest seniors would get the same quantum of support as the poorest who need it the most. They know full well that Trinidad and Tobago, since 1939, has had a system that allocates resources to those seniors who need it the most.

**7.15 p.m.**

They know fully well that a country like Guyana, in adopting this model of "spread it thin to all seniors" was only able to provide the equivalent of TT \$120 per month to each senior citizen; TT \$120 per month to the millionaire senior; as well as \$TT 120 per month to the indigent senior. Is that really what the proposal they are advancing is going to enshrine? This is another proposal in their shopping list that really has no merit whatsoever. The reality is that our Senior Citizens Grant and, indeed, all the grant programmes are significantly higher in Trinidad and Tobago than in virtually all our neighbours to the North and to the South. I invite Members opposite to do their research and to recognize this very clear reality.

We are doing much more than just providing financial support to senior citizens. Our Division of Ageing is in avid pursuit of the best quality of life possible for older persons. To this end, we continue to roll out the national policy on ageing and its accompanying action plan to enhance the capacity of older persons to remain fully integrated in our society, and avail them of opportunities for their continued development.

Within the last fiscal year, the Ministry in partnership with several NGOs operated senior citizens centres in St. James, Maloney, Chaguanas, Rio Claro and Pleasantville. In May of this year, the sixth centre was added in Barataria, the Pearl Gomez Senior Activity Centre. These centres provide older persons with a safe and enabling environment in which they can freely interact with their peers and fully participate in a range of activities which foster a sense of self-worth, dignity and escape from loneliness. These activities include dance class, Tai Chi, aqua aerobics, cooking classes and keep fit regimens. Imagine over 700 of our

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oldest citizens enjoying each day, the opportunities for socialization and fellowship free of charge to them.

This year, the Ministry also operated an older persons information centre to advise seniors and other interested persons on a range of topics including legislation related to older persons; correct providers of medical equipment; access to caregivers; and data on activities and institutions that cater specifically for older persons.

We also conducted public fora for older persons in Point Fortin, Maloney, Tabaquite and Barataria on a range of topics of interest to our older citizens. A similar initiative was undertaken for the benefit of older Government employees and those from various divisions over the age of 40 years. I do not know if they were considered old, I doubt it, but they were exposed to some topics through a series of retirement planning seminars. Sensitization also took the form of training during this year for officers of the Social Welfare Division and the Cash Transfer Programme that interact with vulnerable senior citizens.

With regard to persons with disabilities, we must regard this Government as a full partner with civil society in promoting equal opportunities for the differently abled citizens of this country and the creation on an inclusive society.

In 2009, a Disability Assistance Grant was disbursed by the Social Welfare Division for the benefit of persons who have been certified as permanently disabled or unable to earn a living due to a physical disability. In excess of \$320 million was disbursed to the disabled community via this grant, in this year alone, to over 20,500 persons, not as a salary, but as a support to assist them as they interact with other components of society. Madam Deputy Speaker, 3,200 applicants were approved in 2009, and there are a range of other activities in support of the community of persons with disabilities that are being conducted by that particular division.

With regard to the family, the Government continues to administrate the affairs of this country on the premise that the family unit is the building block upon which our society will develop. This mandate is enshrined in the pillar, "Nurturing a Caring Society".

Our National Family Services Division implemented a Family Life Management Programme in 2009 across the country which included parenting workshops for existing and prospective parents; life skills sessions for adolescents; anger management classes and support for parents and caregivers of children in the age group zero to three years of age.



Crisis intervention also received the focus from family, social workers, and more than 2,000 individuals and families in crisis situations benefited from the services of the staff that man this division. There were interventions in domestic violence, financial problems and family dysfunction, et cetera. There were also weekly radio programmes across the spectrum. In 2009, we also conducted life skills workshops for adolescents on adolescent programming and parenting training for different age groups in communities of Moruga, Cocorite, Marabella, Maloney, Tunapuna, Diego Martin, Chaguanas, Rio Claro, Penal and Beetham Gardens.

With regard to the issue of children, the children are arguably the most vulnerable members of the family and of any society and, accordingly, in the Ministry of Social Development, one of our key objectives speaks to improving the well-being of children. We have already updated this Parliament on the national plan of action for children for 2006—2010. It is currently being further reviewed to assess achievements of the goals for children contained therein. The plan is certainly multisectoral and takes into account ongoing work from a number of Ministries.

The legislative agenda for children remains of paramount importance for the Government. We have had the passage of the Children Authority (Amdt.) Bill, 2008 and the partial proclamation of the Act; the appointment and initial operations finally of a Children's Authority Board; the preparation for the recruitment of staff for the authority; and for the establishment of a children's authority fund to provide resources for ongoing operations of this very important unit. The Children's Authority Board has also appointed a director to spearhead the full establishment of the authority in keeping with the activities identified by the board. In 2009, we also recommended and obtained Cabinet's approval for the development of a comprehensive plan to address the problem of sexual exploitation of minors in Trinidad and Tobago which of course will involve several ministries and departments, including the Ministry of National Security.

In this fiscal period, we provided financial support to 17 major children's homes with an additional four currently being processed for funding. These homes provide residential services to 312 boys and 252 girls during the 2009 period—financial support in the amount of \$34 million. To assist our social sector efforts in 2009, we also provided \$69 million in subvention to 70 NGOs in Trinidad and Tobago. It is an extensive list. Subventions were also provided—

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

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*Motion made*, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 10 minutes. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Before I call on the hon. Minister, I would just like to remind you of the ruling of the Speaker as it relates to contributions during the budget debate. Whilst I have given you some leeway for the balance of your time, could you please remember that ruling?

**Dr. A. Browne:** Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you for the support. I turn very briefly to the issue of the socially displaced. The Government remains concerned about the welfare of all citizens including street dwellers. There are a number of accomplishments in the very early months of the implementation of a long-term strategy to treat with the issue of the socially displaced being triggered by a scientific study that was done in February this year, to gain insight into the lives of displaced persons across the country.

There have been a number of very early achievements in this particular national strategy. These include the full rehabilitation of the Centre for Socially Displaced Persons in Port of Spain; the establishment of a new \$30 million Care and Rehabilitation Centre in Piparo, which has been opened and is currently hosting a pilot batch of 25 socially displaced persons who are doing very well and who are involved in training and rehabilitation programmes in agriculture and a host of other very important developmental programmes.

At present, over 200 clients are receiving services at the Centre for Socially Displaced Persons; 25 formerly displaced persons are receiving mental health care at the St. Ann's Hospital; 25 are receiving the support I indicated at New Horizons; and 30 older persons are being supported at senior citizens homes across the country. These are former socially displaced persons who the Government is funding to be placed at senior homes.

The next phase involves the further establishment of assessment centres in both Port of Spain and San Fernando; further strengthening of the mental health capacity at the Ministry of Health, as well as the recruitment of additional NGOs to partner with us in this process; the mobilization of the municipal police officers to implement a move along policy that we have agreed to with the Mayor of Port of Spain and the Mayor of San Fernando.

We also provided services to over 220 deportees during the 2009 fiscal period—very intensive services including connection with families; assistance

with location for employment; location for residence; referrals to grant programmes and other forms of support, counselling and assistance with advice with regard to resettling; assistance with obtaining birth certificates and other forms of identification. The Ministry has not just been observing the situation with deportees, but collaborating with the Ministry of National Security to meet them as they arrive and to provide the appropriate social services.

The way forward includes further establishment of family focus initiatives such as the national family policy; family life management programme across the country; the full establishment and operation of the Children's Authority with facilities in north, south and in Tobago with the kind input of the Ministry of Public Administration; and the establishment of a child abuse protocol and data management system. This is a very strong agenda for 2009 and everything that we seek to do within the Ministry is based on research and evidence based thrust. A much stronger communication programme and the resumption of a community outreach caravan that will go to every single community in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you can conclude that the Government is working assiduously to ensure that all citizens partake of the national patronage, especially the most vulnerable citizens.

We will continue to implement a mix of social programmes which engender among the population a culture of change and which will assist in transforming citizens into self-sufficient and civic-minded participants in a developing and growing nation.

I am of the view that a caring government must always review its systems of operations, and we will continue to retool, modernize and expand the social sector, not just to give people a fish, but to teach people to fish and to assist every citizen to become empowered and fully productive members of a developing and beautiful nation as we approach 2020.

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

**Mr. Chandresh Sharma** (*Fyzabad*): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. As I listened to the contributions of Members opposite, like so many citizens in Trinidad and Tobago, I am very concerned. The original intention of budget debates in the world over—budget debates have been going on in many countries for hundreds of years—is really to make sure that the provision of goods and services reaches every citizen. It is the responsibility of Opposition Members in Parliaments, the world over, to look at it carefully and to make criticisms and suggestions and for the Government to treat or not to treat with them.

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I have noted in this budget debate after the Member for Couva North, the Leader of the Opposition responded, the first speaker on the Government side saw it fit to go on a personal attack.

**7.30 p.m.**

He did not treat with the content nor did he treat with the recommendations. Last year we observed a similar practice. The question that begs: Why is this happening? When I listened to the last speaker, the goodly doctor from Diego Martin Central, even though he is the fifth, sixth or seventh speaker on that side, he too goes into attack on the mover from this side. The question that really begs: Is this what the Parliament has reached to?

I was in this Parliament when the Member for San Fernando East was the Leader of the Opposition, and—Madam Deputy Speaker, without dragging you into the debate, I think you were also here, so was the Member for Diego Martin North East and the Member for Diego Martin West. I think we were the only Members during that period—respect was critical. In fact, I remember we had a golden rule that we applied, the three Rs: respect for self, respect for others and responsibility.

If we are here to discharge our responsibility, then it is only fair— For instance, when I heard my good friend, the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, say that the Member for Couva North has gotten rusty. One guy sent me a text message and said: Why is he saying that? And if he is saying the Member for Couva North got rusty, is it because he was greased and oiled and he is not rusty? That kind of thing we must not develop. We must be very careful in presenting our views, in discharging our responsibility as Members of Parliament, we stick to what is in front of us.

As I listened to the Member for Diego Martin Central, again, I am thinking, here is a young, promising Member of Parliament. When the PNM held their college meeting in Diego Martin, the Prime Minister said, look out for some future in this young Member of Parliament. He is holding a ministry; he knows the ministry has many problems. In fact, as I listened to Members opposite—you are speaking to the national community and you are also speaking to citizens in Canada, United Kingdom and elsewhere, and you are trying to come over like Fortune 500 CEOs; you are very successful, you dress okay. You want to give this impression that you are running a multi-million dollar enterprise that is bringing in resources and profits and none of those things are happening. These very people are realizing the truth as well, they are aware of it.

You just spoke of all these niceties in the Ministry, what prevents you from saying what are the problems there? What prevents you from engaging us so we can assist you? For instance, citizens are waiting on eyeglasses one, two, three years. You are aware of that, that is not a secret. People are waiting for wheelchairs and they cannot get the wheelchairs because many of the suppliers do not want to give credit. You are aware of that. People cannot get walking sticks; they have to pay \$30 for the vision test and then go to the other place. You are aware of that, but when you pretend those things do not exist— People are going there for pensions, and there are people who are waiting two years for their pensions, for whatever reason. They have been given a runaround; they have to bring this, bring that. *[Interruption]* Two, three minutes. Let me ask you a few more things about your ministry. You are aware of these things.

If you are speaking to the national community and you highlight these things, what is going to happen? The community is going to respond in a meaningful and positive way. *[Interruption]* I have 75 minutes, so I have enough time to give way. More than that, recently and I said this to you privately in the tea room, and I said it to you out of concern, out of love; you are my colleague, we do not hate you all on this side. You all do many foolish things but you are human, you are subject to making errors, and it is my responsibility to say, “My friend, I think you have done wrong here”. I say that to the Member for Chaguanas East continuously, but at the end of day, we care about each other as human beings.

The point I wanted to make before I forget. Five people died on the Mosquito Creek in a horrible motor vehicle accident. Two or three days later, six people died in a house fire in Couva. Your ministry caused a statement to be made. First they extended sympathy to the family in Couva; fine, nothing wrong with that, but not a word for the people in Oropouche. More than that, your ministry made a pronouncement, we are going to assist in the burial, not the same thing for Oropouche accident victims. The question that begs in the national community is, why? Better you had said nothing, because whatever is available, they have a right to make the application for it, and we cannot continue that way.

We go further. At the Ministry of Social Welfare, the availability of goods and services, and we see in the national media, both in the print and electronic— Is the Minister of Finance leaving?

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** Not at all.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** I wanted to ask a question, can you answer it before you go?

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** I am not leaving.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Okay, I am waiting for you, please come back. This Parliament has really become a big joke, you know, Madam Deputy Speaker. They disappear; you raise questions; I do not mean anything to the Minister of Finance. I am saying that they do not treat with the issues. They give the impression that they could not care less.

The country is in a crisis, largely because of failure of the Government to do what is right. [*Desk thumping*] Largely because of failure of the Government to treat with citizens like people, and the manner in which Members, Ministers of Government in particular, conduct themselves.

At the Ministry of Social Welfare—

**Hon. Member:** Social Development.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Social Development, I just wanted to make sure you guys were listening, thank you—the ministry from which the Minister just spoke. During heavy rains and floods—what they would term disasters, although there is a legal definition for it—the PNM-controlled constituencies, the movement of resources immediately after heavy rainfall, and you do not see that in the rural communities. In Fyzabad we do not see that happening at all.

**Miss Le Gendre:** MP on the move.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** The Member for Tunapuna, suffering from newness, says MP on the move. With that kind of conduct you would have to move out sooner than later. Do not let this power get to your head. I warned you all there. You know, minus the ministerial title, you would not be invited to a wake. [*Laughter*] You would not get to talk in a kindergarten party. [*Laughter*] You get caught up with this ministerial title. You must remember this is temporary my dear lady, very temporary. [*Desk thumping*]

Could you imagine the Member for Chaguanas East invited to anything in this country? The answer would be, no. Because you are not involved in the lives of people, so do not be caught up in this ministerial thing. Many people have suffered this thing; you cannot leave this thing. You have to be careful in the discharge of your duty. You do not see yourself powerful, not because you have staff behind you and resources running you. How is it you are able to run after the rainfall with mattress on your head and biscuit to deliver, and others cannot do it? How does that happen? [*Interruption*] Exactly, you are using the State resources. Again, you have to be careful.

One of the difficulties, the MORI poll showed that—and the Prime Minister caused a retreat to take place at Salybia for three days on two occasions—if rain

fell and you all walk, you would drown, because you walk with your nose in the air; the water will fall and drown you. You have to be careful; you have to come over simple; you have to come over as if you are really caring. *[Interruption]* If you have something to say, say it loud; you must not hide behind whispering. This is an education for all of us.

The Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, I wanted to find out something. Somebody asked me: "Hear nah, that Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, he do not talk and thing in the Parliament? So, I said, of course, the man is a good speaker; he came from local government, he must know a few things. They say, but hear nah, what he does do with the ministry. I say, well, that one I have to do some research." Because is one of the things I had to make sure, the research.

So, I went to the Ministry of Works and Transport, top structure, you know where he is?

**Hon. Member:** Where?

**Mr. C. Sharma:** In the back page. *[Laughter]* So, when you see they are making noise, you have to find out why.

I want to make a further point and I want to congratulate for ten seconds, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, because last year this Minister, in his budget contribution, insulted the Member for Siparia, the Opposition Leader and I talked with him, like a brother, and you know, I have seen a massive improvement. Two or three weeks ago, I had an almost crisis situation—he does not take phone calls, but he took this phone call. I said, Minister, I have a problem. He said email me the information, and within 12 hours he responded. If that Minister could do it, all of you could change. *[Desk thumping]* Thank you very much.

I want to get back. You see, it is useless we talk about infrastructure and it is useless we talk about resources. When I listened to the Member for La Brea, a man with a good heart—I do not know how he became a Member of Parliament. When I heard the Member for La Brea talk today, I thought he was addressing the PTA in Palo Seco Secondary. This is the Parliament and you got carried away with Government resources. Do not ever do that. You got carried away, that you are in control of MuST, HYPE, OJT, this and that. You are not in control of anything. *[Desk thumping]* Absolutely nothing. You use the State resources to survive.

I served in the Opposition more than once, no resources. When I won elections in Fyzabad in 1991, it was the first time in 30 years we won that seat. *[Desk thumping]* And I won it with 152 votes. It is a lesson I want you all to note. Take some notes.

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Four years later in Opposition, I won it with the highest number of votes in the country, and it has never been met. [*Desk thumping*] Member for Chaguanas West, note that. It has never been met.

During those four years, I visited every home. The PNM was just waiting to win it back, but service, going out there and caring for people, no resources. I visited every single house and I touched the lives of people. Look at you, resources in abundance; you can get anybody into OJT, CEPEP, YTEPP; you could give CEPEP contracts; you could get tickets to go football.

The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, the Integrity Commission should be investigating these 272 tickets. Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, you are giving lectures; you all are priests, God sent. Look at how much money is misappropriated and we will come to that in a few minutes. So, minus your ability to use the State resources to promote yourselves, you are totally useless. I want to suggest you go back on the ground, Member for Barataria/San Juan.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

You were there, you know that kind of thing. You know there is nothing like going out there. When there is rain in Fyzabad, I have to mobilize whatever little resources to assist the families. The Prime Minister came a couple years ago when there was a flood. I bought 22 tarpaulins, to date I am still paying for it. You know, if a PNM Member does that in Government, he charges them for 50 at 10 times the price. I look at the invoices; I was in Government; I see it.

**Hon. Member:** Try PriceSmart.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** I hope you are not using the Government credit card to go to PriceSmart, because one Member used it to buy a wig, and you have to be very careful. [*Laughter*]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** In vitro fertilizer.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Okay, I do not want to use that big word before I confuse "Talparo" and next thing you know he want to go for one of that. [*Laughter*] This is about Trinidad and Tobago, this is about citizens. The MORI poll was very instructive. The MORI poll found some of the best Members of Parliament were in the Opposition. Is that not very interesting? Because we were on the ground serving, meeting the needs of people, and the Government paid for that.

The first thing I want to look at is the Ministry of Works and Transport. Madam Deputy Speaker, you know I must deal with the— Or, Mr. Speaker,



welcome. I was waiting for you to come back, because I know I would need your protection. [*Desk thumping*] Because you know when I sing my mantra what happens on the opposite side. So, I hope you would protect me.

**7.45 p.m.**

The first thing I wanted to raise and I guess—Member for Laventille West, do you have a position at the ministry?

**Mr. Hypolite:** Check the list.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Oh yes, you are at the bottom of the page. The point is, I am looking at the cost incurred in doing simple work—do you know what is called the industry standards? You are two and a half-times the industry standards. In fact, every ministry I have looked at except the Ministry of Information headed by my good friend, Hon. Neil Parsanlal, because he has nothing to do there, except on Thursdays go to Cabinet and put the chairs in place for them to talk. [*Interruption*]

I want you to look at this book, page 17—you see you guys are new and you would not understand this but maybe the Member for Baratavia/San Juan could assist you. You are paying \$700,000 per mile to pave.

**Hon. Member:** What?

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Churchill Roosevelt Highway, Golden Grove—that is a good place for you all to fix because some of you all have to go there for sure. Golden Grove to UWI west bound lane, widening—listen to the words—and upgrade of 7.60 kilometres—you know how much is that, a little less than five miles—to three standard traffic lanes with shoulders, \$36,235,000; that is \$700,000; that is US \$100,000-plus. Do you know what the US amount is? Thirty eight thousand dollars.

Churchill Roosevelt Highway, El Socorro to Baratavia Interchange, west bound cold recycling of 2.4 kilometres—that is one and a half miles—of third lane, widening and reconstruction of shoulder, associated concrete works and asphalt overlay, \$15 million. You see the kind of money we are wasting? Beetham Highway, lighthouse—do you know where the lighthouse is? You could walk there. If you stand outside you will see it—to St. Vincent Street west bound, \$10 million. [*Interruption*] So when you all come here and pretend, “All yuh running CEO company, all yuh cannot run a poultry depot.” It is a shame though. If you all were in Mr. Panday's Cabinet, many of you—

**Mr. Abdul-Hamid:** We would have been in jail.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** You are right. You know I must congratulate the Member for Chaguanas East—you would have been in jail because when you look at what obtains in T&TEC under your watch—and I will come to that just now—you had to make a jail. *[Interruption]* Caroni Bridge widening, \$39 million. *[Interruption]* Say again, you must learn to speak up. You are not in a drain, you are in the Parliament, stand up and talk like a man. *[Desk thumping]* Carlsen Field Interchange, \$5 million—*[Interruption]* What is the question?

**Mr. Abdul-Hamid:** Have you fully recovered from the cuff you get in your face?

**Mr. C. Sharma:** If I fully recovered from the cuff?

**Mr. Speaker:** I know you missed me a bit in the beginning but please address your remarks to me.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** The Member was asking and I think I owe it to him, because he was asking on television if I recover from the cuff and the short answer of it, my dear friend from Chaguanas East, have you recovered from trying to overthrow the Government? How you became a Minister? *[Desk thumping]*

This is what this country has reached to. When our international committee looks at us and they look to see what is in Government, we are in serious trouble you know. We are in very serious trouble.

Two projects: Daisy Road links to Naparima/Mayaro Road. The Member for Princes Town North and I visited this, \$13 million. Now, in south during the UNC administration one of the things we did was to attend to the Ring Road which was really Tasker Road, pave it and treat with the traffic situation then. From Golconda to Papoorie Road, cold milling, this is really a light repaving to use layman words, \$19,960,000. They do not want to make it \$20 million so they left \$40,000. It is like a store sale \$199.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Sounds like \$1.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Mr. Speaker, I think I would be writing to you for the next budget debate to invite the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Chairman of the Integrity Commission and the Commissioner of Police to sit during this debate, because I think some investigations have to take place and since they have fixed up Golden Grove I hope they fixed what is behind the fence.

Valencia Road, 7.80 kilometres—that is a popular road length for the PNM, 5 miles, \$13 million. This is rape of the Treasury. *[Interruption]* I was in the Ministry of Works and Transport, do you think we could have done that? I was almost tempted to say what Mr. Panday would have done.

Tabaquite/Rio Claro Road, 12.4, that is seven and a half miles, \$26 million; Rochard Douglas Road—I went down there, 6.5 which is four miles, \$8 million. Mr. Speaker, I cannot ask you to do a little mathematics, but look at it, the first one I quoted was Valencia Road, 7.8, cost \$13 million, the same kind of work. Rochard Douglas Road, 6.5, cost \$8 million. You see the kind of corruption and you all want to pretend and tell the country you all are doing very well. You are an auditor my friend—you “eh” make up your mind though.

Buen Intento Road 5.4 kilometres, off the main road—these are roads that are existing though, two-inch paving and three-inch paving, \$7.6 million; Cedar Hill Road 5.5 kilometres, \$7 million; Caratal Road, \$11 million; Toco Road—how many times you would pave Toco Road?—17.5 kilometres, \$26 million; Tamana Road, \$7 million; Caroni Savannah Road, \$9 million; Caroni North Bank Road, \$3 million; Mosquito Creek—temporary work, part of the creek—\$9 million. In fact, when you add it up—Tableland Road 5.5; Dumphries Road 5.0; Mosquito Creek, 5.0 which is 50, give and take is 10 miles, because 15 kilometres is approximately—let us say less than 10 miles; total cost \$25 million.

What must an Opposition Member do? Come here and raise this, budget debate after budget debate and a Member will get up and say all kinds of things he wants. This is not a budget. Mr. Speaker, you should consider getting some kind of training for us all, let us see things in the British Parliament; let us look at the Canadian Parliament and see the experience. I know one of our colleagues is over there now.

Manahambre Road, 8.7—a number of 8-plus—\$16 million. [*Interruption*] Well, work it out in miles because the layman does not know kilo. That is 5 miles for 16, that is \$3 million and these are not new roads being constructed you know.

**Hon. Member:** A number of south roads.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Look at the foolish thing, no wonder you are not in the system. It is okay to make the deals once it is in south roads, so you thief once it is south roads. What kind of foolish thing you are telling the national community? Can that camera flash on you?

Mr. Speaker, Couva Road, \$4.5 million. I can go on with the list but I want to move on because I want to maximize the time here today. I have looked at the bridges now, under the UNC we used to have an Inspector of Bridges, every bridge was inspected to make sure—you do not want it to collapse while people are on it over a weekend. That does not obtain today, but they are just going in there and some minor work is taking place and when you look at the moneys that are being spent, something is wrong. It is really wrong!

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I want to make an appeal—the Prime Minister promised to look on television while the debate is going on—Mr. Prime Minister, something is wrong! We are spending too much money for too little goods and services. Something is wrong and it goes across the ministries. [*Desk thumping*] I will come to demonstrate that elsewhere in a few minutes. We are spending moneys for the Solomon Hochoy Highway plans again, and every time the Government comes in is a new plan, another set of consultants. That is how they split money. This country has spent the most on consultants' fee for a small country. Everything is a consultant; it is consultant to look at the last consultant job as well. [*Laughter*]

**Hon. Member:** Probe the probe.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** And probe the probe. The ministry also involves itself in a bit of national exercise, socio cultural work, whatever that means and hear what they did. At page 30: “A total of 38 vehicles were deployed to the police for Carnival 2008”. Member for Oropouche East, I want you to note this, because I know you had a similar celebration and you looked rather charming in your African attire. “A total of 30 vehicles were deployed to assist the Emancipation Support Committee during the period July 22 to August 03, 2008.” How come no Divali gets this from the Ministry of Works and Transport? How come no Phagwa group gets this? How come no Eid ul Fitr gets this? [*Interruption*] What is the reason?

**Hon. Member:** You have to request it.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** You have to request it. Well, I know many requests have been made for the Ramleela groups to be assisted and it has never been treated with. So the Emancipation group gets it—from July 22 to August 03; 30 vehicles. Who paid for this? This is how taxpayers' moneys are spent? In addition to the Emancipation committee getting about \$5 million and the Indian Arrival Day getting \$150,000—

**Hon. Member:** Shame!

**Mr. C. Sharma:** That is not shame, that is racism. [*Desk thumping*] That is discrimination and that is what the PNM survives on. They play the race card morning, noon and night. You survive on the race card. You have no ability to survive any other how.

Whilst I am on that, Mr. Speaker, on the last day the Member for St. Joseph—in his previous life he was a priest and when I said something he got very upset. I never saw him get so upset, he started to tremble. I said, cool down. When I spoke about the scholarships in Grenada he protested, but he over protested—do you

know, a group from Grenada sent me this information, out of 178 scholarships, there were 16 people of East Indian origin. I want him to prove me wrong today. That is why I say the Integrity Commission and the CoP—not the political party—the Commissioner of Police and the Director of Public Prosecutions have to come here. You know when we talked about it, “All yuh racial; those days gone”. [*Interruption*]

Forty million dollars! Today the Member for La Brea, very shamelessly, calling out the names of people without their authorization. That is a very dirty thing you did. You should never do that. But more than that, “I am calling them because they gave me permission”—because you gave them \$5 of taxpayers’ money but the scholarships, the names cannot be called.

**Mr. Speaker:** You cannot accuse the Member of calling names and saying it is very dirty, when they asked the hon. Member earlier on and he said he got permission.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** You know, I was just waiting for him to say it rather than you say it, but I appreciate it, because you know what, I called two of them and you did not have their permission. Two of them, I could not get everybody.

**Mr. Jeffrey:** Mr. Speaker, I would like him to call those two names for me please?

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Exactly. I called two of them. I do not have their permission to give you the names. I would tell you privately. How did you get it? [*Interruption*] Did you get it in writing?

**8.00 p.m.**

Let us go back.

**Mr. Jeffrey:** Apologize.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Apologize? You have to apologize. A young child goes and applies for something and you come in the Parliament because you are the Minister, using privileged information. How did you get that information? Mr. Speaker, how did he get that information? That is not allowed. In the British Parliament that is not allowed. Not because you name Minister, means that you could go in the files of the Ministry and pick up any information you want. That is illegal and I am going to give them legal advice. I will ask the Member for Chaguanas West to assist me because this thing has to stop. It has to stop.

After the Grenada experience, I got information out of Canada, the United States, United Kingdom, South Africa and elsewhere. Very interesting. Out of 16 Ambassadors, two persons are East Indian origin. "Wha happen, all yuh cyar find Indian?" "You are twisting your face, ain't you ashamed?"

**Mr. Parsanlal:** Mr. Speaker, I am ashamed that on every occasion this has to be said into race. That is what I am ashamed of, that on every occasion this Parliament has been treated to this kind of nonsense. That is what I am ashamed of.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Thank you. I wanted the national community to see a Minister of Government is ashamed because only two Indians have gotten employment. What happened, they do not want scholarships?

**Mr. Parsanlal:** And you know that is not true.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** I will come back to you. We go to Permanent Secretaries. All our sons and daughters go to universities, all of them have degrees. How come three out of 28—3? They do not have degrees too?

**Mr. Parsanlal:** Race is not the issue.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Deputy Permanent Secretaries, five out of 33. A total of 61, eight out of 61. What do you have to say, you are ashamed? The country is ashamed of you, and this has to change. If that is the only contribution I am going to make in this country. I am not saying if you have 61 Permanent Secretaries, 30 must be Indian, 30 must be African, 30 must be Chinese. I am saying fairness, the rainbow of Trinidad and Tobago, the pot-pourri, state enterprises. The Member for Chaguanas East laughs. They laugh out of shame. In another place they could not be anything. Two hundred and fifty board of directors in 30 state corporations, 35 are East Indian origin. What is happening to the East Indians in this country? What is happening to the East Indian people? Is the PNM against them? They are our sons and daughters too. They are our mothers and fathers and they work hard. Is it that they are perceived to be non-PNM supporters?

When you look at the last voting pattern in this country, less than 25 per cent voted the PNM. I cannot understand, and you expect us to come here and pretend these things do not exist. This is why you have so many problems in this country. Whilst I am on it, I have the records as well, but I will tell you it from my head today. I read it last night. It cannot be by accident that the majority of CEPEP contractors do not represent the pot-pourri of the country. It cannot be that the majority of URP workers do not represent the pot-pourri of the country. What do you have to say for that? It cannot be that the houses distributed by HDC now and NHA previously, do not represent the pot-pourri of Trinidad and Tobago. It cannot be by accident. [*Desk thumping*] It cannot be that the intake in the police service, in the fire service, in the coast guard, in the cadet force, in the army does not represent the pot-pourri of Trinidad and Tobago. What is happening in this country? Slow down, take notes. Because you see, you get up and make no intelligent contribution. Let me continue first.

What is our country facing? What is this country facing? We all want to live together. Look how nice we enjoy ourselves in the tea room, when we meet outside, we cool, hug and so on. But how come for appointments, how come for the selection for CEPEP contractors, how come for the distribution of HDC homes, how come to the Permanent Secretary you do not see it? Ambassadors, scholarships, is it by accident? What have we done wrong? What have my people done wrong? *[Interruption]* Exactly! Why is the country like this? I have to live here. I am young. I am going to be here for another 50 years, do I have to put up with this kind of nonsense and say nothing? If Nelson Mandela had behaved like you, what the world will be today? Martin Luther King, Mahatma Ghandi, what did they do different? They stood up for what is right, and we must stand up for what is right. *[Desk thumping]*

This group of Members of Parliament, including the Members for Chaguanas West, Mayaro and Tabaquite, we believe in honesty, justice and fair play. *[Desk thumping]* Do not get caught up in all this love quarrels, we can deal with that. But in the fairness of people—you were a principal, you saw kids. You did not see anything else, you saw children, what has happened since you came into the PNM? How come in the OJTs appointment, the same practice is taking place? Slow down, slow down, I will give you time just now. I will give you time because I want you to research it. I do not want you to jump up and do not take advice from the Member for Barataria/San Juan, he cannot help you.

Let us look at work taking place in the country, the building of anything. How is it the PNM members can always say in advance, what work is going to take place in their constituencies and the UNC members cannot say the same? Power again. You are a Minister, so you know where you are going to get a water project.

Mr. Speaker, a practice that obtains as it comes to my head, let me make mention of it. Where are all the electrification projects? Unfair distribution. Families that have to pay for light pole and transformers are not represented throughout the country. I see it all the time. I get these letters, T&TEC asking to pay \$25,000 for two or three poles and a transformer, but you will not see that happening in the East-West Corridor. You do not see it at all.

When I started, the Minister of Sports was not in Chambers. The Minister of Sports distributed sport gears: football, cricket bats, et cetera. No schools in rural communities, only schools with friends and family. How can we continue putting up with that? *[Interruption]* In a few minutes. "You ain't talk yet, you will reply after. Heh, heh. No heh, heh heh." Write it down and deal with it. Millions of dollars,

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taxpayers' moneys are going. It comes just like the football ticket. It had rain in Port of Spain, so you could not send a ticket to the Member of Diego Martin West.

**Mr. Hunt:** You know what happened; he did not want to give people the tickets, so he used me as an excuse.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Mr. C. Sharma:** How low can you go, my friend? How low can you go? Look at the accusation and look at what he is saying that another Member did not want to give us tickets and he used him. But what else are you used for? I want you to say today, I want you to say since you became Minister, what jobs, what moneys from the Ministry or any Ministry that you are aware of has gone to Radical Trading or whatever the company is called. Not Radika, not Radical Designs. I want you to tell the country.

**Mr. Hunt:** None.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** None? I have other information here. So the moneys of the country were to reach everybody. I want to read from Supplementary Public Sector Investment Programme 2010. Construction of the 36 inch each field Upstream Development (BUD) pipeline and related facilities. Onshore pipeline and facilities are in operation. The closing cost was \$225 million. Compare it with the original cost of US \$153 million. You see, when it is in their favour, they use US. So it moved from US \$153 million to US \$225 million. This is what this country has reached to and the Minister of Finance cannot find money, and going after homeowners. You could imagine what she may go to after, if those homeowners fixed up differently.

The project started in 2002 and was completed in 2008. Mr. Speaker, it does not stop there, \$50.2 million was incurred for the commissioning of the pipeline. Do you know what that means to start it up? Fifty million dollars. Greed is the PNM; it shall prevail. All of us will be dead. None of our children have a future in this PNM.

**Mrs. Gopee-Scoon:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Say that again. You want to die with me?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I bet you the PNM is ashamed.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** It is a horrible situation and I cannot understand how you all could come with your US \$200 suit and pretend all is right. [*Laughter*] Something is wrong. No, no. I do not mean the Minister of Finance because I know you have had that a long time. But really this country is in serious trouble. I was in



Government too and we would sit ourselves and find out how things going, how are people making out. You all do not do that, because when I look at the expenses, it continues and it is frightening. This thing about housing, I want to come to that. That is the biggest scam in this country and I want to repeat it for the Minister of Finance, who just came in. Minister of Finance, I am very concerned that the persons getting houses do not represent the pot-pourri of Trinidad and Tobago.

I think the Member for Diego Martin West raised this, but you did not read it in the way I am seeing it. The administrative building at Petrotrim cost \$365 million. The original estimated cost for this project was \$190 million, but was revised to \$365 million. Look where we country reach. This is not enough for people to hold their head and bawl, for housewives to run out their house and go mad. One hundred and ninety million dollars and it has gone to \$365 million. The project started in 2005 and is scheduled for completion in 2009. However, it was extended to 2010 due to increase in scope of works. Construction is still in progress. Work is 95 per cent completed, but hear this. I think I want to go in the construction business. Work is 95 per cent, tenders were reissued for flooring, electrical, air conditioning, plumbing and service building works, but the building is 95 per cent complete. You are all proud to be in the PNM, or are you all proud to be in Government? This is what you all reduced this country to?

**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. C. Sharma:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the Port of Spain International Waterfront Project cost \$2.8 billion. It comprises two 26-storey office building and another 22 storey. So it is 885 square feet—the two 26 and the 22 storey, that is 9,000. This is made up of the 428 rooms. Do you know what is the cost per room? Seven hundred and seventy thousand dollars. It is math here, you know.

**Dr. Moonilal:** For a room?

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Nowhere in the world—but hear this, it does not stop here. They have a seven-storey car park that takes 1,200 cars. Seven floors are left for car park. Do you know what is the cost of parking your car there? That is the most expensive car park in the world. If you park outside the same fraction it will cost.

**Mrs. Gopee-Scoon:** What is it?

**Mr. C. Sharma:** You did not calculate it? Oh God sweetheart, wake up.

**8.15 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, concerning the housing settlements, Newtown or Princes Town—this is another thing, I notice that when they are naming these housing schemes, they do not reflect the names in Trinidad and Tobago. There could be a housing scheme called Jack Development or Jack Avenue, but there must also be Kamla Avenue and Paula Avenue. Let it be reflective of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is a set of English foreign names, as if nobody else lives there.

The point I want to make, \$1.6 million—this project was renamed the Fairfield Housing Development, and it is expected to bring in 2,500 units. It is costing \$664,000 per unit. How could the Government come here and pretend that all is right. East Port of Spain, \$1.8 billion, 450 apartments costing \$500,000; apartments. Cleaver Woods, Arima, well we know the confusion with that, so we will leave it. Carlsen Field, \$185 million for 190 town and single family units, \$973,000 per unit.

This country growing through a "grah". Do you know what a "grah" is? It is spelt G-R-A-H. "Yuh never go temple and ting?" [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*] Where are you from? Minister of Finance, do not pretend you are from America; "yuh" from right here; come on, be local. We know you suffer a little bit from that, but be local at the same time.

In this country, the culture, whether you come from Africa, India or China, there is "barcat", things spread. [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*] But look how you are doing this thing, \$973,000. Corinth, San Fernando, \$205 million for 748 units, \$533,000. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, under the UNC, and we all must be very proud, Trinidad and Tobago built an international airport, the lowest cost per square foot in the world. The examples I use is the airport in Atlanta, Heathrow Airport, the airport in Hong Kong; we have built among the cheapest.

Mr. Speaker, hear this about the Piarco International Airport overlay. The project involved the completion of hot mix asphalt paving on the eastern side of the airport. This was not a new runway, but it was at an estimated cost of \$218 million. We all have travelled to other airports, \$218 million divided by seven is about US \$30 million; US \$30 million to pave part of a runway.

Do you know what they try to hold us to ransom with? We will ask them a favour and if they grant it, we cannot raise these issues; not at all.

The Ministry of Education, formerly the Social Development Tower, \$611 million for 16 floors of space; \$611 million. What are we telling the country? Who are you fooling?

More than 30 to 40 per cent of this goes into commission and consultant fees, which are kickbacks; that is the scientific word for it; consultant fee, commissions, finder's fee. Nowhere in the world could this thing happen.

This one will destroy our minds—the Chancery Lane Administrative Complex, \$648 million. What are you getting for it? The complex is 300,000 square feet. [*Laughter*] Tobago, the Scarborough Financial Complex, 80,000 square feet, \$176 million. We really have to get some kind of intervention; this thing cannot be allowed to continue.

I want to quickly look at some of the ministries, as it relates to constituencies on this side, not just Fyzabad. The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources—when you look at their agricultural access roads, it is almost zero performance. When you look at the assistance from extension officers, almost zero. At the same time, you see for the mega farms that they are spending \$6 million, claiming to get a retail of \$3 million. To date, the mega farm has not brought in one cent profit. It is running at a loss.

Mr. Speaker, I think the country went into shock today to hear the Attorney General talk about a judge in practice in this land, and it only obtains under the PNM. We must never forget, and Trinidad and Tobago must never forget, what they did to Justice Sat Sharma. And we must pretend those things do not exist.

The Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs—in fairness, this is one Minister who treats with you a bit. But when they give a group in Fyzabad or in San Francique money for Divali, they also give a group in Laventille, which is good; it is a national festival. But when you look at the distribution, the group in San Francique is not getting anything for Emancipation. Best Village programmes, throwing away money; the returns, zero. The participation of the whole country, zero. They are all PNM party groups, largely.

Community centres: Did you see the figures we are paying to build community centres, \$11 million for 4,000 square feet? Even if you use gold, you have change to get, because you would be buying the gold wholesale. The PNM "come see, never see". Do you know what is the industry standard for building in Trinidad and Tobago? Mr. Speaker, \$1,100 per square foot. This is three times that, and they smile. We open something and we get in the newspapers. They pay \$18,000 to put their faces in the newspapers the next day; that is their achievement.

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Community development: Strictly for PNM. The Community Development Fund Secretariat, again, discrimination in the distribution. Self-help, 80 per cent going to PNM constituencies. The National Commission for Self-Help—I talked about that. Do you know that a village council is really a PNM party group? I know the Member for Naparima, in a previous manifestation, worked in community development; he must know of this.

The Ministry of Education: Have you looked at the moneys you spend during the summer fixing schools? Are you aware that you are not getting value for money?

**Miss Le Gendre:** We are.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** You are? My Lord. Again, you have no scientific basis for that. Do you know what you are paying to paint a school? Do you know how much it is to change a couple galvanize sheets?

**Miss Le Gendre:** Yes.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** What?

**Miss Le Gendre:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Yes, you pay \$200 and something. You paid \$97,000 for something that was valued \$27,000? When you do a job, you must send independent people after. I look at one, and it came to my attention through a professional builder; it was charged to your Ministry, \$97,000, educational facilities, or whatever it was called, and there was a tender for the same job for \$27,000. You have to look. If every time the Opposition brings these matters to your attention and you appear not to be concerned, you are really wasting your children's money. You are a mother too and we cannot allow this to continue. And you teach moral, ethical and spiritual values; there is a conflict right there. [*Laughter*]

Pre-school education: Do you know how you are choosing these pre-schools? The PNM party groups. Why are Opposition Members not consulted? [*Interruption*]

[*Minister Le Gendre rises*]

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Hold on; let me finish and I will give way.

How come the Opposition Members are not consulted about where they want the schools? We are told where the schools are going to be. I will give way, you know that I am a lady's gentleman.

**Miss Le Gendre:** I hope you would also be truthful. I do not think that there is anybody on your side or on this side, who can lay any claim and say that

preschools are being distributed with any kind of political bias. Any examination of the ECCE Programme would show that the schools are equitably distributed. As a matter of fact, last year August, I wrote every single Member of Parliament on your side of the House, as well as on mine, for their support to identify sites and communities for the construction of early childhood centres. I am certain that most of you responded, but some of you have not. I just hope that you have not fallen into that lot.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** No, I have not fallen into it, but I could also tell you that I am the Member of Parliament for Fyzabad still and I had no input in the thing. I could also tell you that my colleagues opposite have chosen the sites where schools are going as well. Do you know what I am very concerned about? I am concerned about when you come here—and I do not mean you singular, I mean you plural, all of you—and you pretend that none of these things are accurate, it cannot be so all the time, otherwise you would not improve. The idea is for you to improve.

Mr. Speaker, Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries: Under the UNC we came up with the National Energy Skills Training Centre. In some of our offices, on the compound, we established computer training facilities. In the PNM areas, you have the training facilities. If you look at the resources that go to their training facilities, compared to the ones in the UNC areas, a total margin. In many of them they are trying to close that down as well.

The Minister of Finance came back in this budget and said absolutely nothing about the Hindu Credit Union. She came and made all kinds of noise for Clico, pretended that the HCU was being looked after and, to date, not a word. What am I to tell persons who come to my office when they ask, "What is happening?" What do I tell them, "We raised it in the Parliament; the Government has no interest; that is how they discriminate against people?" What do I tell them? What does anybody tell them?

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs: I want to know why the Ambassadors and the staff do not represent the potpourri of Trinidad and Tobago? I want to see more mix representing Trinidad and Tobago.

**Mrs. Gopee-Scoon:** It is mixed.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** By what percentage, two in 100? Come on; well then, I would bring you some photographs. Maybe you do not know what is mixed. Maybe you are not mixing right; that is your problem. You have to look at it; you cannot dismiss it. Everything we have raised this far is dismissed by every Minister concerned.

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The Ministry of Health: The Minister came and made a set of noise. Persons are waiting for operations. They are getting appointments for 2012, 2013. I have one concern about training opportunities: It must be across the board, whether for doctors, pharmacists, nursing, what have you.

I wanted to ask the Minister of Information what he did, but the point I want to raise I am not sure if it is under his Ministry or the Ministry of Public Administration. Advertisements which appear in the electronic media, I am not seeing a spread. I see the radio stations associated with Louis Lee Sing getting hundreds of thousands of dollars and other radio stations get \$5,000 or \$6,000. I see some stations getting large sums of money, other television stations, like WINTV getting very little. Let us be fair with the people of Trinidad and Tobago, please.

Commercials by all the ministries do not represent the pot-pourri; it does not represent the mix of Trinidad and Tobago, and that has to change.

I know the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development. We had spoken on the last occasion about the employment and manpower placement. To date, we do not know how that operates, who registers, how you get employment. Cooperatives, including credit unions, the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development had promised on the last occasion to give an update on the Hindu Credit Union; to date, nothing has happened.

What money is going to friendly societies?

**8.30 p.m.**

The Ministry of Legal Affairs: Many persons have raised here and elsewhere that those who have applied for birth certificates, if there are any errors on them the applicants get problems in getting them corrected.

And oftentimes when they go for their birth certificates and they are not there, they have to swear to an affidavit to get a new one. That cannot be, it has to change. The Ministry of Legal Affairs is also involved with the Ministry of Consumer Affairs.

The Ministry of Local Government: Mr. Speaker, I do not know why they pretend so much. I took the pains to do some work here. Port of Spain which has 50,000 persons got \$13 million, that is 75 cents per day; Arima, 32,000 persons, 72 cents per day for the provision of goods and services; San Fernando, 55,000 persons, 55 cents; Point Fortin \$1.74 cents; Chaguanas, 34 cents. So when you ask the new Mayor to do things, she does not have money.

Diego Martin, 105,000 persons, 25 cents; San Juan/Laventille, 28 cents; and the Minister of Finance pretends to be this great economist of enormous wealth, quoting all kinds of international magazines and reading all kinds of foolishness and fooling people.

San Juan/Laventille, 26 cents; Tunapuna, 14 cents; Sangre Grande, 44 cents; Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo, 17 cents, and what is very disappointing, the Members for Barataria/San Juan and La Horquetta do not know this; the two of them are lost: "Whe he get that from?"

Mayaro, 33,000 persons, 51 cents; Siparia, 81,917 persons, 30 cents; Penal/Debe, 83,000 persons, 32 cents; Princes Town, 22 cents with 91,000 persons. How can they deliver any goods and services?

Everybody got \$1 million for recreation except—I saw somebody got \$500,000—Siparia. When one looks at a corporation, or take Princes Town for instance which has twenty-something grounds, what will \$1,000 do?

Vehicles, \$1 million; roads and bridges, Port of Spain got \$4 million; Arima, \$2 million; San Fernando, \$3 million; Point Fortin, \$3 million; Chaguanas, \$2 million; Diego Martin, \$3 million; San Juan/Laventille, \$3 million; Tunapuna, \$3 million.

I made these comparisons earlier to show what the Ministry of Works and Transport was spending. When one looks at a rural regional corporation like Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo which has 150 bridges and for maintenance they get \$3 million, it is calculated not to work, and the reason they do this is that they can award contracts from the ministerial office and there is where the corruption goes.

It appears as if Members of Government are not ready for governance. Maybe they are too busy being Ministers and are not aware of these things. Besides that, Port of Spain is 13.5 kilometres and it gets \$13 million; Arima is 11 kilometres, it gets \$8 million; San Fernando is 18 kilometres and it gets \$11 million; Point Fortin, 23 kilometres, \$12 million; Chaguanas is 60 kilometres, it gets \$8.4 million. "You ain't see it better you did keep Suruj dey." [*Laughter*]

Diego Martin, 127 kilometres, \$9.7 million; San Juan/Laventille, 220 kilometres, \$15 million; Tunapuna, 527 square kilometres, \$10 million; Sangre Grande, 898 kilometres, \$10 million; Couva, 719 kilometres, \$10 million; Mayaro, 852 kilometres, \$6.7 million; Siparia, 510 kilometres, \$8.5 million; Penal/Debe, 246 kilometres, \$9.4 million; Princes Town, 621 kilometres, \$7 million.

Government has no interest in making anything work in this country, absolutely nothing. It is just a joy ride, it is to make as much money as you could,

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mamaguy the country with all kinds of statistics, claim any story you want and discriminate as much as you want.

Mr. Speaker, I have never seen you at a Chutney show, but I am sure you go to Chutney from time to time, but I see the calypsonians—and I am happy—Trinbago Unified Calypsonians' Organisation is getting money for the construction of a home for calypsonians so when they get sick they will have somewhere to go. When will the chutney singers get this? In the next—they discriminate against you at all points, at every opportunity.

How come there are so many pan theatres? I like pan too, I do not go too often. But all over the country you go, you see pan theatres; \$5 million, \$10 million, and not a single theatre for Indian art forms, not a single theatre for the Chinese art form, not a single theatre for tassa. Are you all not ashamed? When you sit in Cabinet or wherever, do you not discuss this? How does the Minister of Finance approve all this money for all these pan theatres and it never came to her to consider an Indian orchestra?

Mr. Speaker, do you know what this will lead to? Something I hope never happens; people take to the streets to protest. You can push them only so much, they will reach a point where you cannot push them anymore. You have to get serious. It pains us to bring this information, but this is the truth. We do not create any of these things.

Special purposes companies, \$15 million; community improvement services doing PNM party work, a kickback with any sums of money they want, hundreds of millions of dollars. Education Facilities Company Limited, the Minister of Education, check and see where their money is going. When you are a Member of Parliament in an area, you have to visit all the schools, you must know what is taking place and if I bring it to your attention, thank me, and look into it. Do not defend it too early, premature is not good enough.

Estate Management and Business, well we know the scandal there. Where is Rao? I remember Rao sending a tractor to destroy seven acres of peppers in the St. Augustine constituency and Orange Grove. Mighty, showing the PNM, "Look how ah doing yuh dirty work".

National Insurance Property Development Company (Nipdec), what work are they doing? What are the sums of money and who is checking on them? The National Commission for Self-Help Limited, National Energy Company, NIDCO. The Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, the only thing that was involved in the ministry was the water taxi. "It ain't make a cent profit up to today, not one cent." We are subsidizing it left, right and centre.



Palo Seco Industrial Enterprises Limited, projects all over in the PNM constituencies, the PNM Members just call the person in charge and say what they want done and it starts tomorrow. We write letter upon letter and we are still waiting.

The Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago, the Sports Company, this is a PNM financing outfit; how they never came to the MPs for Fyzabad, Princes Town or St Augustine to ask what projects they want in the areas?

Mr. Speaker, when one looks at the resources, of the State and how they are spent by this PNM, they are spent against a large sector of the community and as a representative of the people of the constituency of Fyzabad, which happens to be the most mixed constituency in Trinidad and Tobago, they are fed up and they have told me to bring this to the attention of the House, to Members, and that they are frustrated and they cannot take this anymore, and I begged them to hold.

This discrimination cannot continue. The resources of the State must reach every citizen; whether in scholarships, HDC homes, CEPEP contractors, promotions, whether to become a Permanent Secretary, a Deputy Permanent Secretary, whether to work in an Embassy in the United States of America, Canada or where have you, they must be fairly distributed. They must have an opportunity; if your son wants to join the police service, he must have a fair chance like anybody else's son or daughter.

Mr. Speaker, I wish I had about five hours.

Thank you very much.

**The Minister of Tourism (Hon. Joseph Ross):** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Firstly, I would like to recognize the excellent contribution that our hon. Minister of Finance made in presenting this 2010 Appropriation Bill. [*Desk thumping*] What this Bill seeks to do is to ensure that the objectives of this Government are achieved, to ensure that we are on track to achieve developed country status for Trinidad and Tobago on or before the year 2020.

Mr. Speaker, I do not believe that we could have had a better theme for this budget; “Strengthening Efficiency, Addressing the Challenges”. Indeed, we are living in very challenging economic times and apart from executing our projects and programmes, we need to ensure that we execute them in the most efficient manner. So I want to again congratulate and commend the hon. Minister of Finance for ensuring that systems have been put in place to ensure that all the ministries are aware, and Ministers are aware, that they need to take a very active role in ensuring that our objectives are achieved in the most efficient manner.

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Mr. Speaker, I listened to the Member for Fyzabad and I really do not want to get into any discussion on what he had to say, but I would just make one observation. After listening to that dissertation with a lot of fabricated information and racial discrimination, I want to ask him to look into the mirror. Out of 15 Members on the other side, two are of African descent and the rest from another ethnic origin.

**Mr. Sharma:** What is your point?

**Hon. J. Ross:** The point is, this is not the place for us to deal with that kind of thing. People in glass houses must not throw stones.

**Mr. Sharma:** Nonsense!

**Hon. J. Ross:** Mr. Speaker, I will even make it sound a little more dramatic because two out of 15 is 86 per cent. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Hon. J. Ross:** I did not disturb you when you were speaking. Mr. Speaker, I intend to examine this budget and I intend to do three things basically in my contribution; to respond to some of the unfortunate and misleading statements and comments that came from Members on the other side; I also intend to touch on the importance of tourism to the economy of Trinidad and Tobago and to go into some of the challenges that the industry is facing globally at the moment. And last, but by no means least, I would like to touch on some of the achievements of the Ministry of Tourism, the Tourism Development Company and briefly touch, as well, on what the THA has achieved over the last year or so and to look at some of our plans and programmes for the coming years.

**8.45 p.m.**

In terms of the contribution that was made by the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Couva North—and I would stick strictly to the comments on tourism without deviating and going into any other area. The Member for Couva North criticized Government severely for making available \$20.7 million to hoteliers, claiming that Government is using public funds for private property development and wanted to know what was so special about hoteliers.

I would like to advise the hon. Member that Trinidad and Tobago is not the only country that makes these kinds of packages available to its hoteliers and he can go through the Caribbean and he will see that incentives, from time to time, are always given to the tourism sector when they are under these kinds of

pressure. He also went on to look at the travel and tourism competitive index and he made the assertion that in terms of business costs of crime and violence and so on, every single Caribbean country ranked higher than Trinidad and Tobago. Firstly, the statistics never showed that. For that matter, not all the Caribbean countries were included in the Travel and Tourism Competitive Index. So again, I think that the hon. Member needs to go and review the information. I just want to get the record straight.

What the hon. Member did not tell this Parliament and the nation, is that Trinidad and Tobago, generally speaking, is relatively new on the tourism stage. He mentioned that we dropped 10 points, from 74 to 84. Yes, that was correct, but what he did not say is that we are a relative newcomer on the tourism stage and you cannot expect a country, for that matter, to enter into any international event, business, whatever, and to start from the top.

The fact is, we are one of only 133 countries that were subjected to this kind of scrutiny and what he did not say as well is that the sample size, the number of countries that were involved in the latest measure, also increased from the previous one. So, again, this is a case where the statistics are not really and truly interpreted properly and presented to the Parliament and to the nation.

I recall last year I had to spend a lot of time going through the statistics. I would not do it this time; I will just make the point and move on. The Travel and Tourism Competitive Index only existed for the last three years and even the authors of this document recognize that they are still in the developmental stage and not all the information is based on hard data. A lot of it is subjective. That, again, he did not tell this honourable House. He spent a very long time talking about the downward slide of tourism in Trinidad and Tobago, creating the impression that Government is not doing anything for tourism and that Trinidad and Tobago is the only country in the region and probably the world, for that matter, that is experiencing this downward slide.

I would like to take the very statistics that he was using to show him how he was not using statistics but he was abusing it and misleading and misinforming this country. [*Desk thumping*]

I looked at the figures for 2008, again the Caribbean Tourism Organization latest statistics, 2008. It shows that Anguilla declined 12.1 per cent; Bahamas, 4.3 per cent; Barbados declined, 1 per cent; Belize, 3 per cent; Bermuda, 14 per cent; the British Virgin Islands, 3.4 per cent; Grenada, 4.1 per cent; Martinique 4.6 per cent; Montserrat 5 per cent; Puerto Rico, 3 per cent; St. Vincent and the

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Grenadines, 6 per cent; Suriname, 8 per cent; Trinidad and Tobago, 4 per cent; and I can go on and on and on. So when he is giving people the impression that Trinidad and Tobago is going so far down, creating the impression that we are the only one in the Caribbean, when you look at the information, when you look at tourism internationally, you would understand that the tourism industry is facing very hard times.

I go one year back again to 2007. The picture remains the same. The Bahamas dropped 5 per cent; Cuba dropped 3 per cent; Dominica, 9 per cent; Puerto Rico, 6 per cent; St. Kitts and Nevis, 7 per cent; St. Lucia, 5 per cent; St. Vincent and the Grenadines, 8 per cent; Trinidad and Tobago dropped 1.7 per cent.

For this year 2009, Anguilla dropped 21 per cent; Antigua and Barbuda, 13 per cent; Aruba, 5 per cent; The Bahamas, 14.1 per cent, and it goes on and on and it shows that Trinidad and Tobago is holding on extremely well. [*Desk thumping*] I think that this is a clear case of abuse and misuse of information.

I also want to look at the Member of Parliament for Siparia commenting on the expenditure on publicity, claiming that we are spending so much money and no tourists are coming to Trinidad and Tobago. In other words, where are the tourists going? They are not coming here and we are spending so much money. People need to make up their mind what they are saying and what they want to say.

On the one hand, they are using the Travel and Tourism Index to say that we have slipped from 74 to 84. The very Travel and Tourism Index—and I have it here—shows that in terms of our affinity for travel and tourism we are not spending enough. So, on the one hand she is saying that we are spending so much; the index is saying we need to spend a lot more. Our affinity for travel and tourism, we were ranked 122 out of the 133. Barbados, in terms of affinity for tourism, is ranked way up, number 2. They spend a large part of their GDP on tourism.

So they need to make up their minds what they want to see. Do not think that we are spending all that money and not getting the returns. We are spending what we feel is necessary at this point in time to spend on tourism. We recognize the importance of these statistics and what we are doing is that I have advised the Tourism Development Company to take the Travel and Tourism Competitive Index, take all the pillars, examine the pillars, see where we are falling short and see what we need to do to improve on the competitive index.

I think I should also mention at this point in time—and I am glad that the Member for Diego Martin West is back here with us. I heard the comment coming as well from another party on the other side, again criticizing our expenditure. I

think what the Member for Diego Martin West was saying was that he needed schools and we are spending so much, for instance, on Maracas, \$200-odd million on Maracas and we were not able to provide schools and what have you. We need to recognize that this country must invest in our tourism product. It is an investment. If we are to generate funds to finance education; if we are to generate funds to finance health care and other social services, it may not always come from the oil and gas sector.

Tourism is a major contributor to the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. It creates employment, but also we must take note of the returns. When we invest in Maracas, what we are doing is making our country much more attractive and we are going to ensure that we have enough funds to put in the kitty so that we can finance other activities in Trinidad and Tobago.

The importance of the tourism sector to our economic growth, revenue generation and job-creation potential cannot be underestimated. Our local tourism industry employs some 33,000 persons directly and a further 58,000 indirectly. It contributes—

*[Dr. Moonilal stands]*

Go ahead. And this is the only time; I have limited time to speak.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Thank you very much, Minister, for giving way; just two quick questions. You are saying that the tourism sector employs 33,000 persons directly and 58,000 persons indirectly. Could you just give me the source of that information where you are getting it from? Secondly, you said earlier that the tourism sector contributes significantly to the economy. Are you in a position to state the contribution of the tourism sector to the GDP of the country?

**Hon. J. Ross:** Mr. Speaker, my information comes from the United Nations World Travel—what is the report again? I would give it to you shortly. In addition, it contributes about 10 per cent to our GDP.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of Tobago, tourism contributes 39 per cent of the GDP of Tobago and in terms of employment over 51 per cent of the people depends on employment in the tourism sector. Visitor expenditure to Trinidad and Tobago in 2008 was in the vicinity of TT \$4 billion.

**9.00 p.m.**

I lay that issue there and that kind of information is enough to show you how important tourism is to our country.

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According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization—that is where the statistics are coming from—international tourism and travel declined by 8 per cent from January to April this year. I am talking globally. Our international tourism and travel declined by 8 per cent this year. This was a continuation of the negative growth already experienced in the second half of 2008. The records showed that in that period it moved from 269 million persons to 247 million persons travelling in that period 2008. A drop of 22 million. I am giving you a picture of why we had this decline.

The last two years, 2007 and 2008 have been an extremely difficult period for the travel and tourism sectors. We know of high oil prices during the summer of 2008; the international economic and financial crisis resulting in sharp reductions in business activity worldwide; increased unemployment particularly in the key tourism source markets. Over the last couple years, we have had significant reduction in airline capacity. Some of the larger airlines started to cut back on flights because it was too costly for them and it would have resulted in additional air fare and people were not travelling as they used to. The breakout out of the Swine Flu virus and its effect on the demand in the short and medium-term. All this affected travel and tourism.

Right now we have the establishment of an air passenger duty for passengers of the United Kingdom which is due to come on stream for long haul destinations like ours. All this would make the cost of travel extremely high and more expensive for those people who want to come from Europe to Trinidad and Tobago. These are some of the issues that we have to face in the tourism industry.

Against that kind of background that we have to be revising our plans on a very regular basis. An integral part of economic growth and job creation is to provide the right opportunities and assistance to small and medium-sized business in the country. In this regard, Cabinet had agreed recently to an incentive plan. Because of all the problems that the industry was facing, Cabinet decided to embark on an incentive plan and it is all in keeping with our Vision 2020 goal of upgrading the quality of accommodation options and ensuring as well that we have an adequate number of rooms in Trinidad and Tobago. If we do not have rooms, what are we going to advertise? Where will people go to if we do not have rooms and quality rooms?

In recognition of that, Cabinet agreed to a stimulus package for the industry. It was not as the hon. Member for Couva North was saying, that we decided to take the money and give it to the private sector. It is a plan to ensure that business goes on. You have to remember the number of people's jobs that would be at stake.

You also have to look at the kinds of revenue that we would lose as a result and the survival of the industry. The plan targets properties with 100 rooms and less. It is not a case that we are going to the big hotels. It is for the smaller sized hotels.

In terms of room stock we estimate that 1,504 rooms in Trinidad and 951 rooms in Tobago will qualify for such a package. In addition, those who access the page would be required to do the work up front to pay the money, and in the package they would be reimbursed by 25 per cent up to a maximum of \$1,200 per room in Trinidad and since in Tobago things are more expensive, we agree up to \$1,500 per room. They put out the money, do the work and then submit the bills. We audit the bills and have quantity surveyors to verify that what they said they were going to do would be done.

This incentive plan will provide Port of Spain with the quality rooms that it requires as it seeks to position itself as the meeting and conventions capital of the Southern Caribbean. For Tobago it will also consolidate the tour operators and airline interests and again, boost confidence in the destination which seems to have been dwindling.

I want to look at some of our quality standards initiatives as well in the tourism sector. In keeping with our Vision 2020 mandate to enable competitive business, we have sought to strengthen and improve quality standards in the tourism sector. In March of this year, there was established a Memorandum of Understanding between the Tourism Development Company and the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards for the administering of the Trinidad and Tobago Certification Programme. We have a certification programme which seeks to ensure that our hotel operators, our taxi drivers, tour guides and a large section of stakeholders conform to certain national and in some cases, international standards. We want to bring quality standards into the tourism industry in Trinidad and Tobago.

We anticipate that in the first year of this Memorandum of Understanding, over 100 operators will be audited and well on their way to becoming certified. When this is done we are saying that we would be enabling competitiveness in the industry. We also seek to further upgrade the skills of our tourism operators by what we have as the Small Tourism Enterprises Programme which is step. In fiscal 2008/2009, nine training programmes were conducted and over 145 tour operators were trained in areas such as customer service, housekeeping, hospitality education and occupational health and safety among other things. We are using the Small Tourism Enterprises Programme to develop the skills in the small tourism sector.

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We go a bit further and have a programme which we call the Tourism Industry Partnership Programme (TIPP). This is a joint venture with the University of the West Indies where we use the interns of the university and assign them to small hotels, bed and breakfast organizations and so on, so that they would develop their skills and in addition, they would bring quality service to some of these institutions. To date, 12 students have benefitted and seven such organizations have participated in the project.

Investment in the accommodation sector continues to be very encouraging. The stock of first-class room currently on train and slated for commencement early in the fiscal year, includes the 120 room Star Hotel in Piarcó which is expected to have a soft opening I understand, later on in this year. A soft opening, not any big splash. We also witnessed the expansion of the Cara Suites Hotel and Conference Centre in Claxton Bay with a new wing containing 50 guest rooms. That was opened in June of this year. The project had a capital value of TT \$22 million and employed an additional 25 staff members. In this quarter, the Hampton Inn, a Hilton brand is expected to begin construction in Port of Spain and this would add approximately 150 internationally branded first class rooms to our national stock and will service the business visitors to Port of Spain among others. [*Desk thumping*]

In respect of the existing portfolio of incentives, for fiscal 2008, as of July 31 2009, 57 projects received tangible benefits through the Tourism Development Act, 2000. These projects had a capital value of TT \$828 million and proposed employment to benefit from these projects was in the vicinity of 500 persons. During the period October 2008 to July 2009, approvals were granted for a further 54 tourism projects of which three were accommodation projects and 51 for tourism taxi projects. Again, the total estimated capital expenditure on these stood at \$22.4 million.

All this goes to show that the more we invest in tourism is the more we continue to generate sustainable employment and in addition, the more we earn foreign exchange for Trinidad and Tobago. We are witnessing—I read a report from Ernst & Young. I think that the Member for Couva North referred to it and I would like to refer to some of the things that I saw in the report. Page 29 of the Focus on Trinidad and Tobago Budget 2010, put out by Ernst & Young says:

“The World Travel and Tourism Council has identified the following areas of concern which ought to be addressed...

Many citizens view this sector as a ‘last resort’ industry in which to pursue a career.”



I have information that is showing otherwise. I think that the hon. Member for Couva North had referred to that. The information is showing that we have a large number of people who are now pursuing careers in tourism. At the Hotel School in Chaguaramas the number of graduates doubled from 2000 to now, from I think about 87 to 150 plus students graduated.

We are also witnessing the university programme, the Bachelor of Science degree that is being offered at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine which started two years ago and the Masters programme which also started about two years ago. We are also witnessing a large influx of students into these programmes. I do not think that it is quite accurate to infer that people are using that as a last resort.

**9.15 p.m.**

I want briefly to touch on conferences and conventions—what we have achieved and what we plan to achieve in the next couple of years. The international hemispheric and regional events are very important media both in the short run and in the long term to help us unlock our tourism potential. They afford us a once-in-a-lifetime chance to showcase the best we have as a tourism destination. So we are using these conferences and conventions, among other things, to showcase our country, our people, our national heritage, our infrastructure and a sense of place that fills us with great pride.

Trinidad and Tobago was fortunate to have had the opportunity to host major international conferences. These conferences drew global awareness to Trinidad and Tobago as a destination. I believe that Trinidad and Tobago is a much better off place today and for many years to come because of the vision, the courage and the unwavering commitment of the hon. Prime Minister to have these conferences, particularly the Fifth Summit of the Americas and the coming CHOGM in Trinidad and Tobago.

In May 2008, we successfully hosted the Twelfth Annual Caribbean Hotels and Tourism Investment Conference, which is the premier tourism investment conference in the Caribbean. We were able to attract in excess of 500 delegates at that conference. In October last year, we were again fortunate to host the Florida Cruise Ship/Caribbean Cruise Association Conference (FCCA) and again we had in excess of 790 delegates. We have other conferences coming up. We had the Fifth Summit of The Americas. We have CHOGM coming up and all these point to one thing—Trinidad and Tobago is fast becoming a very attractive destination.

We have established a convention bureau at the Tourism Development Company and we estimate that it will have a significant impact in terms of

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bringing major conferences to this country. We expect that in the first year of its operation that there will be 10 corporate conferences and 10 conventions. We anticipate that the total economic impact will be in the vicinity of TT \$110 million, US \$16.2 million. So, Mr. Speaker, when others think that we are wasting money in tourism, I tell them that the economic impact is significant.

Community empowerment: Again, we are collaborating with communities throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago to ensure that they take a major role in developing their products, in particular in the rural districts, so as to unlock the tourism potential in these areas.

Government recognizes that active community involvement in tourism instills national pride and creates a heightened sense of ownership. We also firmly believe that community tourism will create numerous job opportunities and develop skills that will increase the employability of the participants in these programmes. We have been working with community groups and regional corporations to develop the capability to manage sites and attractions. For instance, we work with the Diego Martin Regional Corporation where we train tour guides in events managements, customer service and a host of other things.

One of the most highly successful community tourism initiatives is that of the Turtle Village Trust. The vision of the Turtle Village Trust is to make Trinidad and Tobago the premier turtle tourism destination globally. The Ministry provides both financial and technical support to this trust.

Some of the projects of the trust encompass the development of nature trails, river tours, hiking trails, awareness building and we anticipate that over the next five years the Turtle Village Trust will be involved in projects like the establishment of an Amerindian village, wildlife park, underwater aquarium, craft market and other projects that will eventually provide additional income to the residents from the turtle villages within the community.

In June of this year, we had the opportunity to witness the opening of an orientation centre at Grande Riviere. Again, this was a major accomplishment and the centre consisted of a tourist office, Internet facility, video room, cafeteria and a spot for tour briefing and interaction with visitors. We can go on and on dealing with some of these projects.

On July 29, for instance, the Ministry of Tourism partnered yet again with the Turtle Village Trust, BHP Billiton, Atlantic LNG and the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies at the University of the West Indies, in hosting the first ever international conference on turtle conservation, ecotourism and

sustainable community development. One of the major achievements at the end of this conference was the development of a draft ecotourism policy which the Ministry is currently considering.

We also worked with the Salybia community where we sought to improve the beach facilities to develop quarters, provision for recreational services, vending, washroom facilities, a car park area, a kayak centre, interpretive signage and a cleaner environment where the people can go to enjoy themselves. In this coming year, we intend to accelerate our community empowerment programme.

We have also expanded our visitor guides programme. In this year, we increased it to 101 tour guides for Carnival 2009. We train them in customer service, protocol, communications and relevant skills. Our guides played a major role at the Fifth Summit of The Americas.

We have been conducting an awareness campaign throughout the schools, current affairs, school outreach programmes and informing students on the importance of tourism to the national economy. We intend to continue that programme in a more aggressive manner.

In the works for this financial year is a coordinated tourism sector outreach programme to our schools again and we have also produced a DVD, *A Career in Tourism*. So we are moving ahead.

**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 15 minutes. [*Hon. N. Parsanlal*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. J. Ross:** Thank you very much colleagues. I would not take much longer. I would just like to highlight two other things: Our Maracas Project, which I spoke about already, but just to inform this House again and the population that when the project is completed we will have improvement in the traffic congestion in that area, a higher capacity waste water treatment plant and this will be constructed from the beach area and south of the North Coast Road. We will have significant improvement to the flooding issue and a larger car park area. We will have timber along the length of the beach to prevent sand loss. We will have a timber board walk, a main pavilion with vending booths, an events area for shows and performances, better toilet and storing facilities, an administrative building, improved drainage facilities, a children's play area and zoned area on the eastern and western ends of the beach.

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[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

I mentioned these things because someone wanted to know what all this money is going to do. Work is also going on at the Emperor Valley Zoo and we intend, when it is completed, to have a modern zoo. Las Cuevas, Manzanilla, Vessigny, the La Brea Pitch Lake; all these areas benefited from our update programme during the course of this year.

It was also a pleasure to launch, on August 11, 2009, the refurbished Gasparee Caves. We partnered with the Chaguaramas Development Authority and we provided the funding and the technical support for the installation of railings, improved lighting, construction of a caretaker facility, upgrade signage and visitor amenities and the installation of security surveillance systems. All of these things were accomplished in the last year.

Our marketing programme continues to be a very hectic one. We continue in Tobago, for instance, to grant support to airlines which bring tourists to the island and this is absolutely necessary in a depressed economy at this time. We increased our number of road shows in North America, Britain, Germany and Scandinavia. We embarked on a programme of social networking, encouraging people of the diaspora to come back home for vacation. In terms of coverage from magazines such as the *Island Magazine*, the *New York Times* and so on, we had approximately \$33.8 million in positive coverage in the United States and in Europe £1.5 million of positive coverage. We did not put out that money, but when we valued the coverage we got, that was the value.

We continue to participate in the Regional Caribbean Marketing Fund where we are embarking on a programme to market the Caribbean. In choosing a destination, they will not say they are coming first to Trinidad. We have done our research; they look for the Caribbean and when they find the Caribbean, then they say that they are going to an island. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, this is all part of the market thrust to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago continues to grow and to experience vibrancy in the tourism sector.

I would also advise this honourable House and the nation, that coming out of the FCCA conference we held last year, Tobago experienced a bumper cruise ship season and it was for the very first time—this is where the conference will benefit us—57 vessels, in excess of 50,000 cruise passengers visited Tobago this year.

**9.30 p.m.**

In conclusion, while those Members on the other side continue to make their noise, bray and howl, we will continue to concentrate on our efforts and keep our

focus on building a bright future for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. While they continue to bad mouth this country, to embark on destructive propaganda and encourage civil disobedience, we will continue to focus on providing not just good but excellent governance.

It is not by chance that visitor arrivals grew significantly over the last five years. When this Government took office in late 2001, international visit arrival stood at 383,000 persons per year. It grew to reach 450,000 by the end of 2007; an increase of over 17 per cent. It is not by chance that our United Kingdom office was voted the top tourism office at a recent world tourism market. It is not by chance that Tobago has consistently been selected as a leading ecotourism ecodestination in the world. It is not by chance that our National Culinary team has been outperforming and beating all Caribbean neighbours, including Puerto Rico, at the prestigious Taste of the Caribbean organized by the Caribbean Hotel Association. It is not by chance that Nature Seekers Incorporated, one of our well-known community groups, has won international awards for their protection work on beaches on the East Coast of Trinidad and Tobago. It will not be by chance when Trinidad and Tobago ends up, very soon, in the very top 10 of the tourism competitive index. We will work to achieve our objective. We will plan, we will organize and we will follow the directives outlined in this budget and do it efficiently. It will not be by chance.

Madam Deputy Speaker, let me remind those Members on the other side, and I strongly believe it, when they continue to bad mouth this country, that Trinidad and Tobago is a blessed country. This Government is a blessed Government and who God bless, let no man curse.

I thank you.

**The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill):** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a pleasure for me, to join the debate. Let me, first of all, congratulate my colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance. I intend to deal with one issue and one issue alone.

During the course of the debate, the question was asked and I propose to answer that right now. The question was: What happened at Petrotrin, that the estimates were so wrong and so far out, or worse, what has happened that caused us to enter a programme where the total, when we entered the programme, was \$3.3 billion and we took a decision?

The reference has to do with the petroleum company Petrotrin and a project that we embarked on called the Gasoline Optimization Project. The project

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involved the construction and revamping of several major units in the Pointe-a-Pierre Refinery, towards the enhancement of gasoline quality and quantity. You would recall that in the wake of Trinidad and Tobago finding itself in circumstances where its major Caribbean market basically shifted to Venezuela, based on better terms and conditions, that we found ourselves in a situation where we had one or two choices, either go out of business or create the circumstances to go into the international market. This we sought to do through this programme called the Gasoline Optimization Project, but it also did a couple other things. It basically was intended to replace aged equipment, to improve plant integrity, reduce the sale of unfinished low-value product and also satisfy more stringent gasoline specifications.

The project consisted of a couple of things.

- the upgrade of the fluid catalytic cracking unit; a major component of the project;

What this sought to do was to create increased capacity from 26,000 barrels to 35,000 barrels per day.

- to convert a higher percentage of vacuum gas oil to gasoline and to increase the product obtained from 81 MON to 83 MON, which is the specification that was required;
- a new alkylation acid plant was being contemplated at 10,000 barrels per day, which increases gasoline reduction and a 180 acid regeneration plant as part of that particular plan activity;
- a new prefabrication unit, an isomerization unit, which is at 28,000 barrels per standard day unit at renews benzene and produces feed for the isomerization unit; and
- a 7,400 barrels per standard day plant, which improves the octane.

This is all intended to improve the quality of product that is being refined and that was intended to go into the other markets, specifically the United States market.

There were some other issues: a new continuous catalytic regeneration platforming unit, which is a 27,000 barrels per day unit to improve the octane quality and utilities and off-sites. These include boiler and water treating facilities, tank transfer systems, power supply and control rooms.

Let us start with the issue of the project cost. The estimated cost of the project in 2003, was US \$350 million. This initial estimate was based on licence stores data and was conceptual in nature.

During 2004 and 2005, basic engineering designs were provided for a better indication of the scope of the project. Based on this review, the cost increased to US \$650 million and is attributed to the following:

- a 50 per cent increase in the cost of the isomerization unit;
- the increase in scope outside the battery limits;
- the increase in power requirement and the construction of a new substation and a new cooling tower.

All of these were found out as we started to get more and more into the product itself.

In 2006, with an overheated global construction industry, which is true, Petrotrin experienced difficulty in obtaining construction lump sum bids from prequalified contractors. As a consequence, bids for the construction of plants were higher and the cost estimate increased to \$843,000,000 at the time due to the following: the other 23 per cent increase in the estimated cost of the continuous catalytic regeneration platforming unit. Let me tell you why this is so. We had a situation in Trinidad where, for the cost of rigs, for example, a particular company told me that one year they had a particular contract in which they were paying for a rig something like US \$25,000 per day and when the contract came to an end, they were told: “The cost is now \$250,000 per day and we are not sure when you could get it and you either take it or leave it.” What had occurred is that because of the higher prices, remember we are going through a high price environment, costs were escalating at a rate. This is what was happening in the industry. There was a 23 per cent increase in the estimated cost for the catalytic regeneration unit. There was a 74 per cent increase in the estimate of the fluid catalytic cracking unit, a 60 per cent increase in the estimate of the acid plant and additionally all of this for the cost and schedule of material, equipment and construction were borne by Petrotrin.

During the period 2006—2008, detailed engineering was undertaken by the APC contractors for all the plans and full requirement of utilities and off-site were identified on a phased basis. This also resulted after this exercise was done in an increase of scope and the determination of new items of works. After you have sat down and you actually got into the work, you realized that it had to be increased and you had to, in fact, get new items. Some of the new items that you had to get were an API separator, a unit that separates oil from water; a cooling tower; a gasoline storage tank; gasoline loading lines and submarine; bulk electrical substation and transmission lines. At this point in time, the cost of the project was increased to US \$917 million in 2007, based on these developments.

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In 2008, there was a further review of the project and the cost increased from US \$917 million to the current US \$1,300,000,000. Again, the main reasons were as follows:

- the continued effects of the overheated global construction industry, which resulted in increases to the order of 40 per cent in the cost of equipment, material and in particular the cost of reimbursable contracts for the third catalytic cracking unit and the acid units;
- increase of the catalytic regeneration platform unit and significant increases in the scope of works, arising from designs and construction of new structures;
- replacing the use of existing structures, based on the need to satisfy new engineering codes;
- new works identified, based on the investigated works that the APC contractors were required to do;
- relocation and removal of substantial amounts of underground surfaces and other structures in the areas of old foundations and cable tranches; and, of course
- the need to install new underground drainage systems.

To summarize it, therefore, this project suffered from the global overheated construction industry which was fuelled by severe competition for materials, equipment and services for high growth areas such as China and India. That had the following implications:

- these factors changed the EC market and contractors were no longer prepared to bid lump sum prices;
- decreased capacity and availability of ACP contractors and consequent escalation in cost of their services;
- the cost of services of project management services contractors also escalated;
- industry capacity overload, resulting in increases in lead time for equipment over a two-year period from 40 to 70 weeks for vessels, from 50 to 84 weeks for compressors and from 40 to 120 weeks for reactors;
- escalation in the cost of materials and equipment varied between 10 to 30 per cent and the project also suffered from local sub-contractors and longer than anticipated construction durations.



Madam Deputy Speaker, here is what it looked like. In 2003, it was \$350 million; 2005, it went to \$650 million; 2006, \$843 million; 2007, \$917 million; 2008, \$1.3 billion; and 2009, \$1.3 billion. These cost changes had to do with what was occurring between the period 2003—2009 in the hydrocarbon industry. There were significant shortages. There were significant cost increases and it is those factors that impacted the cost of this particular project at Petrotrin.

In closing, as we speak, the last tranche of resources to bring this project to completion has in fact been negotiated. In a meeting this morning with Petrotrin, I was advised that this is almost 90 per cent completed and we should have this project completed and available, certainly this element of it, very shortly.

**9.45 p.m.**

Madam Deputy Speaker, all other projects in the energy sector during this time frame will suffer the same characteristics. So the GTL project which was mentioned is going to have a similar cost profile.

We have tried as far as possible to get the best people to look at these particular projects and, yes, there has been some cost overruns in some instances, but as we have seen and as we will continue to see, much of these costs were as a function of the market that we were involved in and, therefore, they could not have escaped. The only way we could have reduced some of this cost was to do a lot of it faster, and the type of project that it was and what was required to move this project forward, it just could not happen.

I just wanted to ensure the record was correct and that we had indicated the reason these costs were, in fact, what they were and where it started in 2003 and where it is today in 2009. It is our expectation that this project would be completed very shortly, and we will get the benefits that we are looking for which is our ability to increase our revenue through the use of this particular product.

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

**Mr. Jack Warner** (*Chaguanas West*): Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise here with a heavy heart, very heavy indeed. When I was a young boy in school, I used to listen to people like Winston Mahabir, Gerard Montano and Lionel Seukeran and I used to hear the debates which they conducted in the Chamber. We used to have a programme called the Government Broadcasting Unit on a pie radio in the country in those days. It was a pleasure to go at 8.00 p.m. and listen to the debates on the pie radio. The pie radio was a radio with a tube. So, you had to put it on at 7.00 p.m. to hear the debates at 8.00 p.m. It took an hour to start, but the entire

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village would come together and sit to hear the debates in my parents' yard. I used to long to become a parliamentarian, not necessarily on this side, but if fate had it so, then so be it.

As I rise here tonight to speak on this debate, I look around in this august Chamber and I am very sad indeed. We are coming to talk about a debate of about \$46 billion at 9.48 p.m. There are 15 Members on that side and three on my side, and we are talking about the people's business. In the public gallery the police constable makes it four. Had it not been for him, it would have been three persons, and we are not concerned.

I sit here and I can hear my friend, the Member for Diego Martin Central, snoring from over here—the young supposedly bright parliamentarian—and I ask myself: Are we really concerned about the people's business?

We just heard the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries who came here to explain how expenditure in Petrotrin was moved from \$600 million to \$1.3 billion. He took seven minutes to explain the \$700 million—\$100 million per minute, and he gone. That is our business. If you ask me what he said, I do not know. If I do not know, the guy in Woodford Square does not know either. That is the kind of contempt we have for the people's business. The Prime Minister is not here tonight to respond to the allegations made by the Member for Diego Martin West. He did not only talk about Petrotrin, but he talked about two contracts in particular and he showed the wanton and excessive waste as if our money is “chillibibi” and it would not finish. Do you know something? We do not have to worry.

The Parliament reopened two Fridays ago and there were only eight persons in the public gallery. When the Minister announced the budget to be presented on Monday, one would have thought that the gallery would have been filled, but it was only three-quarter filled. Today, and also on Friday, at no point in time was there any more than eight persons at best and four persons at worse, and we are happy about how we conduct the people's business. For me, it is a sad day indeed.

In fact, as I rise to speak, if I choose to go beyond 45 minutes, you are going to hear the steups, because everybody wants to leave and go home. The fact is we are talking about \$46 billion. The Minister of Finance read a budget presentation of 43 pages which comprised 22,857 words. It took a little more than three hours to deliver. As I sat here listening to her, I said to myself, in all of this, she has not said a single word about Laventille. Laventille, even in the worst of time, was once and still is one of the Government's most loyal constituencies—whether it is Laventille East/Morvant or Laventille West—there was not a word about

Laventille; the transformation of Laventille; nothing about putting a live factory in Laventille; nothing about putting a live factory in Laventille; nothing about putting a branch of First Citizens Bank in Laventille; and nothing to transform the lives of the people in Laventille. I sat here and I said to myself, if they could treat Laventille so, how can I expect Chaguanas West, Mayaro, Tabaquite or Caroni Central to be treated better?

Of course, they went to the college of Mayaro; the college of Harris Promenade; the high school of Diego Martin; and the university of Woodford Square, but not in the college of Felicity; the college of Charlieville; the college of Orange Field; the college of Brickfield; the college of Waterloo and the college of Endeavour where people are suffering, and where people want to understand what they have done to suffer this way. They did not go there. Therefore, I said to myself, I am not surprised.

I heard the Member for La Brea making a big hurrah that nobody said anything good about the budget. While he was speaking, I said that you cannot say anything good about the budget if there is nothing good about it. I then looked at the budget; I said, what can we say about the budget? Can we say that the budget promises to decentralize the central services in 12 regions of this country as said by the Minister of Social Development? By the way, Minister, if I was really ready tonight, I would have shown you the file with the letters that I wrote you. I sent letters to you and I did not even get one acknowledgment.

**Dr. Browne:** That is not true.

**Mr. J. Warner:** Minister, I do not have time to dissimulate here. I did not get any reply. I am happy to note that you have sent me a note and you will investigate. I had cause to do the same with the Minister of Planning, Housing and the Environment. There are over 20 letters and I did not even get a reply. In fact, on a scale of one to 10, the Ministry of Planning, Housing and Environment will get a half, with 10 being the highest and one being the lowest. It is the worst Ministry. If they treat parliamentarians on this side like this, what about the public?

Ironically enough, when Sen. The Hon. Hazel Manning was appointed a Minister, I was angry. I feel no Prime Minister's wife should be a Minister, particularly after the Burnham era. Madam Deputy Speaker, I am going to tell you something. In my experience, the best Minister to date—I should say the least bad Minister in this country to date—is Sen. The Hon. Hazel Manning. She returns your call; she treats with your problems and even if you are not satisfied, she answers you. She does not keep her nose up in the air; she does not behave as if

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she is God's gift to a Ministry, but you see these guys—not you so much Peter—you cannot get anything from them. The fact is, if you treat your parliamentarians this way, how do you treat with the public?

I have heard my colleague, the hon. Member for Mayaro, Mr. Winston Peters, boasted about the three community centres. So what? If Mayaro deserves 33 community centres, give it to them. What is the big thing? But he is ungrateful! That is your psychology. I am saying that as long as we continue this way, we shall be in serious trouble.

What is there in the budget to make me smile? Is it because they have promised to establish assessment centres to assess children and to refer them to the Children's Authority? Is it that? Can I say that I am happy to have pension reform? Is it that? Even as I talk to you now, and I look across to the Minister of Finance—I am seeing the back of her chair—cannot even answer me because it is not even important. Do you know why it is not important? Whatever we say on this side is totally irrelevant on that side, because the ayes have it. I do not even understand, as I stand here, what all this talk is about. I know that we are talking here and we can talk until the cock comes home to roost, and nothing is going to change, because the ayes have it and, therefore, it is not important for anybody to listen or to be present. We come here and not even a comma will change or a full stop will change. This is an exercise in futility.

It is so bad, because the budget was read last Monday and in less than 24 hours certain measures in the budget became law. Do you think we could talk and tell them that they should not raise alcohol or cigarette and so on? We cannot. That is the point I am making. Why are we speaking? You see, the impression is being given that only in one part of this House there is a reservoir of knowledge, common sense, intelligence and concern for the people. Nobody here is concerned. That is the belief. I sit here sometimes and I say to myself, what have I done to deserve this?

The point is that the budget, as presented, has some serious concerns for the people. The budget did not tell the people how their lives would be affected or how their lives would be improved. It did not tell them that. It did not tell them what jobs are being created for them. It did not tell them how many hospital wards are going to be opened, although the Minister of Health came here this afternoon and gave an exposition. He is one of the Ministers who always acknowledges your letters. He does not do much, but he acknowledges your letters, at least mine and also yours.

**10.00 p.m.**

That is right. Because he understands that he is not the last Minister; there were others before him and others after him and he treats us with respect. The budget did not tell anybody which communities will get a regular water supply. I hope that I would hear it before I leave here tonight, from the Minister of Public Utilities.

**Mr. Peters:** Do not hold your breath.

**Mr. J. Warner:** Do not hold my breath? The budget did not tell us what serious drainage projects will end the flooding in this country; how food prices shall be reduced; which roads shall be paved, and which fallen bridges shall be fixed. It did not tell us anything new about crime. In fact, the number one problem in the country is crime.

The Minister of Finance said that when the Minister of National Security speaks, he shall elaborate on crime. Where is he? That is the contempt with which we are treated in this Parliament. These are the challenges which the budget should have addressed, and which remain untouched to date. For me, the budget is one big farce. It is who could speak longer than whom, or who could speak more badly than whom, or could read, I should say. That is what it is about. So, you talk for three hours and 10 minutes, I talk for three hours and 10 minutes. That is what it is about. I am saying to you that nothing that can be said on this side, not even a comma would be changed. Who is fooling whom?

On August 31, 1962, the true father of this nation, Dr. Eric Williams, when this country attained independence, he made a speech. I would take just two or three lines from it. He asked the question:

"What use will you make of your independence?"

Of course, there are some Members on this side who do not even know who Dr. Eric Williams was. They have not even read *Capitalism and Slavery*, so let me help them. Independence speech, he said:

"What use would you make of your independence? What will you transmit to your children five years from today?"

Madam Deputy Speaker, 47 years later the question is still relevant. What shall we transmit to our children five years, five months, five weeks from today. Dr. Williams said:

"The first responsibility that devolves upon you is the protection and promotion of your democracy."

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Look at our democracy. That is what he said. He said:

"Democracy means more, much more, than the right to vote, (much more than) one vote for every man and every woman of the prescribed age.

Democracy means recognition of the rights of others. Democracy means equality of opportunity for all in education, in the public service and in private employment..."

He said:

"Democracy means the protection of the weak against the strong."

The budget, which we have read and which we are discussing, has blown all of this to bits. That budget has attacked the fundamentals of our democracy; has curtailed the rights of our citizens; has failed to practise the equality of opportunity, which Dr. Williams expounded, and which my colleague from Fyzabad laboured in the vineyard to explain about earlier on this evening.

That budget has failed to offer protection to the weak and, more importantly, that budget has turned its back on Dr. Eric Williams. In fact, if I was sharing red cards in a football match today, the Minister of Finance would get two, but to get a red card you have to be on the field of play. On the budget which we saw earlier on here these last few days, the Minister is not even getting a warm up.

It is a bad budget and I will tell you why. It is titled: "Strengthening Efficiency, Addressing the Challenges". I ask you, strengthening efficiency, where? In the hospitals? In the courts? In the Ministries of Health, National Security? Where is the efficiency being strengthened? Addressing the challenges! Which challenges have been addressed? In fact, for me, it was the greatest display of inefficiency to occupy so much of Parliament's time, the people's time, to say so little.

For a Government that talks about accountability and particularly my friend, the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, nothing is wrong with this. Nothing is wrong with accountability, but where is the accountability of the Government in the 2008/2009 budget? Did the Government account for the \$46.4 billion they spent? We could ask here too: Where the money gone? Did anybody answer the Member for Diego Martin West, except for the charade that was put on just now by the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, and in the absence of the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West?

I ask you again, where is the accountability? What do we have to show for it? Do we have more police stations, more police officers? Is the court system fixed? How many new schools were built and opened in the last budget? Is our education

system better? There is a draft Curriculum, Planning and Development Literacy Action Plan 2009—2012. Just give me two seconds, Ma'am, let me read something for you. Of 540 schools, 132 failed in the SEA exams. Let me give you some figures, some raw score means. The mean score for Language Arts: Caroni, 2003, 63.7; 2007—the last year for which there are figures—55.6; North Eastern, 2003, 55.2; 2007, 49.8; Port of Spain, 2003, 63.73; 2007, 56.4. The list goes on and on. In every district there is a decline, but that is not all.

You come to CXC, Language Arts, and the grade for remedial work: Tobago, 44 per cent of the students need remedial work; North Eastern district, 32 per cent; St. Patrick, 35 per cent; St. George East, 24 per cent; and the list goes on, every district. We are in serious trouble. How do you account for the money spent last year? I do not want to belabour the point, but I ask again, where is the Review of the Economy? Besides the Grand Bazaar bridge—what they call interchange, I call it a bridge—how many new bridges were built?

**Mr. Imbert:** I will answer that.

**Mr. J. Warner:** All right. How many new roads? Answer that too.

**Mr. Imbert:** I will answer that too.

**Mr. J. Warner:** The last new road that was built in this country was 20 years ago.

**Mr. Imbert:** That is not true.

**Mr. J. Warner:** Okay, answer me. In the last 20 years, they have put over 200 vehicles on the road. They have not built a single new road in 20 years, and yet they put more than 200 vehicles on the road. And they are saying now on the Priority Bus Route, it is illegal and therefore it is changed from \$200 to \$2,000. If you go on the route, because you are desperate, it is illegal. When you have flood on the Eastern Main Road, as they have every other week, where the people would pass? Where would they go?

Would it not have been better for a sensible regime to say the bus route is one way for all vehicles, from east to west, from 6.00 a.m. to 9.00 a.m. and on the Eastern Main Road, the same thing, but in the opposite direction. In the afternoon, from 4.00 p.m. to 7.00 p.m. again, west to east, one way, and you cut out all this foolishness about bus pass, police and so on, because the traffic is east, so make it one way. If I can be told, why not, I will listen. The answer is not about penalties you know, because to get penalties you have to first have a conviction, you have to try them, and we know what our conviction rate is in this country.

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What is even worse, is the style and the format of the budget presentation. Totally inefficient. The style and format are designed to counter transparency and accountability. It tells you where the Government can hide the money and not tell you exactly where the money has been used. For example, on page 72 of the Estimates of Development Programme Expenditure 2010, it says \$14.7 million was spent on improvement works to police stations. Page 28 of PSIP document, Item 109, understates the figure by \$500,000, and then lists nine police stations where work was allegedly done, but it gives no breakdown of what the works were or how much was spent on each police station.

How therefore, do you measure value for money? How are we to know whether it makes sense to give the Minister of National Security an additional \$15 million? How do we know this? How do we know what stations he would upgrade or refurbish? You know what is done? We are giving the Minister a blank cheque, and I would see him about that just now. On page 28 of the PSIP, the Ministry of National Security spent some money to paint a mural wall in Bon Accord, Tobago. Who is painting this wall? Which firm is painting this wall? How much did it cost? How much money was spent on paint? And how much was spent on labour? I am saying it is vague and it is done so deliberately and this is, of course, a small example.

**10.15 p.m.**

If you look at the budget that was done, the budget seems similar to last year's budget. Almost a Xerox copy. The same thing, a comma here, a comma there, it is almost a Xerox copy and I am saying that is because of the lack of details in the budget that is deliberate, so the Government has made no promises how the moneys are to be spent and therefore you cannot accuse them of anything.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am saying, the budget we heard from the Minister of Finance is a joke, is a farce. I will use simple logic and simple language to explain. Very simple for the man on the streets. When the last budget was presented, every commentator of substance was critical of the budget because they said the oil price was too high and the price for gas was also too high. You will recall the Government adjusting the budget downwards twice. Then the Government went on to spend every single cent and did not leave any surplus for the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund.

You would recall that the commentators last year asked the Government to rethink on the Trinidad and Tobago International Financial Centre (TTIFC). You would recall that we were even told that August 2008 we would have a full centre,



to date the centre is still empty. You pass there and see lights day and night. Up to this point even though a big delegation went to Dubai, it has not come back with one single firm to date. [*Interruption*] Where are the tenants at the centre? I do not want to say anything much except to say that we are going down—as some guy said—a slippery slope.

Earlier on today the Member for Diego Martin West said we are spending money as if it is going out of style. We have spent over \$1 billion on the Summit of the Americas and you would recall that I have asked about 30 questions on that summit. We spent over \$400 million on the old airport and not even a plane landed there. I am saying again though we spent \$1 billion on the Summit of the Americas, what do we have to show for it?

We have also done some unproductive spending on the waterfront. That too could have been avoided. We have wasted hundreds of billions of dollars at the Brian Lara Stadium and even then we do not know how many more millions we have to spend to complete it. We do not know! All I am saying is that is a reflection of the contempt which the Government has for this country. But those figures we heard from the Minister of Finance means nothing to the poor. Those figures do not acknowledge the suffering and the hardships of the poor people. Those figures do not tell the people in Chaguanas West or Couva North about when they are getting box drains or when they are getting roads. It does not tell them how they will face the grocery for rice, for “aloo”, for dhal, for “baigan”; those figures mean nothing to them. They want to know from the budget how their lives will be improved. I am saying therefore that this budget this year, the Government is saying it will spend the same way it did last year, and therefore I am saying that we are going into deficit again for a second consecutive time.

The Government has one major weakness and that is it cannot see money and leave it alone. One major weakness you know. Saving is a bad word. Do not tell them to save at all, you insult them and that is their weakness. Imagine the budget is based on petroleum and oil prices over which they have no control. They have no control over production; they have no control over prices, but they are spending money as if it is “gobar” and the day will come when all of us will pay a price for that.

I want to fast-track and talk briefly on the Government spending its money on foreigners and foreign inputs when the Government should try to make it less dependent on foreigners and foreign input. Thirty per cent of this nation’s workforce is employed in welfare programmes that are unproductive and do not lead to any sustainable future. While all of this is happening, this Government

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continues to depend on Chinese labour to the detriment of local labour and the Government is now bringing in Chinese slavery as a substitute for what we had many years ago, African slavery.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to talk to you briefly about a company call Trinity Housing. Trinity Housing is one of the local companies—[*Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira returns to her seat*] Welcome back Minister, your timing was beautiful.

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** I was listening to you in the tea room.

**Mr. J. Warner:** All right, I will come back to you. Trinity Housing is one of those firms that has employed Chinese labour. Trinity Housing has a contract in English for the Chinese labourers to sign and they sign it, of course, with their thumb print. The fact is the firm has not lived up to its terms of the contract. In the first case Trinity Housing has broken every single promise it has made to the Chinese workers.

According to the contract—No. 2—housing and food has to be given to you by the company, they get no housing and no food. Since August 22 the firm has stopped giving the Chinese any food. The firm has not paid them since July and the firm has doctored their number of hours of work and is paying them less than they are entitled to. The firm has charged them for national insurance and to the best of my knowledge a foreign employee does not have to pay national insurance. The firm takes a security fund from each employee of \$1,000, and therefore every Chinese labourer whose salary on average is \$8,500 receives a net of \$4,200. The firm takes \$4,000 from every Chinese and this is what we have here.

More than this, the Chinese labourers have signed for five years and if they go back before five years they will lose certain benefits as well. This is the firm. That is what we are doing here, and we of course want to build a society and a country by exploiting the Chinese. Ask yourself on what it is our moneys shall be spent. Ask yourself if the money is spent on, say, agriculture. One of the worst forms of rural neglect is the agricultural sector.

The access roads which they promised to build, my colleague from Caroni Central has shown that the roads are not being built. In fact they are building fewer roads this year than they built last year. More importantly, you will see that not only are they building fewer roads but as far as possible, in every aspect, every form, every institution, corruption is pervasive. Let me give you one example: This here—[*Holds up document*] Minister of Foreign Affairs—is the building you bought in Toronto. This is the building you bought in Toronto. [*Interruption*] You bought also a building in Washington, you bought also in Brussels and you bought also in South Africa but I will come to this one for the time being.

You spent \$160 million buying buildings. This building is \$20 million more in the estimates than it cost. This building was sold for Canadian \$4.25 million which you admitted also in the newspapers, this building, and yet for the estimates it is \$5 million. Twenty million dollars more it cost in the books. The building in Washington also does not tally with what the Government paid and what the account shows—the building in South Africa likewise. All I ask you, can you tell us why this building is \$20 million more than the market price?

This is one example and these are the things that hurt, because when these things happen—and corruption is all pervasive—it means that the country is at a loss; when it happens it means that the poor people are denied certain benefits that would improve their lives. I go every week to Chaguanas West and I go every week to Couva North and I see people suffering. On any one occasion you go there, there are 127 persons, some from as far as San Fernando East all coming to beg for help and then when you have this amount of corruption taking place, it hurts. It hurts, and you know what, nobody seems to care. To whom can they turn? You do not believe me? I am saying therefore that this cannot be allowed to continue.

**Mr. Ross:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Could I ask the Member for Chaguanas West how he determined that building was \$20 million more than the market price? So far, I do not know if I missed it, but you did not indicate what was the market price, who determined the market price and where you got that information on the market price.

**Mr. J. Warner:** That is easy. On September 15, 2009 your Government, our Government gave a cheque for \$4.25 million to conclude the deal on this commercial property. The property is at 185 Sheppard Avenue West, Toronto, Canada. That figure tallies roughly to TT \$24.6 million. But the fact is though the deal was signed and consummated, in the 2010 estimates the figure moved from \$24.6 million to \$46.2 million. I am saying therefore it is a \$20 million increase. I am saying the same thing applies also towards the building that was bought in Washington, and the money they spent in Brussels and South Africa was also poorly spent too.

**10.30 p.m.**

And I will tell you this too. Mr. Speaker, I did not come here to score cheap points. I told the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Member of Parliament for Point Fortin, hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon that I am going to raise it. I told her to please do her research and talk after me, so she could answer me and tell the public. I did not come here to score cheap points. I am not that kind of person. I told the

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Minister I am going to raise this and for her to try and talk after me and explain to the people why. Not so?

**Mrs. Gopee-Scoon:** Yes.

**Mr. J. Warner:** Okay. I did not come here to get cheap points. I am not that kind of "fella". That is it. But the point I am making to you is that all where you turn people are suffering, and where I come from—Chaguanas West and at times Couva North—basically it is agriculture. I asked the farmers what they want. You think the farmers want high-rise buildings? You think the farmers are concerned about rapid rail? You think the farmers are concerned about water taxi? The people in Chaguanas West and the surrounding constituencies, all they ask you for is a box drain, some roads. They are asking for the traffic jam in Chaguanas to be alleviated.

The Minister of Health came here this afternoon and said that he is moving the Ministry of Health from Chaguanas to Montrose.

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. J. Warner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, my colleague. Well, I cannot say thanks to anybody else, but thank you. [*Interruption*] I looked you know. I looked. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am saying all they are asking for is box drains and some roads to solve the traffic problem. So I was saying [*Interruption*—I am coming to that just now—that the Minister of Health came and he said that he is moving the Chaguanas Health Centre from Chaguanas to Montrose. Out of respect, they came to me and they showed me what they are doing, and they said that they are going to Montrose, September 26.

Mr. Speaker, the minute I was told by the Chaguanas Health Centre that they are moving to Montrose, I immediately applied for the Chaguanas Health Centre to be used as the People's Mall in Chaguanas, and you could take the people off the streets and put them in the Chaguanas Mall. I had the concurrence of the Mayor of Chaguanas.

Mr. Speaker, I did not know to whom I should turn, so I picked up the phone and I called the Minister of Local Government and I asked her to who shall I write to ask this place as the People's Mall. She said, "Look, I do not know, but since it

is Caroni lands you can check with Mr. Garcia, he of course will tell you what you have to do.” I called Mr. Garcia—why I am telling you this is for the people—and he said, "Jack, I am not quite sure, but write me the letter and I will walk it through for you." I called the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, Sen. Piggott and he said, "When you send it to Mr. Garcia, send me a copy." In 24 hours I was called by Mr. Garcia's office and I was told that my request was approved. It was approved—[*Interruption*]

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** That is efficiency.

**Mr. J. Warner:** I will give you the reverse side just now— and that they will make every effort to have it ready for the people of Chaguanas in time. I felt ecstatic because I am not used to this kind of thing, particularly from other Ministries.

The same day there was a football match at the Hasely Crawford Stadium, last Wednesday. Mr. Speaker, ESPN came here seven days before with their equipment—I am not saying of course John Doe, I said ESPN—to show the match to 69 countries. I wrote the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs asking him for a waiver of duty and he sent it to the Minister of Finance. I wrote the Minister of Finance. The whole TTFB delegation was in Honduras and I was in Trinidad, I then of course put through some phone calls and so on, “nothing is happening”, I then got a phone call from the Federation to talk to a "fella" called Andy Singh from the Ministry of Finance. When I picked up the phone to call Andy Singh, he put it down and then he called the Federation and told them, “Why did they give me his number, he is not talking to me.” I had to go and find the broker to get \$560,000 to put in the bank, so that ESPN would not talk this country bad and after that was done, the Prime Minister—not the Minister of Finance—hastily signed the letter for me.

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** How do you think it reached the Prime Minister?

**Mr. J. Warner:** I do not know how it reached.

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** It reached because I sent it.

**Mr. J. Warner:** But after the money was put in the bank.

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** As it came to me—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. J. Warner:** Tell the House.

**Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira:** Mr. Speaker, when the matter came on my desk, because Cabinet was not meeting before the next week and because the matter

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was so urgent, as it reached on my desk, the same weekend we sent it to the Prime Minister for him to have Cabinet ratify it thereafter. So immediately it came to my desk, it was dealt with. I could not deal with it before. In fact, if I had waited till the next week, it would have been too late. So we dealt with it as quickly as we could, as it reached on my desk, with the urgency that it deserved and you must tell the whole story. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. J. Warner:** Well I thank you so much, but I wrote the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs 10 days before. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Hunt:** Mr. Speaker, the minute I collected the letter from the Member for Chaguanas West in his capacity as the Special Advisor to TTFF, it was sent directly to the Minister of Finance, that same day. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. Nunez-Testeira:** Yes.

**Mr. J. Warner:** Okay. Mr. Speaker, it took 10 days to reach her, but in any case, I know it takes about 10 months for a document to reach the Commissioner of Police. I am not worried.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Mr. J. Warner:** My concern is, how could you have somebody acting, like Noel Garcia did on the one hand, and Andy Singh acting like he did on the other? So I wrote both the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs and the Minister of Finance—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please!

**Mr. J. Warner:** I wrote the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs because he was insulting. He was insulting ,in my various capacities, whether it is FIFA, a Member of Parliament, he was rude, so I wrote him and I said, "Look, this guy was rude." Did you get that letter?

**Mrs. Nunez-Testeira:** I got the letter and I did investigate it.

**Mr. J. Warner:** All right. Fine. I am telling you that as long as those things happen, you could have whatever budget you want, unless you have staff members and your staff able to cooperate with the people, you fail. If Andy Singh, whoever he is, is not talking to Jack Warner, you think he will be talking to John Doe in Woodford Square? But it is all right. Therefore, I say to myself, I must tell this House what the farmers want in Central. Because we come from an agricultural region, whether it is Oropouche West or East, or Naparima, we are farmers. What do our farmers want in the budget? For our farmers, the budget must address issues of irrigation, especially during the dry season with catchment

dams and so on. The budget must address drainage to combat flooding in the rainy season; access roads and bridges; investment in research and development; to develop more efficient techniques in agriculture; better facilities to access machinery; concession for supplies, such as fertilizers; better marketing and processing support. Those are the things that the farmers will want.

I heard the Member for La Brea, the hon. Fitzgerald Jeffery—Hoo! Hoo! [*Laughter*] He is sleeping. I heard him, and he was talking about how many—this person passed, and this one went to Crowne Plaza, and this one went to Bel Air Hotel, and this one did so and so and he called some names.

Mr. Speaker, when I was in Couva last Thursday, there was a guy—I will not call his name because I did not get permission to call his name—who got VSEP from Caroni. He went and took his money to study Technical Drawing, vocational education. He passed. He then took the certificate and went to the Ministry of Education to get a job. They gave him a completed form and just marked it in ink, "You have passed and you are registered, and if you do not hear from us in three years' time and then call back." [*Laughter*] I swear. The guy came in tears. [*Interruption*] Now, this is a guy who took his VSEP to improve himself and he gets a form that tells him, your thing is okay and so on, but if you do not hear from us in three years—

**Mr. Speaker:** Listen, I am trying to listen to the Member. If you all want to talk, go outside. Please, continue.

**Mr. J. Warner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. You see, this is the point I am making again because nobody listens. What you are saying is not important. You are irrelevant in here. But I am talking to the Minister of Education and telling her that form is a bad form. A guy who takes his VSEP and improves himself and becomes a technical teacher should be encouraged. So the Member for La Brea, the hon. Fitzgerald Jeffrey, he is lucky because he is from a PNM constituency. "I from a UNC constituency, I ain't so lucky." Nobody knows the guy and I am saying therefore, that "Gopaul luck eh Seepaul luck", so do not generalize and do not come here and show off because there are guys in our constituencies who are suffering.

Mr. Speaker—and I am not taking part in this thing about ethnic cleansing and so on—I printed 41 of these. [*Logo displayed*] This is the logo for the FIFA Under 17 Women's World Cup. Mr. Speaker, do you know what this is? This is the tassa and steel band together. This is an amalgam of the instruments for the two races, and I have printed this to give every Member a copy because in some ways I am saying like what my friend is saying here, "Let us stop this discrimination".

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Mr. Speaker, Independence night the State sponsored fireworks in Port of Spain and in San Fernando, not in Central. Therefore I say, no, they are wrong. I sponsored it. That same militant ship that the Member for Diego Martin West spoke about—US \$60 million for a centre in Port of Spain; US \$40 million for a centre in San Fernando though, these figures are erroneous, but those were the figures given. I ask myself, what is the figure for the centre in Central? So the people in Central are not people too?

The one thing that they cannot talk to me and say, "I am a racist". They cannot say that about me. They may say that about anybody, but not me and I have nothing to hide. I am saying that we have to stop this and we must treat people equally, and this is why I rose tonight. I say tonight, that on Wednesday, or tomorrow, whenever we come back here, I have engraved a breathalyser for every Member of this House, for every Senator, for the Members in the press box. I bought 100 mobile breathalysers, and I engraved them do you know why? I bought one for you too, Mr. Speaker. Yours is also there. I engraved them because I want Members to understand and to realize that the breathalyser has to come. It is too important, and if I give them a portable one, free of charge, engraved and so on, it may help them to expedite the breathalyser. So the five lives that we talked about that were lost in Oropouche, would not be lost. *[Interruption]* Yes they have batteries. Laugh! Giggle. You see, everything here is a giggle. A budget of \$46 billion, we giggle it away. We giggle the budget away, \$46 billion. We are talking tonight, giggle. But the fact is I am saying that the rural neglect must stop.

**10.45 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, I want to make the point that in this country the people are angry. I saw a line in a book somewhere that I was reading. The guy said that you must never be afraid of an army of lions led by a sheep, but you have to be mortally afraid of an army of sheep led by a lion. Army of sheep—*[Mr. Warner points to Members opposite]*

Unless we change, this country will not be what we like it to be. There is a kind of anger out there; people are not smiling anymore. You could say what you want about 10,000 persons being trained and 14,000 persons being trained, people are not smiling anymore. People in here are not happy. All I ask is that we go back and demonstrate the milk of human kindness; let us help the people and put the people first. If you do that, this country would be a better place for all of us, on that side and on this side, but, at the end of the day, the winner shall be Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you.



**The Minister of Foreign Affairs (Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a contribution, though limited, to the 2009—2010 budget debate and to congratulate the Minister of Finance on her fine budget presentation last Monday.

At this hour of the night, I would respond only to those allegations made by the Member for Chaguanas West. I will speak, therefore, to the specific accusations regarding the Government's timely decision in 2008/2009 to invest in sound infrastructure, which is one of the pillars of Vision 2020.

With the global economic downturn, there was a resultant drop in property prices throughout the world. One would admit that the prudent thing to do was to, in fact, invest in property, once we were in a position to do so. One would admit as well that we were locked in to several leasehold arrangements which were quite onerous, therefore, the thing to do, if the Government was in a position to do so, was to buy. The time to buy was 2008/2009 and we entered into those arrangements last year, as we were able to.

The Member for Chaguanas West spoke to the purchase of a property at 185 Shepherd Avenue West in Toronto, Ontario. It was for the purchase of a new administration office, in particular, the Office of the Consular General. He claimed that the property was purchased at a price of TT \$46 million. I wish to advise the hon. Member that figure was incorrect. The figure paid by us, and I would give it to you in clear figures, TT \$24,565,000.

**Hon. Member:** Oh God!

**Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon:** You obviously got your information wrong, and I am prepared to provide you with any further details that you may need. [*Desk thumping*]

This was for accommodation to house the Consular General in Toronto. As you know, we were bursting at our seams in Toronto. We have quite a large diaspora there and we need to continue to deliver good service to our nationals residing there and, of course, to those Canadians who wish to come to Trinidad and invest in Trinidad and Tobago and wish to have information on Trinidad and Tobago and other activities here. Therefore, we entered into that agreement, but it was \$24 million.

To the question of the purchase of an office building at 1714 Massachusetts Avenue in Washington, we did, in fact, enter a purchase agreement only, perhaps, about two months ago. That was for TT \$75 million. That would translate to about US \$12 million. When we began our negotiations, we started at about US \$16 million and we were able to negotiate downwards to US \$12 million. [*Desk thumping*]

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I have to say to you that I myself visited the property, maybe about two months ago; it is adjoining the existing accommodation; so it is just divided by a wall. It is an excellent opportunity, all we need to do is break the wall down and we would have double the space which we had before.

**Mr. Warner:** The property in Brussels.

**Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon:** Let me finish.

**Mr. Imbert:** "Yuh come spreading bad rake here." [*Laughter*]

**Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon:** That building, Member for Chaguanas West, is in pristine condition. We have absolutely no renovations to make to the building in Washington. It is a fine purchase and an excellent decision by this Government. [*Desk thumping*]

I invite you to visit it when next you are in Washington.

**Mr. Warner:** No problem, I have an office there.

**Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon:** I move now to the purchase of a property at 125 Maiden Lane in New York, which now houses the Office of the Consular General in New York. That decision was taken, perhaps, late 2008. That property was purchased for US \$10,813,124. That property will be opened by the hon. Prime Minister next Friday, when he is in New York for the UN General Assembly debate. That again was another great decision taken by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. It is a very valuable property, indeed; we have moved into it already. Of course, we now are able to serve members of our diaspora resident in the US and, in particular, in New York.

**Mr. Peters:** You need to train the staff to be more mannerly to people. They are very, very uncouth.

**Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon:** Customer service is our focus.

As I am on investing in sound infrastructure, perhaps I should tell you about Knowsley. The Cabinet took a decision earlier this year to construct another wing on the eastern side of the current building which houses the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. That building is being done to provide extra staff accommodation. It is being done at a cost about TT \$24 million. The construction is being done by Yorke. It is a 100 per cent local construction firm and all the attendant services, including landscape, et cetera, is all going to be done by local personnel.

**Mr. Peters:** No Chinese?

**Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon:** No Chinese. With regard to Knowsley, the Government took a decision to restore it. It is well known for its very historic value and architectural favour and design. We took a decision to restore this building. As you know, it is a building that is 200-years-old, but nothing has been done to it in the last, perhaps, 20 years or so. A decision was taken to, in fact, commence restoration work, and that would be completed in November this year. The contract for the restoration was awarded through UDeCott to Shanghai Corporation, *[Interruption]* and that is going to—while we have Chinese working on that building, it is going to ensure that it is done on time and to specifications. I can assure you that by the end of November, perhaps by December, we should also move into the newly renovated and restored Knowsley building.

In fact, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would sit on one compound, which is a change from last year. We had been separated at PowerGen. *[Desk thumping]* Investing in sound infrastructure and environmental efficiency.

Hon. Member, you wanted clarification on another property? In Brussels? We did, in fact, agree to the purchase of a property in Brussels, but we are going to hold on that. No one is occupying those premises. It is the residence of the ambassador. It is unoccupied, but I believe that we would probably have to look at purchasing another building there, but we have not bought anything at all. We have not entered into any arrangements which would be in question or so. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Warner:** Madam Minister, I want to first thank you for allowing me just two minutes, and to say to you that I very much appreciate the explanation you have given. I am happy I told you beforehand to prepare for me, because I was coming late tonight. If I erred in any way, I apologize. *[Desk thumping]*

**Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon:** Member, I do not know why you are apologizing; you did ask for details and I did tell you that I would furnish you with them.

**Mr. Imbert:** He gave bad information.

**Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon:** Therefore, that is the Government's commitment to investing in sound infrastructure. That is the commitment of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to serve our diaspora abroad and to continue to promote this Government's domestic policy as well.

At this time, I do not know if there are any other matters you want to raise. I know that the Member for Fyzabad was concerned about our representation at the embassies, but I will not engage in any discussions on ethnic cleansing at this time at all. *[Desk thumping]* He could put it in writing.

Mr. Speaker, thank you.

**The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Mustapha Abdul-Hamid):** Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure for me tonight to stand to make my own contribution to the Appropriation Bill (Budget), 2009—2010.

As I stand here before this Opposition, sitting in what is, no doubt, their pristine glory—all three and a half of them—I am able to say that I would really like to begin with offering my very sincere congratulations to hon. Minister of Finance for her preparation and presentation, of what was, no doubt, an excellent budget. [*Desk thumping*]

I would really like to invite all Members, and members of the public as well, to contemplate this budget, not in isolation, but to really examine it in the context of a number of budgets that would have been presented to this honourable House over the last seven or eight years. One must examine the cumulative effects of budget after budget after budget, and the impact of those budgets over a period of governance.

In 2002, you would recall, that at that point the country was faced with a situation where unemployment was, perhaps, at levels that the Government considered to be unacceptable. So a major intervention in generating employment was undertaken, at that point in time. There was a significant intervention in the social sector with many increases and many positive introductions in the social services.

Around 2003, we recognized that we were lagging way behind in our housing stock. That really was as a consequence of the previous government having, virtually, abandoned any policy of construction of public housing. It may interest you to know that for the period 1995—2001, when we came into government in 2001, there was a list of persons in the National Housing Authority (NHA) waiting for houses; that list numbered 65,000. There were 65,000 citizens of this country who had applied for housing and were on a waiting list. Do you know how many houses were constructed between 1995 and 2001, that allowed for these 65,000 citizens? Mr. Speaker, 462.

**Hon. Members:** “Oh gosh!” [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:** Out of those 462, do you know that the hon. Member for Caroni East, got two?

**Hon. Member:** What?

**Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:** There were two that were allocated to him, and the very same Member for Diego Martin West came to this honourable House, when he was Minister of Housing, and had to advise this Parliament that they had to beg him to take back his deposit.

**11.00 p.m.**

And that is why as a country we lost six years of development in the housing sector, and so recognizing that, this Government embarked on a housing construction programme just around 2002/2003 and that was as a consequence of a budget statement that was read in this honourable House.

In 2004, our attention turned to the education and training sectors. You will recall with the introduction of the GATE programme and a number of new training programmes, we started to pay closer attention to the establishment of education as priority number one and so we dealt with that aspect of our national development. In those years, 2005—2006, we also looked very carefully at our tax regime, and one will recall that our maximum tax was 35 per cent and it is now down to 25 per cent. [*Desk thumping*]

So that citizens of this country now have a greater disposable income. All of that was intended to generate and contribute to the economic activity together with a major infrastructure project that was contemplated and has been ongoing for some time.

So, Mr. Speaker, when Members listen to this budget and this debate, Members are advised to understand this contribution in the context of eight years of good, productive and successful governance of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] We celebrate good governance in this budget.

Mr. Speaker, this Parliament today suffered a particularly painful experience. I know that the hon. Member for Fyzabad is well known for generating feelings of intense disgust sometimes when he speaks, and some creatures release some very foul odors from time to time, but today, the hon. Member for Fyzabad gave a particularly pungent contribution in this honourable House and I must say that he has today demonstrated that he can and has reached a new low in his contribution. It was disgraceful, despicable, ignorant and unacceptable for any Member of this House to make that quality contribution. And the hon. Member for Fyzabad and his leader, and all his supporters must be very ashamed of that contribution that was made today.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what was worse? Time after time he keeps getting worse and worse and he is demonstrating that he is incorrigible, meaning that he cannot be corrected it seems. I do not know what help he needs, but I would strongly suggest that that hon. Member seeks some serious psychological help. [*Desk thumping*].

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Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Couva North and other Members, when they speak as they have spoken, perhaps they might have been able to get away with some of the comments they have made back in 1976, perhaps in 1981, they still could have gotten away with it, or even in 1986. I will even extend it as far as 1991 and 1995. Some of the things that they have said, perhaps they can get away and still maintain or still have the population have some confidence that they have some degree of credibility. But they cannot get away with those comments in 2009, and I will tell you why; because they have had six years in Government and the population has had a good look at them. They now have a record and their record is what we can use to make a proper assessment of who they really are, what they think and how they would really govern.

So the population is no longer going to be victims to any lyrics, because what we can and now are able to pay attention to, is their record in Government. So we know them. We know, and remember that they were the same ones, as much care and concern they tried to demonstrate for citizens of this country, they were the ones who called teachers criminals. They were the ones, when a journalist—as I recall—asked a question that was perceived to be a penetrating one that they did not wish to answer, they were told: Ask your mother.

Mr. Speaker, I see a puzzled look on your face, perhaps you do not remember, but a journalist was told: Ask your mother. And when allegations of corruption or misbehaviour came to them, the population was told: Go and tell the police in a most disinteresting way. "Take it to the police." So we know their record, and today the hon. Minister in the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education was able to demonstrate, without a shadow of a doubt, that one quality that has persisted in their collective character is that of hypocrisy. [*Desk thumping*] Because they say one thing when they are in office and when they are in Opposition, as has been well established, they are known to say things that are very different and that characteristic is what has them sitting where they are today because the population knows them very well. They suffer a fundamental credibility problem.

The Member for Siparia in her contribution criticized the Government for offering a \$50,000 salary to the CEO of NIDCO. I do not even know if that is true, but assuming, for argument sake it is true, that was in 2009; \$50,000 to run NIDCO which is a significant company with many infrastructural projects. But do you know back in 1997/1998 thereabouts, there was a company called Tidco, 10 or 11 years ago, and at the time, there was a gentleman called Vishnu Ramlogan who was the CEO of that company and do you know what his salary was, Mr. Speaker? It was \$110,000. Ten years ago. That is the hypocrisy about which we must speak.

**Hon. Member:** That is per year?

**Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:** A month, \$110,000 a month. Do you expect these gentlemen to work for \$110,000 a year?

Mr. Speaker, and the hon. Member for Chaguanas West, we know him too you know. At the time he did not have a ministerial portfolio; perhaps he was smarter then, and he knew where to stand and where to place himself. Today I hear him crying for box drains. What is the matter? In 1995 to 2001 they did not know how to build box drains? Is that it? And they only knew—

**Mr. Warner:** I was not there.

**Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:** You did not hold a portfolio in the government, but you were very much there. You were more there than those who were there. [*Desk thumping*] I remember the hon. Member had said we are spending money like it is going out of style, that is what he said and now realizes that there is need to build box drains in rural areas. But at that time, he was at the forefront in the advocacy for the construction of stadia; four stadia. And do you know that was top priority?

Today I am hearing talk about priority, that was established as top priority because we had an under-17 tournament coming up, and that was top priority. But do you know what was worse? An IDB loan financing was available at 4 per cent interest rate, but they declined that offer and accepted instead an interest rate on the local market at 13 per cent. Do you know why? To be able to circumvent and escape IDB regulations, an IDB oversight to allow this CONCACAF the free reign to construct what it wanted to construct. And we know the story of the CONCACAF. There are two different CONCACAF, but that is another story. The hon. Member for Chaguanas West could explain it better.

I have a constituency, Chaguanas East and there are parts of that constituency that I do not know for what reason, but some people just do not like that particular part. It was part of Chaguanas and some of it was part of Caroni Central.

Mr. Speaker, that particular part; Enterprise area I am talking about, experienced the sorest and most severe form of neglect during their period of governance. When we went in there some years ago, we had to rescue the community, and I really must thank the Member for Diego Martin North/East for the role he has played in helping to upgrade some of the infrastructure in those areas. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, many of the contributions on that side have been characterized by hypocrisy, contradictions and occasionally we got a very unique oxymoron I

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would say. Those are the three qualities that would have contributed in the main; contradictions, oxymorons and hypocrisy.

The Member for Siparia again and Couva North accused us of propaganda and advertising. Unbelievable you know, because I remember very clearly at a particular point in time that almost every exercise book that our primary school children were issued by the State carried the face of the then Prime Minister, the hon. Basdeo Panday. His face and the books were all yellow and orange. So primary school children when they wrote mathematics, it was written just below Mr. Panday's chin on the copy book. And almost every pencil in the country was orange and yellow.

Everything was calculated to go after the minds of our children; that is what it was. That is propaganda. Do you know where they got some of those ideas? Do you remember they had brought in a gentleman called Mr. James Carvell, an expert from the democratic party of the United States who came up with a lot of these ideas of how they can establish themselves and how to do this marketing?

Do you remember this banner from end to end Dollar for Dollar/ I remember that very well, and to some extent it worked. Because if one looks at Dollar for dollar as compared to GATE, GATE has helped tens of thousands, over 100,000 students. Dollar for Dollar assisted an elite, small group of about 3,000. Compared to GATE and what it does, GATE is free tertiary education, full; Dollar for Dollar was a little pipsqueak of a programme when put next to GATE, but a lot of people thought Dollar for Dollar was something. All advertising and propaganda.

So again, the characteristic of hypocrisy is very clear when we look at their conduct, they have a record so that we know them and understand that their words and actions are in conflict with each other.

Mr. Speaker, the electricity sector. We have a major development in this country. By now, all Trinidad and Tobago will be familiar with the Vision 2020 and we have broken it down sector by sector and each ministry would have its own targets to meet, and within the Ministry of Public Utilities, we too have our targets in the electricity sector.

It has to be understood in the context of our established present day infrastructure. We produce 1180 megawatts of power today, and in the various sectors, you would know that the residential customers are 28 per cent; 2 per cent of our power goes to street lighting; 9 per cent to our commercial entities; light industry 23 per cent and heavy industry 38 per cent.



Mr. Speaker, it would interest you to know for a developing country that over 60 per cent of our power demand is from the industrial sector. That tells you something about this country and what we are, and if you examine our per capita consumption of electricity, you are going to see that per capita we consume more electricity than Italy and we are right there with Germany and some of the other European countries like Great Britain.

**11.15 p.m.**

We are fast moving towards becoming a fully industrialized nation and that is an important piece of information to understand, because it tells you something about the character of our country. To produce this power, to generate this power, we have five power generation stations. At Point Lisas we generate 842 megawatts. It is, what you call, a simple cycle. We use only natural gas. The Trinity Power Plant at Brechin Castle produces 225 megawatts, again natural gas; Penal 236. This is our only, what is called the combined cycle where we use natural gas and some steam turbines and we use the exhaust steam to generate additional electricity. So it is called combined cycle. We use the exhaust as fuel for some other generation. So 124 megawatts is generated by natural gas and 62 megawatts, which is considerable, is generated from steam. In Tobago we have a 21 megawatt operating on diesel and Port of Spain, 280 megawatts is the installed capacity again, natural gas with a heavy oil back-up.

That is where we are today. It is important to understand we demand 1,180 and we generate just around 1,600 megawatts of power. It is important that you generate at least 30 per cent in excess of what your demand is. That difference is what you use to ensure reliability in your system to deal with any downtime planned maintenance and even unplanned maintenance, as the case might be.

We have a number of very important projects under way as part of our development programme and we have to be able to anticipate the power demand for those projects, because more and more the heavy industry and light industry will be making greater and greater demands on our electricity system. We expect an expansion in the housing sector, because of the number of homes that are being built and with it there will be an expansion in demand among residential customers. That will be gradual and steady.

Commercial generally tends to go with the residential. Wherever you have residential areas, commercial activity tends to take place and increases in demand in the commercial sector will also take place. Light industry, like the O'Meara Industrial Estate, Diamond Vale Industrial Estate, those kinds of industrial estates also tend to be gradual and steady. Heavy industry tends to make dramatic increases in demand.

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One heavy industrial plant can demand as much as 450 megawatts of power. That is a significant jump. That is about ten times what is consumed in all of Grenada, all of Barbados. One plant that consumes what all of the islands put together cannot consume or do not demand. And we have a number of heavy industry projects that are under way. The aluminum smelter, for example, will demand 460 megawatts. That is a big jump. The desal plant, which we anticipate over the next few years, will demand 92 megawatts—all four for them. They will not all come on at one time. Twenty-three megawatts is what is required for one 20-million gallons per day plant; all four of them together will demand 92 megawatts.

The gas to polypropylene project, together with other petro-chemical industries, will demand just around 225 at Point Lisas. Right now there is an upgrade of Petrotrin, which was being referred to earlier. We have already contemplated that and calculated that into our projections. That will demand 96 megawatts. At Tamana, the light industries and downstream aluminium will demand 22 megawatts and other light manufacturing exercise. And as you know, in Tobago, the Cove Industrial Estate together with the Studley Park Industrial Estate, both of them will demand an increasing, about 15 or 20 megawatts all told in Tobago, new demand.

So if we have new demand, we must have more power because today we only have 1,600 megawatts of power being generated. So we have to expand our generation capacity, and we are doing exactly that. Right now under construction at Union Estate is a 750-megawatt power generation plant, again combined cycle. The advantage of combined cycle is that it allows you to use your natural gas more efficiently.

The first 450 megawatts of power will be generated using natural gas and the remaining 270 will be generated using the exhaust steam. So together we will get 720 megawatts of power coming out of that plant, providing power not only to the aluminium smelter, but also to the national grid. We already have six generation units in the country and we are proceeding full speed ahead with that particular project.

We will also expand the Trinity Power Plant. There is a 225 natural gas; we will add 113 megawatts and that 113 will be combined cycle, using the steam. So there will be no additional demand for gas at Trinity, similarly at Point Lisas—842; we will add 104. Only steam will be used as fuel. And we are also right now discussing with the Ministry of Works and Transport a site for a Sea Lots power plant which will be the replacement plant for the Wrightson Road power plant and that, we expect to be a 720-megawatt plant, again combined cycle. We also have contemplated a new power plant for Wallerfield, but that will take place sometime later, around 2013.

All told, the total generation capacity to 2020 in Trinidad will be 3,320 megawatts. That is a significant increase and the power generation is in context of a development plan in the industrial sector and also taking into account our increases projected among residential customers, commercial activity and light manufacturing.

We have done our work. This Government has done its work and we know what our numbers are. [*Desk thumping*] We have done a very careful analysis and our total demand to 2020 will be 2,461 megawatts, approximately, and again we are respecting the relationship, exceeding demand by at least 30 per cent, making sure that we have that ratio in order.

Again, in terms of reporting successes, in a matter of months, perhaps in the next one or two months at most, we will be commissioning a new power generation plant in Tobago at Cove Industrial Estate, 64 megawatts. [*Desk thumping*] So the construction has been under way and we are well on course in terms of achieving our targets in the electricity sector in the context of Vision 2020. [*Desk thumping*]

All of that must be supported by a transmission system and new transmission infrastructure. Power has to be moved around and that we have been doing since 2005. We are in the process of installing new 220 kv circuits; we have completed 61 kilometres out of 109 kilometres; 60 per cent of our new 220 kv. Take note, that is a historical number. Up until now, since the establishment of T&TEC, we have only had power transmitted up to 132 kv. It is more efficient to transmit power over long distances with a higher kilo voltage and so we have gone up to 220, first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, again indicating and representing some of our development factors.

We have new 132 kv; we have completed 40 per cent; 57 kilometres out of 163 kilometres; new 66 kv circuits; we have completed 15 out of 60 kilometres in lines, and we have constructed as well 14 new substations, 50 per cent completed in terms of our transmission and infrastructure.

In summary, to 2020, our power generation and electricity system, we are looking at eight power generation stations; 107 high voltage substations; 1,627 kilometres of transmission lines and cables; 6,970 kilometres of distribution lines and cables. In short, Trinidad and Tobago will have the most sophisticated power generation electricity sector in the English speaking Caribbean and in the wider Caribbean, perhaps only Puerto Rico will have a system more sophisticated than Trinidad and Tobago.

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Indeed, we are well on our way to achieving our targets, Vision 2020. These things we propose to do, utilizing a power purchase agreement. Government equity will be a major factor, together with private sector involvement.

There are a number of points that also need to be addressed. The AMI, Advanced Metering Infrastructure, again that is a new technology. Out of the 400,000 meters, we have installed over 380,000. So we are about 95 per cent complete with that particular project. A new call centre has been established which we advertised, because the citizens were having some problems and we have made an intervention, collaborating with Direct One and citizens can now access T&TEC to make their troubled calls and we are providing assurances that they will get someone to speak to within 90 seconds. We are using infrared technology to detect faults in lines even before we get outages. We are installing animal guards and other protective mechanisms to ensure that animals do not access our lines and create outages. We have done quite a bit of infrastructure work to ensure that we offer the most reliable service to our citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

The water sector: From as far back as 1995, the then government—this was the under prime ministership of the hon. Patrick Manning—recognized that there was a management problem at the Water and Sewerage Authority and as a form of intervention we made an arrangement to bring in expert management. In addition to that, what we did was, part of the deal was that there ought to have been no debt at WASA, so the Government cleared WASA's debt and handed over to Severn Trent, an organization without any debt. A clean bill of health in terms of its finances was given. Do you know what happened? The PNM left office and the UNC came into office and they inherited a WASA with zero debt. Do you know what we met when we came back into office in 2001? Would you believe the debt of WASA, when we came in, stood at \$4.2 billion? It took them six years to generate a debt of \$4.2 billion. And a few days ago, the hon. Member for Couva North could ask if it is costing \$250,000 per person. Do you know why, assuming his numbers are correct? A lot of WASA's expenditure goes to servicing that \$4.2 billion debt. We have to pay interest on the debt. And the hon. Member for Oropouche West today did, in fact, mention about getting into a cycle of debt.

WASA's income goes to servicing that \$4.2 billion debt. The question is, can we, in fact, say that we have \$4.2 billion worth of improvement in the water service? They promised us something called "Water for All" on the basis of what? One desalination plant producing 20 million gallons of water per day? That was a fraud. That was all marketing. Lyrics; nothing but lyrics, because we know that it is far more complicated to be able to provide a better quality water for our

citizens. We know it involves transmission lines; replacement and new transmission lines; we know we must have a metering system; we know we must expand our water production, not by 20 million gallons, but by 200 million gallons. It cannot be a single desalination plant, but they sold that to this population and, mercifully for this country, the population has come to know them so that we no longer are victims to any of their empty lyrical content.

We have been working hard over the last several months to make some interventions, again to ensure that the quality of management at WASA is improved.

**11.30 p.m.**

The board has taken some very tough decisions to ensure that we improve the quality of our management. If you do not have good quality management, no amount of money you put into WASA will give you the outcome that you want or need. You will never get good value for money unless you have sound management. So your very first order of business is to fix the organization and that is what we have been doing.

We have produced a governance manual. I would love to be able to read for you what two persons have had to say about this governance manual. This will guide the conduct of all business in WASA. Anybody who wants to do business with WASA will be guided by this governance manual. I will read for you what one person had to say. Time is short.

I have had the opportunity to participate in the development of the Authorities Governance Manual in a unique achievement for a public sector organization. The manual amongst other things sets out the framework for the ethical and proper conduct of the business of the authority by its board and management in consultation with the duly recognized unions. The tremendous value of the manual is also found in its entrenchment of sound principles for the promotion of management/labour cooperation (PROMALCO).

My association views this initiative undertaken by WASA as progressive and evidence of the authority's willingness and commitment to transform itself holistically.

We remain dedicated to the task at hand and such efforts that will result in a secure future for our members as well as the authority. Having regard to the aforementioned statements we are fully supportive of the authority's governance manual given the intent to create a sound governance culture within the organization.

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I wish to personally extend my congratulations to the Chairman of WASA for this bold initiative which will no doubt set the standard for other public sector organizations.

Do you have an idea who signed this letter? This letter is signed with kind regards Jennifer Baptiste Primus, President of the PSA. [*Desk thumping*] We have similar testimonials from Mr. James Lambert and Mr. Andrew Dardaine, NUGFW and the EPA. We have worked in close collaboration in the transformation of the organization and we are already beginning to see the results in the conduct of the organization. We are confident now that as we put money into the organization by way of investment in infrastructure, we can and will get better results.

Gone are the days when you will pour money into WASA and not get the outcomes because of a less than well-functioning organization. We are well on the way. I think that our achievements in WASA in terms of the transformation exercise over the last 13 months have been what one might call “an outrageous success”. We are extremely happy for the last 13 months of work. [*Desk thumping*] As you know, we have a development programme and construction of desalination plants. I can advise all Members who are interested, that given our experience with the last desalination plant we tried to build and all the issues that arose there from, we decided to be very careful in the procurement.

We went on the international market looking for an independent procurement expert, someone to come to advise and guide our process. His intervention has been invaluable to the process. And now as a consequence of his intervention we are moving forward and ensuring that the best procurement strategies are employed. We are at the point of signing a contract with programme managers responsible for the desalination plant. Their role would be to supervise construction once it has started and oversee and prepare our tender documents, do some preliminary and geotechnical surveys and water testing. That would be done over the next few months, then we go to construction.

It has taken a little more time only because we are very careful as we step forward, understanding what our experience has been on the last occasion. However, in the short-term we have negotiated with Desalcott for the expansion of the existing plant and we will go to 40 million gallons over the next three months. That would provide some significant relief to San Fernando and further south. It will also mean that some of the water that comes from Caroni can now be directed to Port of Spain as to improve the water supply along the East-West Corridor into Port of Spain while the water from Point Lisas will improve the north/south water supply.

In anticipation of the desalination plant, we have also developed a plan that would give us some good results in the short-term. It is called a management action plan. The Member for Chaguanas West asked—we have identified very specific projects that we must do. We have identified 51 wells that would be new water sources. Some of them have been started by WASA and the work has not been completed. I can give you examples. These wells are located in Moka, Tucker Valley, Valsayn, Aripo, Guanapo, Cumuto, Matura, Freeport, Carlsen Field, Las Lomas, Mamoral, Caparo, Talparo, River Estate, St. Augustine, Brazil, Todds Road, Point Fortin, Guapo, Fyzabad, and Grande Riviere. We have identified specifically 51 wells in which we have confidence.

We are utilizing the services of a gentleman from France who has great international experience. His intervention has been of great value to us in helping us to change some of our engineering philosophies. He has introduced good technical information allowing us to make better decisions. We have been moving forward without wells. We also propose to purchase five portable water treatment plants which would be located at La Fortune, Clarke Road, Matura, Blue Basin and Fyzabad. These are areas where we have a source but we need to be able to treat the water. We may have a ground source or a river source, but we need to treat the water. Those five will give us 3 million gallons.

More important than the total, is the strategic location of these water sources together with three portable desalination plants at Erin, Mayaro and Cove, would give us 5.5 million gallons of water. One may ask why we are proceeding to put portable plants while we have desalination plants to come. The answer is that these in the long-term will give us back-up supply for emergency cases. They will allow us to get to our citizens a water supply in a shorter period of time and in the long-term they would allow us to make emergency interventions. They do not cost so much, but in the long-term their value would be measured in that they will create for us redundancy. Whenever we have crisis we can move around these equipment to ensure that we are able to better supply our citizens.

We have also identified 91 kilometres of high leakage mains for the first time. I have those high leakage mains listed here. I can tell you. They are El Socorro, 7.2 km; Western Main Road, 12.2; Old Dinsley, 4.1; Tucker Valley, 8.0; Old Hollis, Maracas Royal Road, 12.0 km. We have identified specific kilometres of pipelines that need to be changed. These are the ones that are most culpable in our unaccounted for water leakage problems. We have also identified 85 kilometres of new pipeline that we would have to put in place. We have done the work and we are now in a position where we can proceed to develop this infrastructure on the

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basis of sound analysis and well-prepared and well-developed plans. We are comfortable that we will be getting good value for money.

Among other things we are doing in the water sector, we do have 6-month targets and 18-month targets that we will meet. In the future, God willing, I will do a statement in Parliament giving further details on some of those development projects within the water sector: The Management Action Plan together with an update on what we have been doing in WASA and the strategic plan including the desalination plant. I must. It would be very difficult for me not to respond to some of these accusations that have been made in terms of how we embark on our work in the context of the distribution of services.

It is very painful to listen to any Member talk about discrimination in the context of provision of services. We have installed 77,000 new street lamps over the last several years. Do you know where they have gone? In Tobago, 3,500. Let me go with North Trinidad first, 10,985; East Trinidad, 21,286; Central Trinidad, 16,059 new lamps and in South Trinidad, 25,756 new lamps. The whole country is lit. In fact, sometimes they accuse us of putting too many lights. What is the problem that they have? We have upgraded lamps as well.

We also embarked on a programme of lighting public spaces and recreation grounds and so on. I want to give you a sample of some of the grounds that we have lit.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members, the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Public Utilities has expired.

*Motion made,* That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 10 minutes. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and may I say my special thanks to my colleagues. I must mention some of the grounds that we have lit. The Aranguez Savannah, Toruba Recreation Ground, Esmeralda Recreation Ground in Cunupia and New Settlement—when that was lit it was in Chaguanas at the time and the Member of Parliament was Manohar Ramsaran—New Settlement Ground by Rainbow Palace in Chaguanas, Ragoonanan Road Recreation Ground, Couva Recreation Ground by KFC, Tableland Recreation Ground, Tableland Recreation Local Road, Bamboo No. 2 Recreation Ground, Carapo Recreation Ground, Rousillac Recreation Ground, Salazar Trace in Point Fortin. Hear this one, Mr. Speaker! The hon. Member for Chaguanas West was



ecstatic when we provided lights to the Green Park Recreation Ground in Felicity. That paved the way for his great success in the Borough of Chaguanas that he has since been able to experience. [*Desk thumping*] That gave him the kind of credibility, I imagine, that he was looking for, for so long. He is a successful MP today largely as a consequence of the intervention that has been made by this Government at Green Park. We are very, very happy to be able to offer services to all our citizens. [*Desk thumping*]

We do not see what some of them see. I do not know why and how they manage to see what they come and claim. Over the last several years you would be familiar with the National Social Development Programme (NSDP). Very successful. We have been in electricity, for example. Since 2002, we have done 1,631 electrification projects at a cost of \$180 million. Those projects are intended to provide electricity to communities that may not have—the way T&TEC works, if you require new infrastructure the Government cannot and has not been giving T&TEC a subvention. T&TEC has to make its way. Any customer requiring infrastructure will have to pay for that infrastructure; a portion of the infrastructure cost they have to pay. What the Government has been doing in favour of those communities that may not be able to afford is intervening and providing the funding to allow for the introduction of new infrastructure in some of these communities.

This week the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla reported that a major project was done in Cumuto/Manzanilla and tried his very best to give credit to no one. He was grateful but he was grateful to no one. Let me advise him that this programme was conceptualized and presented to the Government and country by the hon. Prime Minister further to a number of walks—about that he would have done some years ago and so recognizing the need and his compassion, concern and care for the people, this is a programme where we would have put our money in support of average citizens.

The same thing can be said in the water sector. We have a number of projects to improve and those are projects that we will continue to work on to complete.

**11.45 p.m.**

We also wire people's houses. We pay contractors. If there are citizens who require that their homes be rewired, the Government is prepared to pay for that and all you need to do is to apply and demonstrate that you qualify. I have read the criteria to this Parliament before. I am prepared to do so again. Time is short this evening, but clearly identified criteria qualify our citizens. So far, since 2005,

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there have been 4,131 homes, belonging to 4,131 citizens of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, throughout the length and breadth of this country.

Mr. Warner, it may interest you to know, just for posterity almost, about our house wiring. I will just call three constituencies. From 2007 to now, in Cumuto/Manzanilla, we have wired 152 homes; in Princes Town, we have wired 174 homes and, in Fyzabad, we have wired 137 homes. [*Interruption*] This is the same Fyzabad, and we did not go with a meter to measure colour; we just wired the citizens' homes. I do not know, with this breathalyser the Member is bringing, if he can get some device to measure when someone is speaking and the words are not true. Perhaps the Member, in his international experience, can identify a device to measure untruths. Then we may have a better Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much for the opportunity to make this contribution. Once again, as I close, I congratulate the Minister of Finance for the brilliant work that she has been doing in helping to keep this country stable as we move steadfastly towards Vision 2020.

Thank you very much.

**The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I join this debate, at this hour, 11.47 p.m., and it would be remiss of me if I did not congratulate the Minister of Finance who has presented an excellent budget. Not only has the hon. Minister presented an excellent budget, but she has managed the country's finances in the last fiscal year in very difficult circumstances. The last 12 months have not been easy in terms of commodity prices and the Minister of Finance deserves special commendation for her management of the economy over the last 12 months, which has resulted in a minimal decline in GDP when compared to constant prices.

No one would have known, 12 months ago, that the world would collapse in a global economic crisis. No one would have known that oil prices would drop from over US \$140 to US \$35. No one could possibly have known that. In fact, the experts had all predicted that oil prices would remain in excess of US \$100 per barrel throughout 2009. Despite the doom and gloom predictions of Members opposite, we have already seen a recovery of the price of oil back up to US \$70. You will recall, Mr. Speaker, when it dropped to US \$35, that those so-called experts said it would drop to US \$25.

Mr. Speaker, if I may digress, I switched on the television this morning to Channel 3 and saw a particular individual who has been criticizing the PNM for the last 40 years. He had been involved, at some point in our distant past, in an

election campaign against the PNM, yet those persons are held up as being impartial, dispassionate, neutral and so on. I switched channels. I know the gentleman.

I switched the channel and saw Patrick Watson, COP activist, who speaks on COP platforms, criticizing the PNM, masquerading as an impartial, dispassionate, neutral, objective, unbiased [*Interruption*] professorial commentator. Thank you, Member for Oropouche East.

When you read the papers, when you listen to the radio, when you watch the television and listen to all the economists and commentators, if they have not contested elections against the PNM and lost, or campaigned against the PNM and lost, or attempted to campaign against the PNM and lost, there is nothing else. When I look at all these economists and commentators, they are all violently and bitterly opposed to the People's National Movement, whether they are newspaper editors, journalists or so-called economists. Every single one of them has either been a defeated candidate against the PNM, has been involved in election campaigns against us, or is going to be defeated in the next election. Thank you again, Member for Oropouche East. He knows.

I have to listen to these people. I prefer to listen to the Member for St. Augustine. At least I know he is a politician. I know where he stands. He is an Opposition politician. I do not mind listening to him. He may talk nonsense, but I know where he stands. He does not pretend that he is not an Opposition politician. That is what he is.

I have to listen to all these pseudo wannabes, never were, have been, never will be, failed politicians and deposit losers. Someone has to tell me that I must accept what they say when everything they say is contaminated and coloured with bias, prejudice and sour grapes. Some of them cannot even win a village council election, but they want to tell us how to run the country.

I was digressing. As I said, oil has recovered to US \$70 and gas is now back up over US \$3.00. I expect, based on all the information available, that natural gas prices will continue to recover and oil prices will stabilize and may very well increase in the coming 12 months.

I do not have time for the prophets of doom and gloom. As far as I am concerned, the worst is behind us. If you look all around the world, you hear talk about a global economic recovery and I am satisfied that our future will be quite bright and be nothing like the prophets of doom and gloom are telling us. The less said about them the better.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Mary King.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Yes. That is another one. You know them well, Member for Oropouche East.

Let me deal with some of the issues brought up in this debate. Today, the Member for Siparia made a sterling dissertation, or so she thought, about the right of citizens to criticize judgments and judges. According to the hon. Member for Siparia, it is a blatant contempt of court to dare to criticize the ruling of a judge, and that a government must never do so. In fact, the hon. Member accused the Attorney General of using the cover of Parliament to attack the Honourable Justice Narine.

Mr. Speaker, the right of citizens to criticize judges and judgments is trite law. I think I had better read into the record the authorities on this matter. I have a little argument with the distinguished Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara who has advised me that the leading authority on the right of citizens to criticize judges is the case of *Ambard v the Attorney General*, a 1936 case, a Privy Council decision. We have a little argument going.

The case I shall refer to is that of *Regina v Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, Ex parte Blackburn (No. 2)* (1968). That is the case I shall refer to. I am now going to read from the text of that judgment—Blackburn (No. 2). One Mr. Blackburn had complained to the court in England that a Mr. Quintin Hogg, wrote an article in the *Punch*, a magazine, dated February 1968, under the heading “Political Parley”. Mr. Hogg was accused of contempt. This is the judgment of Lord Denning, the Master of the Rolls at the time. He referred to what Mr. Hogg had said. This is what Mr. Hogg said. I am quoting from Lord Denning. Let me read the salient passages in the article.

"The recent judgment of the Court of Appeal is a strange example of the *blindness* which sometimes descends on the best of judges. The legislation of 1960 and thereafter has been rendered virtually unworkable by the unrealistic, contradictory and, in the leading case, erroneous decisions of the courts, including the Court of Appeal. So what do they do? *Apologize* for the expense and trouble to which they have put the police to? Not a bit of it. Lambast the police for not enforcing the law *which they themselves had rendered unworkable* and which is now the subject of a Bill, the manifest purpose of which is to alter it."—and so on.

Mr. Hogg made a scathing condemnation of judges and the Court of Appeal. What did the judges say? This is what Lord Denning said.

"That article is certainly critical of this court. In so far as it referred to the Court of Appeal, it is admittedly erroneous. The court did not...give any decision which was erroneous...But is the article a contempt of court?"

This is Lord Denning speaking.

"This is the first case, so far as I know, where this court has been called on to consider an allegation of contempt against itself. It is a jurisdiction which undoubtedly belongs to us but which we will most sparingly exercise: more particularly as we ourselves have an interest in the matter. Let me say at once that we will never use this jurisdiction as a means to uphold our own dignity...Nor will we use it to suppress those who speak against us. We do not fear criticism, nor do we resent it. For there is something far more important at stake."

### **12.00 midnight**

I know the Member for Oropouche East is a student of law. You must know who Lord Denning is. The famous Lord Denning, Master of the Rolls, quoted in virtually every textbook on law.

"It is no less than freedom of speech itself..."

This is the salient point. This is what Lord Denning said:

"It is the right of every man in Parliament or out of it, in the Press or over the broadcast, to make fair comment, even outspoken comment, on matters of public interest. Those who comment can deal faithfully with all that is done in a court of justice. They can say we are mistaken,"—they can say—"our decisions erroneous, whether they are subject to appeal or not. All we would ask is that those who criticize us will remember that, from the nature of our office, we cannot reply to their criticisms."

What Denning was saying is that you can make the strongest criticism possible of a judge and of a judgment, but what he went on to say is that what the court will not tolerate is a personal attack on a judge.

All the Attorney General did today was to criticize the decision of Justice Narine. He did not make any personal attack on the judge. He did not vilify the judge. The significance of this ruling, which has stood for the last 41 years—every one of the three judges—this is a Court of Appeal decision—concurred. They may not like what people say about them. They may not appreciate it, but they recognize the right of people inside and outside of Parliament to criticize judgments and judges, as long as you do not get personal about it.

The Member for Siparia needs some education in law. She needs to go back to law school. She needs to re-educate herself. This is a judgment that has been standing for 41 years, *Regina v Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, Ex parte Blackburn* (No. 2) (1968) 2 Q.B., All England 319. [*Interruption*]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Standing Order 68—

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Standing Order 68, [*Interruption*] Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** I know you are well within yourself, but that last remark has to be withdrawn.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Mr. Speaker, I apologize. That is like under the dress tail. Mr. Speaker, I will submit to this—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** That is the Speaker's Standing Order.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** I am finished with you. I apologized. "You still there?" Mr. Speaker, I would speak to you. Clearly, the Member for Caroni East is hard of hearing.

The law that I just quoted is trite law; the case that the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara contends is the leading authority. *Ambard v the Attorney General* speaks about justice not being a cloistered virtue. That is a 1936 case; 63 years ago. These decisions have stood the test of time. Anybody inside and outside of Parliament, you do not need parliamentary privilege, can criticize judgments of a judge. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Warner:** seventy-three years.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** seventy-three years, I am so sorry. Thank you for the correction. The only thing you have to be careful about is that you cannot vilify or personally demonize a judge, but you can certainly criticize judicial decisions and their judgments. That is just foolishness that the Member for Siparia tried to make us believe, as per usual, in this House today.

The other thing I want to submit to this Parliament is that there were two cases entitled *Regina vs Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, Ex parte Blackburn (No. 1)*. That was the first one. They were looking at the power of a court to give instructions to the police; a very instructive case because it goes to the root of the decision of Justice Narine. In *Regina v Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis (No. 1)*, the court has been asked to look at a situation where the police were not—this is England again—enforcing gambling laws on a particular street. There was gambling taking place, but the then police commissioner was of the view that the gambling was petty; that it was not significant and he had issued a memo to his constables telling them: "Don't worry with that, ignore that. Don't bother to enforce the gambling laws with respect to that particular locality because the offences are petty." Mr. Blackburn, who obviously did not like gambling and did

not like the things associated with gambling and all the attendant evils that it brings, went to court and he called upon the court to issue an order of mandamus, compelling the police to enforce the gambling laws.

The judges looked at it very, very carefully because they made the point that they understood the separation of powers and the courts are always very reluctant to interfere with the discretionary authority of the police. But in this particular case, it was obvious that the police were not enforcing the law. There was no doubt that the laws were being broken. It was not a mere allegation. It was a fact that laws were being broken and in those circumstances, the court felt compelled to intervene and to order the police to enforce the law.

What has happened in this particular case with this Abu Bakr affidavit is that the judge has decided to direct the police to investigate a matter, not to enforce a breach of the law. I am not sure the judge can do that. I am sure that this matter will be fully ventilated and tested in another place, but I am not sure that the judge has that kind of discretion; that he can order the police to investigate an unproven allegation. I am not sure about that. I am sure that matter will be dealt with in another place at another time.

Again, I think the Member for Siparia has to go back to law school and do some remedial education, because the legal thesis that she presented today was built on froth. It is based on a false premise. It is frivolous, vexatious and abusive of the process; completely abusive. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** And I hope now we would come to the general principles of government policy and administration as indicated by the Appropriation Bill and Estimates.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** I would most certainly do that. I just wanted to dispense with that nonsense and put it where it belongs.

Let me just deal with the Member for Fyzabad, very quickly. I understand he was carrying on about the costs to repair certain roads as reported in an administrative report of the Ministry of Works and Transport for the 2007/2008 period. The Member for Fyzabad was ranting and raving, so I am told. I was not in the Chamber, but it was reported to me by both Members on this side and Members on your side that you were fulminating, ranting and raving and frothing about the variations in costs. [*Interruption*]

**Dr. Browne:** Foaming.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Foaming; that is what I have been told. He was carrying on at a rate: how is it possible? This needs to be investigated and so on. He of all people; that hon. Member was a junior Minister or Parliamentary Secretary. What were you?

**Mr. Sharma:** Whatever!

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Whatever. He was something in the Ministry of Works and Transport under the UNC. I cannot remember what it was. He was in the Ministry of Works and Transport and he had in-depth knowledge of that Ministry's operations. He, of all people will know that you cannot whimsically allocate a unit rate or a unit cost to the construction of roads, based simply on the length of the road. Some roads need to be completely and reconstructed. You know that. Some roads like those tasker roads in south Trinidad that have been converted from a track into a proper first-class road need a completely new foundation. Some have no foundations at all. Some roads need to be strengthened such as the Plum Mitan Road. I mentioned it to the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla. I told him: "What nonsense is your colleague talking?" That section of the Plum Mitan Road, just one kilometre where we have to repair five major landslips, will cost \$15 million. The Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla knows that. Some roads require extensive slope stabilization and retaining walls.

Some roads even require box drains, as we heard from the Member for Chaguanas West. Some just need resheeting. Anybody knows that. Any fool will know that, far less an hon. Member like the Member for Fyzabad; a distinguished Member like the Member for Fyzabad, who is no fool. Any fool will know that. I am not referring to him. Any fool will know that you cannot whimsically allocate a unit rate to a road; just stand in space and look into a crystal ball and say all roads will cost the same. They vary because of topography, geography, geology, the condition of the road, the type of road and the traffic on the road. It is not a one size fits all. [*Interruption*] No, I am not giving way to you; it is too late in the night. I think for the Member for Fyzabad to represent in this House that something is wrong with different roads costing different amounts, is purely mischievous. He certainly knows better. He is purely mischievous. He very well knows better.

It brings me—I am seeing a comment by the Member for Fyzabad—to a comment made by the Member for Chaguanas, whose presentation was not very good. You could do better than that, Member for Chaguanas West. I know you were called into service a little sooner than you thought, but a man of your experience. You are the Vice-President of FIFA. I am sure when Havalange or one



of them call you and say: "Jack is your turn tuh talk." You will just jump in and give them a 60 minutes or two-hour presentation. You have all your information. Hon. Member, "yuh let meh down tonight" Call for box drain? Is that what you are calling for? All your figures for foreign affairs were palpably wrong, false, erroneous, incorrect and bad.

I want to read from a document. In just the last three years alone, the Ministry of Works and Transport has constructed 31, rather than one, brand new first-class dual carriageway reinforced concrete bridges; 31. I would read out the names, because they have a habit of saying that it is not true: B11, Plymouth; B18, Windward Road, Tobago; B112, Windward Road, Tobago, Hillsborough area; B117, Windward Road Argyle, Tobago; B112, Blenheim Bridge, Tobago; B11, Cedar Hill Road, Trinidad; B12, Ciperó Road; B446, SS Erin Road; B175, Southern Main Road; B180, and Southern Main Road. Those are all brand new reinforced concrete bridges. Member for Chaguanas West, are you blind? You have never driven on any of these roads? Have you never seen the work that the PNM Government has done in the last three years?

**Mr. Warner:** No, I have not.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** You are flying too much. You are a frequent flyer. You are not in Trinidad enough. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Warner:** I would give you some miles.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** B122, SS Erin Road; B124, SS Erin Road; B23, Morne Diablo, Quarry Road; B3, 24 Cunapo Southern Main Road; and B16, Moruga Road. Hear the areas; rural areas. The Member speaks of rural neglect. You are a hypocrite, Sir. It continues: B11, La Lune Road; B168, Paria Main Road; B11, Hololo Road; B26, Southern Main Road; B241, Paria Main Road; B235, Paria Main Road; B25, Caura Royal Road; B115, Caura Royal Road; B215, Toco Main Road; B119, Toco Main Road; B121, Toco Main Road; B219, Toco Main Road; B11, San Raphael; B120, Erin Road; and B21, La Lune Road; all in the rural areas, 31 reinforced concrete bridges. That is just one of the bridge programmes of the Ministry of Works and Transport.

**12.15 a.m.**

Mr. Speaker, in fact, we have built over 50 new bridges in the last few years, and I have to come to this Parliament and hear nonsense about what we have done, and you want box drains. It pains me! This debate has fallen flat. It fell flat with the contribution of the Leader of the Opposition. I was shocked. I was not

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going to listen to him. I got a bit bored early o'clock, but I jumped up when I heard him say the UNC solution to infrastructure development is to patch potholes. That is what the Member said. He said that is their approach to infrastructure development—patch potholes. He was saying it in the context when he was complaining that this PNM Government is resurfacing the Churchill Roosevelt Highway from Barataria to Aranguéz. He was complaining. He said that we had paved that road many times. That is not true. That road was last resurfaced many years ago.

The surface had deteriorated to the point where it was becoming dangerous. It was necessary for us to strip the road and then pave between the Barataria Flyover and the Aranguéz traffic lights which we have completed. The Member for Couva North was complaining that all this PNM Government is doing is paving roads. That is a compliment. He said what we should do instead is patch potholes, and I had to listen to that. They spent \$1 billion through the Tourism and Industrial Development Company—a company with no expertise whatsoever in road paving. The UNC spent \$1,000 million to avoid the strictures of the Central Tenders Board Ordinance. They spent \$1,000 million paving roads in the year 2000 to win an election. They paved dead dogs in the road; and they paved over cars. If you were standing in the road, they would have paved you also. That is what happened in the year 2000. We all know about that.

In fact, further, I heard a Minister of Works say in this House that the bill for the asphalt was more than the production of Petrotrin in that year. In other words, it was scientifically impossible. I heard that in this House before. When you look at the amount of bitumen produced by Petrotrin in that year, and you try to work it out into the amount of asphalt that was paid for, scientifically they paid for more asphalt than Petrotrin produced bitumen. Bitumen is just one component of asphalt concrete. That is what went on in 2000. This whole country saw that. That is what contributed to the collapse of the UNC government in 2001 when the Member for Tabaquite and two other Members walked out of the UNC government. It was because of that nonsense that was taking place, and I have to stand in this House and hear the Member for Couva North say that the PNM Government is paving too many roads and we should patch potholes instead. I switched off one time. I mean, the debate had gone flat before that, but that was the end for me. If I had a hearing aid, I would have put it in and then turned it off so that I would not have to listen to him. The debate has really fallen flat.

The fact of the matter is, the Minister of Finance highlighted some of the infrastructure achievements of this Government and those are facts. As the

Minister of Information said, facts are stubborn things; they do not go away. It is a fact that the PNM administration has completed phase II of the Churchill Roosevelt Highway and the Uriah Butler Highway Interchange. That is a fact! [*Desk thumping*] Every time you drive down the highway that fact is staring you right in your face. It is a fact that the construction of that elevated west to south ramp and the construction of the Bamboo Flyover have reduced the travel time for persons travelling from Port of Spain to East Trinidad, and from Port of Spain to South Trinidad by 45 minutes. Those are facts that you cannot get away from. That was promised by the Minister of Finance in last year's budget statement, and that was delivered in fiscal 2009. Promise made, promise kept. [*Desk thumping*]

What about the water taxi? I hear they are travelling on the water taxi now. I hear some of them are just coming into Port of Spain and going back down just for the fun of it. That is what I was told. Member for Oropouche, is that a fact? You are going up and down; you are taking a cruise. That is what I heard. Again, the introduction of a coastal Water Taxi Service was promised by the Minister of Finance in the last budget statement; promise made, promise kept. Now, you can travel in air-conditioned comfort from San Fernando to Port of Spain and back in 55 minutes. It is a smooth ride as if you are on a luxury liner. Promise made; promise kept by the People's National Movement administration.

Mr. Speaker, what about the bus service? When the PNM Government came into office in December 2001, what was happening in Trinidad and Tobago? They had some yellow monstrosities—smoky with no windows; foreign used about 20 or 30 years old—for the rural communities. That is what your government thought of your constituents. They had a set of old foreign used, defective and broken down buses. That is your government's contribution to mass transit in this country—a set of old broken down foreign used buses.

At that time, the record would show that the fleet of available buses to PTSC numbered 80, down from almost 300 when the PNM demitted office in 1995. How many buses do we have now? There are 310 air-conditioned, modern, top of the line buses. [*Interruption*] I am reminded that they have digital flat screen. We have quadrupled the fleet of available buses in this country.

We have increased the number of routes from just over 20 routes to over 100 routes and these routes are being serviced by PTSC. That is what this PNM Government has been able to achieve in the last couple years. We have quadrupled the number of buses in this country. We are taking the fleet up to 400. Cabinet has approved the acquisition of a further 85 buses a couple weeks ago. We are taking it up to 400—from 80 under the UNC to 400 under the PNM. That is

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performance PNM style. Some of the buses are designed for differently-abled persons. They have wheelchair access and every modern convenience. That is performance PNM style. Yes we care. That is why it was so difficult for me to listen to the contribution of the hon. Leader of the Opposition. He really did not say anything. He did not say much.

Before I conclude, I think it is incumbent upon me to deal with some of the remarks made by my colleague, the Member for Diego Martin West. I must say that when I listened to the contribution of the Member for Diego Martin West and when I read it afterwards, I was a bit taken aback. In fact, in my opinion, when you read the hon. Member's contribution, in several parts of his contribution you would get the impression that he was speaking as if he was not part of the PNM administration. That is how it came across. He came across as being very angry. He made some statements which I am sure when he reflects upon them, he would realize that some of the statements he made are really not sustainable.

The hon. Member for Diego Martin West was a member of the Cabinet until sometime in 2008. It was in 2008 that the hon. Member for Diego Martin West ran into difficulty with the Prime Minister and was dismissed from the Cabinet. *[Interruption]* I am speaking facts. Mr. Speaker, I really have a difficulty listening to one of my colleagues, a PNM Member, making statements about the PNM Government getting a bonanza and blowing it. He said that much of what the Government has done—I think I would tell my hon. colleague that I really think he needs to read his *Hansard* and see what he said and do some introspection, because to make a statement “much of what the Government has done has brought no political credit”—He was a member of the Government until mid 2008. I think it is an unsustainable statement. I think in his cold sober moments he would realize that what he said is not accurate.

I have some advice for him, and he may not wish to take it, but he really needs to do some introspection because the statements that my colleague is making are just not accurate or sustainable.

Let me just deal with some specific issues. Some allegations were made with respect to projects that are being undertaken by UDeCott. One of the statements made by my hon. colleague was that in the tendering for the Ministry of Legal Affairs Tower, the lowest bidder did not get the contract. That is a fact. In fact, these things have been fully ventilated in this Parliament in the last budget debate.

In fact, it was the Member for Tabaquite who spoke at length on issues surrounding the contract for the award of the Ministry of Legal Affairs building

which, in fact, led to the establishment of the Commission of Enquiry into the construction sector. So, these things are not new. These things have been in the public domain for at least 12 months and have been fully ventilated both inside and outside of Parliament, and in the recently concluded hearings of the Commission of Enquiry, but it is worth repeating, because people tend to forget. One of the things that my hon. colleague said was that in the tender for the Ministry of Legal Affairs building, the lowest tenderer did not get the contract. That is true. He said that the second lowest tenderer also did not get it, and that is also true. He said that the third lowest tenderer got the job at a price of \$368 million which was some \$60 million more than the two other contractors who had qualified to do the job.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this statement has been made many times before and has been answered many times before. The fact of the matter is that the lowest bidder on that project was Karamath, and everybody knows that; the second lowest was a company called Johnson, everybody knows that as well; and the third lowest who got the job was a company called Sunway.

**12.30 a.m.**

It has been stated repeatedly that the reason why Karamath was not awarded the contract was because Karamath was busily occupied with many other projects, including the Brian Lara Cricket facility, and that Karamath did not have the capacity. UDeCott felt it was too risky, that Karamath had too much on their plate at that point in time. It was a question of capacity, so they did not get the contract.

Similarly Johnson—and this has been stated repeatedly—was the front-runner for the Chancery Lane project and again, questions of capacity came up, that if they gave Johnson both the Chancery Lane project, where they were the front-runner, and the Ministry of Legal Affairs Tower; they would not have the capability to do both projects at the same time. *[Interruption]* No, Sunway had no work at the time. Sunway was a new entrant into the construction sector. You are quite right, Member for Oropouche East, in your flippant way; you have hit the nail on the head.

The fact of the matter is Sunway did not have any capacity issues. So, the Urban Development Corporation decided that the two lowest bidders had capacity issues and it would be risky to award the contract to them, and they gave it to the third lowest bidder. That happens all the time. Member for Chaguanas West, in your private life, you do not always accept the lowest bidder; automatically, nobody does that.

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As a matter of routine you look at all the factors; you look at the capability of the contractors; you look at the price. In this particular case of the Ministry of Legal Affairs building, you had one of the—

**Mr. Speaker:** At this time I would like to invite a Member to move an appropriate extension to the hon. Minister of Works and Transport.

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

*Motion made,* That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Hon. N. Parsanlal*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues for that extension of time, 15 minutes would be more than adequate; that would take me to 12.48 a.m. As I was saying, it is common practice when you are evaluating tenders, that you look at the capability of contractors before you award it. You do not just blindly award a contract to the lowest bidder, and on this particular contract, some of the major contractors in Trinidad and Tobago had bid far more than that.

NH International, for example, had bid over \$400 million, this is what I am advised. You had Carillion bidding \$400 million. You had some of the largest contractors in Trinidad and Tobago bidding \$400 million and above. One of them had bid \$450 million. So, when you look at all the circumstances, the bigger contractors are bidding \$400 million, \$450 million. The two lowest are stretched, they do not have any capacity. The Urban Development Corporation chose not to take the risk to award the contract at a price that they felt might be too low, so that the contractor would start off being challenged in terms of completing the project successfully. Also, the two contractors were stretched in terms of resources and capability. Those facts have been in the public domain for the last 12 months. I am a bit surprised that this matter has reared its head again.

The other allegation that the hon. Member for Diego Martin West made was that there was some issue with the award of the Chancery Lane contract. Let us look at the Chancery Lane contract. [*Interruption*] You could say it in the night, the day, it does not matter. What would happen?

I am advised that Chancery Lane was not a traditional design/tender contract. It was a design/build. Now, in a design/build/tender or a design/build project, price is not the determining factor. You look at the quality that is being offered. Because it is a design/build, a contractor could offer you minimal finishes. They could offer you a shell, without any floor finishes, wall finishes, ceiling finishes.

They could offer you a rudimentary structure, and of course, their price would be lower, and another contractor could come along and offer you a completely finished building.

It is not a case of comparing apples and apples. You have to look at the thing in its totality. I am advised that the Chancery Lane project, being a design/build, the contractor that won it, the same Johnson, who was second on the Legal Affairs, had partnered with one of the leading architects in Trinidad and Tobago, Stephen Mendes. I do not think anybody here would challenge Mr. Stephen Mendes qualifications as an architect. He has done many of the most prestigious buildings in Trinidad and Tobago.

So, Johnson had partnered with Stephen Mendes—Design Collaborative, I believe is his firm—and together they had put in a design bid, and after consideration of all the factors, the quality of the finishes being offered, the level of detail, the compliance with the clients' requirements, Johnson was adjudged the best evaluated tender.

There is no secret in all of this; there is no mystery. I would say with respect to the complaint that another contractor had put in a lower bid. I think we have to be very, very careful that we are not too close to matters, because, guess who that contractor was? NH International. We have to be concerned that we do not get too close to matters, so that we suffer from unconscious bias and lose sight of the facts. All of these things would be dealt with in the report of the commission of enquiry, when that report is submitted.

As for the Performing Arts Academy, and by the way Member for Chaguanas West, you could not be serious. It is an academy, it is not a centre. It is a training institution, and there are going to be two. There is going to be a north academy and there is going to be a south academy. Are you saying we should have three? If we build three academies in this country, Member for Chaguanas West, you would be the first to accuse this Government of profligate spending and squandermania.

The fact of the matter, that argument that we should have a third performing arts academy, holds no water. "Why don't we build one in Point Fortin? Why don't we build one in Toco? Why don't we build one in Mayaro?" If we use your colloquial argument— Mr. Speaker, I am worried about the Member for Chaguanas West. I am beginning to think he wants to associate himself with "Koochoowan" Trace and standpipe politics. [*Laughter*] When I hear these kinds of things, I worry. I thought he was a man of the world, but he seems to be descending into the arena of standpipe politics and "Koochoowan" Trace. Come on, you could not be serious.

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Just let me deal very quickly with the Performing Arts Academy. The contract is for two academies, as I said, one in north, one in south, and that is adequate for Trinidad for the time being. There is no need to build one in Mayaro, and in Couva, and in Chaguanas, and in Toco, and in Barataria, and in Diego Martin. There is no need for that. We have a north academy and a south academy, and that is adequate at this point in time.

The contract for the two academies is in the sum of US \$100 million, and it was approximately a 60:40 split or a 65:35 split in terms of the money. If you take US\$60 million, \$65 million, you are going to get very close to US\$400 million. In fact, US \$60 million is TT \$380 million; US \$65 million would take you to TT \$410 million. It is an approximation. In addition, when a cost is associated with a construction contract—and all of you will know this—that when you price a project, quite often you do not include consultancy fees, those are not put into the cost of a construction contract. You do not put in project management. Quite often you do not put in value added tax, legal fees. The construction contract is the value of the construction contract itself.

Therefore, if one sees that the cost of the two academies is US \$100 million and with a 60:40 split or a 65:35 split and one looks in a document and sees that one of them is TT \$441 million, which is US \$70 million, without doing the necessary analysis to see how that US \$70 million is arrived at, does it include consultancy fees, project management fees, a hedge on currency fluctuation? For example, one cannot draw the kind of conclusions that are being drawn with respect to the cost of the north Performing Arts Academy. You cannot draw those conclusions. Therefore, it is unfortunate that my colleague from Diego Martin West was so angry, and as I said, I would advise him to do some introspection, because all of that anger and rage is totally unproductive.

Coming back to the budget itself. I really must conclude this contribution by congratulating the Minister of Finance, because it has been a very, very difficult year. [*Desk thumping*] It is only because of the prudent management of the PNM over the last five years that we accumulated the savings. What hon. Members opposite will not tell the population is that the Government has been running fiscal surpluses for the last five years. Billions of dollars in surpluses. I am not talking about money that went in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, it is extra to that. For the last five years we have been running fiscal surpluses.

Therefore, we have a lot of money in our current account in the Central Bank. We are in credit, and it is because of the prudent management of the economy and the fact that we have been generating fiscal surpluses, based on very conservative



oil price projections, because that is how we have generated the surpluses. We used very conservative oil and natural gas prices, which we pegged our budget on and because the oil prices were much higher than the projections of the Ministry of Finance in the last five years, we were able to generate significant surpluses, which is what we have been able to use in this last fiscal year, to deal with a budget deficit and what we are going to use to deal with a budget deficit going forward in 2010. If we had not managed the economy in this way, we would not have been able to do this. That is why I say the Minister of Finance must be congratulated for managing the economy under very difficult circumstances in the face of a global economic collapse. [*Desk thumping*]

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, as I said, there is very little to respond to on the other side. [*Interruption*] Oh, you want me to talk about that? Well, in the three minutes available to me, I will talk about that. They also do not like to talk about the tremendous work being done by the Ministry of Works and Transport, Drainage Division. I mean considerable work has been done on the new cut channel in south Oropouche. Member for Oropouche East, you know about that? You ever heard of it?

**12.45 a.m.**

The new cut channel; the Cipero River; the Vistabella River, the Marabella River; the Mitchell River; the Goocharan River; Alleys Creek; the Satar Drain; the Felicity Drain; the Honda River and the Caparo River. I can go on and on. We are doing improvement works in the Caroni River. This Government has spent hundreds of millions of dollars dredging, clearing, straightening, widening and upgrading the main water courses and rivers in this country. Hundreds of millions of dollars over the last five years and with all the “ol’ talk”, over the last three years the incidence of flooding in this country has been significantly reduced. [*Interruption*] In the flood prone areas in Central Trinidad; in Caparo; in Caroni and in all of the traditional flood prone areas in this country the incidence of flooding over the last three years has been significantly reduced. You could jump high, jump low; those are facts. [*Interruption*] That is “ol’ talk”. Two little puddle on the road, I mean, they want to blow up everything to make a mountain out of a molehill.

So, with those few words, I commend this budget to this Parliament.

I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**Ms. Indra Sinanan Ojah-Maharaj** (*Toco/Sangre Grande*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I make my contribution at this time of the morning, we, the people of Toco/Sangre Grande, would also like to congratulate the Minister of Finance for this budget in difficult times.

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I sat here and I listened carefully, and some people who spoke, and in particular, the Member for Oropouche West, in her statement she made some very crucial remarks. She mentioned in her debate and I want to quote her. In fact, she said “tell me who has benefited in this country from this budget?” Well, I want to send a message to her—and I hope she is up, if she is here or at home or see her tomorrow—to tell her that the people of Toco/Sangre Grande have benefited and some of my colleagues on both sides of the House have benefited.

I am sorry that time is against us all; because we could have gone into over 70 different projects—even her own constituents could attest too. In fact, in my constituency we have witnessed the growth and development within our community and it is an ongoing process. Even though our community is tranquil and scenic, its physical infrastructure is being transformed and improved and this is extended throughout the country. You see, Mr. Speaker, one means through a budget expresses itself is how it alerts and enhances the landscape of a country.

I am happy to report that not only roads, bridges; drains and pavements, but other infrastructure is being improved throughout the country. Not just Toco/Sangre Grande, but I stand here and I speak proudly of Cumuto/Manzanilla. I am saying to this honourable House that the hon. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla could attest to that. Because while he sits here and complains about the infrastructure, there is a lot going on. He also benefits from the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation who has been doing a lot of work in that community.

I want to thank the residents and the visitors for their patience and their understanding over the years and to tell them that over a period of time the communities of the North Coast of Trinidad will emerge with some of the modern infrastructure as they have seen going on. [*Desk thumping*]

In fact, with all of that infrastructure taking place, our bridges, as most of you would have known—there is a price to pay with progress, but all of our recreation and relaxation facilities are always encouraging. As a matter of fact, there are some Members on the Opposite side who could attest too—because in the past few years it was the liming spot for the Opposition. I think at that time they were in the Government. The Member for Caroni East is also a constituent of mine and he could attest to the 15 minutes he has saved in driving to his private facilities.

Mr. Speaker, imagine the potential and the setting of that North Coast through the 2009 budget and what is yet to come in this 2010. That setting that has started will offer domestic and international tourism. It will also increase local tourism. While we boast about ecotourism I do not think the Member for Oropouche West

was informed about a \$75 million Cabinet approval that is about to be implemented for the ecotourism project on the north coast.

I am glad you were listening Member for Fyzabad. The last time I stood here and I boasted about the north coast and I told this House about the ice facilities in Toco you laughed and today I sat here and I listened to you talk about discrimination, it hurt me then, but you were not aware—

**Mr. Sharma:** Cry.

**Ms. I. Sinanan Ojah-Maharaj:** I must, because sometimes when I hear you talk about discrimination it hurts me to know that you are one of us and the people of Toco will never forget you for what you did by laughing at them. We no longer have to drive from Matelot to Sangre Grande where we are now producing in excess of 5,000 tonnes of ice at the fishing depot. [*Desk thumping*]

You see we also have some of your colleagues from a couple of years ago who own hundreds of acres of land in the area and we are also, through that fishing depot, retailing ice and providing gas for the fishermen who no longer have to drive from Matelot to Sangre Grande and full their tanks to go back, so all that was part of the 2009 budget. What we have for the 2010 budget—I wish the hon. Member was here. I have listed here over 35 very simple projects—because I do not want to bore anyone at this time—of things that are happening in the area through this budget. I am really sorry that I was instructed to speak for 15 minutes because there are a few more speakers. [*Interruption*] Well, in my next 10 minutes I will just touch on a few of them:

One, family life. Family life is the cornerstone of any country. Legislation is a backbone of law and order, but this Government, this administration is now finalizing our national family policy which seeks to strengthen family to focus on parenting and to extend support services. [*Desk thumping*]

The Homes for the Older Persons Bill will also seek to make a difference in the lives of our senior citizens—Men and women who have built our country, who have built this society. Three pieces of legislation have been passed and already making a difference in the lives of our children. These are modern and progressive pieces of legislation of law. They offer security, comfort, shelter and assistance to young ones who require such help.

Hon. Members, this Government is also implementing policy on ageing, the National Youth Policy and sporting facilities that have been prepared and made available, so how could someone stand and say, tell me who is benefiting? Surely

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they do not understand. [*Desk thumping*] While I agree there are challenges we have to look at the broader picture. You see, the sporting facilities that are being prepared and made available are also going to help in healthier nationals, and quite possibly, the grooming of our sporting heroes. I can tell you about the Ojoe Road facilities that the people of Toco, Sangre Grande, Cummuto, Manzanilla and even up to Arima has been making do. Several other facilities around this country are being upgraded and while there are cries for many more, I think that this Government has started that project to uplift these facilities and I do not think that they can be matched to any other term in office by any other government. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I understand that almost half of the population is now taking part in sporting and recreational activities of one kind or the other across the country. That includes a large number of women. I am happy to note—and at this time to also congratulate the women's under 20 football team who hails from Sangre Grande, and we are now taking on Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] So the north coast is not only about ecotourism but about sporting facilities. It is evident that there are over 150 trophies—and the Minister of Education could also attest—on display at the Toco Composite School. I think it is the only school in the country that has the most number of trophies for almost all of the sporting facilities, or courses, or anything in terms of sport that was available in this country. And yet the impression is given that nobody will benefit. All that I have mentioned so far came from 2009 and back, do I need to say more about 2010?

**1.00 a.m.**

Mr. Speaker, PTSC has expanded its transportation service. The people of Toco are now benefiting [*Desk thumping*] and I am pleased to stand here and report that this would soon also be extended to the Matelot area. I understand tonight that there was another protest by the people of Matelot and it is hard to explain to them even though we have tried, because they, like most of the other communities have also had their patience tested. I want to say that through the Ministry of Works and Transport, we have benefited for 10 miles as was just read out and we are about to get the road from Toco to Matelot in this budget. So again, I am saying that this is probably number 15 on the list of some of the things that we will be getting in the next few months.

The national policy on persons with diabetes, the national workplace policy on HIV. Soon the Tobacco Control Bill will be brought before us. All of this represents a Government that cares deeply for its citizens, and wants us all to enjoy long, healthy and successful lives. How could anyone stand here and ask such a question. Tell me who will benefit from this budget? All of this just simply

represents a caring Government, but the measures must also be considered in the context of the establishment of communities centre.

I want to say as I stand here, that already we have benefited in 2008, a new community centre which is under construction within the Duranta Gardens. Only recently, two more community centres were awarded on the north coast and several others are under construction. Not just in Toco/Sangre Grande, but in Cumuto/Manzanilla. I did not hear that, I did not hear anyone saying that this is not—yes, Cumuto/Manzanilla, and the hon. Member can tell you that I work hand in hand with him. He would send his constituents across and I would help. So this Government is not just fixing PNM constituents as was said; [*Desk thumping*] it is evenly spread across the board.

You see, this Government has also set up five community mediation centres in the country and we have 15 more to go. Now that is just 19, I thought of mentioning only one to show who is benefiting. The aim is to resolve dispute in a non-threatening environment. The National Family Life Management Programme is another success story. It serves the people in a real and fundamental way. Lifestyle disease affects all of us, whether directly or indirectly and this Government's public health care and education exercise with respect to lifestyle disease are reaping rewards. The Government is continuing its outstanding programme on the chronic non-communicationable exercise in educating the population.

Mr. Speaker, one of the major advances in our communities is the number of recreation grounds, with the impact it is making in creating healthy families. Maybe the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs forgot to mention it, but a note was taken to Cabinet with over 150 something grounds to be uplifted and lit; at least to have lit by the end or the middle of next year.

The Government's aim is to reduce the divorce rate, the child maintenance cases, matters of domestic violence and teenage pregnancy. The National Plan of Action for children is yet another programme that is deeply rooted in the family.

The Government has been making an all out approach to combat poverty through a number of programmes. There are over 110 programmes within this Government. Sixty of them out of social development in over 30 departments and more from community development, that will total the 110-plus. These measures are not for PNM constituencies, but across the board.

So when we sit here and listen to the politicking, sometimes we are fooled by our own words that it is only for one section of people and this is not so. In fact, assistance from microenterprise is another real progress being made daily by all, and not just one side of the country.

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Mr. Speaker, they forgot about the Community Development Fund. This is a programme that is making a difference in lives of many people in our country, and this fund in particular has been the talk of almost all, if not all, many sittings. But do you know who benefit? It is the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and not as the question was posed, tell me who is benefiting in this country from the budget.

I wish to praise the efforts of National Commission for Self-help. A lot of poor people have benefited from this particular commission, the National Commission for Self-help. Mr. Speaker, the number of people who are benefiting from this—in fact, the cries for this is beyond I think what the Minister can handle and this in itself is testimony that we are reaching out to the citizens who cannot even afford to help themselves. Yet we say, "Tell me who is benefiting."

Mr. Speaker, the NGO and CBO movement does not always receive the appreciation that it deserves, because we all know it is the best kept secret of the hard work that they do. But their diligence in pioneering work has been integrated with several Government Ministers, and even Members on the other side who benefit. You see, the Government must be credited for the pension reform it is piloting and further assistance for tertiary education remain intact, but yet we are asked, who is benefiting.

Mr. Speaker, the measures for agriculture are far-reaching, while for years we heard the cries of the farmers with respect to their lands, accessing the ADB, roads, praedial larceny, I want to tell this honourable House that my dedication not just to Toco/Sangre Grande, but assisting Cumuto/Manzanilla is no "ol' talk". Years before I became a Member of Parliament, I also worked with the ADB as a director and I had to face five others directors to ensure that an ADB bank come to Sangre Grande if it was the last thing I do. Wherever I go and I serve, I make things happen, and I can say to the people of Toco/Sangre Grande that ADB did not just come there on its own. It was the board of directors and the management together with the Minister which made that decision, and we are fortunate with this new implementation that is coming the way of the farmers. Not just of Toco, but Valencia which happens to be producing 75 per cent of all the produce that this country exports. So this Government is playing its role.

Have you all noticed that there is not much cry these days about produce and the price of produce? I wonder whose initiative it was in helping to bring those prices down. It was the Government; it was a caring Government. [*Desk thumping*]

The construction of new homes will not only provide shelter to many of our citizens, but also employment to the construction workers and those who provide

goods and services to the sector are also benefiting. The private sector supplied in excess of 25,000 fridges, stoves, beds, furniture. Who made that happen? We stimulated the private sector. This housing programme of this Government is one of the major success stories and the people of Trinidad and Tobago are well aware.

You see, I can go on. I have up to 35 little success stories, but it is really sad that at 1.13 a.m. in the morning when we have to send this message out, maybe three-quarter of the population is asleep.

**Mr. Warner:** All. [*Laughter*]

**Mrs. I. Sinanan Ojah-Maharaj:** It is. However, that is why we are here because the people have entrusted us with their lives. I do not see it as punishment. When I took this job, I took it with the passion of serving the people. [*Desk thumping*] You see, the industrial park is also another sign of progress and this is a borderline between Cumuto/Manzanilla and Toco/Sangre Grande. It is heartwarming to see emphasis through the local government on the recycling of plastic, glass and other items, like disposing of car tyre shredding and the reduction in the number of dump sites.

Mr. Speaker, hundreds of thousands of plastic containers in the form of bottles and beverage containers go down the drain or in the garbage. Mr. Speaker, it is this Government and legislation that is going to make this happen in the near future. All this is part of the budget.

**1.15 a.m.**

As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, pretty soon we may not have any site for garbage. I want to commend the Minister of Local Government for coming with a package for the recycling of plastic and glass. [*Desk thumping*]

The community I have the honour to represent has some of the prettiest forest in Trinidad and Tobago, and so, I appreciate our forests. But in other parts of the country, we are losing large sections of our forests. I want to identify the reforestation programme and say how happy I am that we have the Matura National Park, which is also earmarked for international tourism. [*Desk thumping*]

A lot of people are not quite aware of this; I hope my colleague from Fyzabad visits that national park in the near future and gets some more insight as to what the park is all about. We would love to have you there, so you would not have to laugh at us anymore. You are invited.

**Mr. Sharma:** I will go with you after. [*Laughter*]

**Mrs. I. Sinanan Ojah-Maharaj:** Unfortunately, maybe you are not aware, but it is 1.16 in the morning, and you need to get home, you live far.

Mr. Speaker, early childhood centres: This was never done before; this is being done now. Why no comment on that? Who is benefiting from that? I am sure, if not some of us, all or most of us have friends and family who have little ones going there. In fact, people across this country now have a place to send their little ones, which is also providing time for the mothers who had to stay at home with a child up to six and seven years old.

I know that several more centres are being constructed across the country, and we wait anxiously. I can stand here and say that we anxiously await them, not just in our constituency, but in our colleagues' as well, so the next time they come to this House they could say how pleased they are.

We could go on and on tonight.

**Mr. Warner:** No! [*Laughter*]

**Mrs. I. Sinanan Ojah-Maharaj:** But when we go on and on, the people who are supposed to be listening to us—because it seems as though some Members of the Opposition never appreciate what the Government does.

**Mr. Sharma:** That is a point.

**Mrs. I. Sinanan Ojah-Maharaj:** I am glad you said that was a point, I hope that your constituents would be listening to you tomorrow—

**Mr. Warner:** We appreciate it now. [*Laughter*]

**Mrs. I. Sinanan Ojah-Maharaj:**—because when you are not making racial discrimination remarks, you are looking down at your junior colleagues. I wish the time would come that this Member of Parliament would set an example and stop attacking all the young people in here. [*Desk thumping*]

We, in excess of 130,000 persons from Cumuto/Manzanilla and Toco/Sangre Grande, stand firm with the Minister of Finance, the first woman in the history of this House to present a budget. We also support the budget; we support the Government and the move, and on behalf of the people of Toco/Sangre Grande, we will be anxiously awaiting all the implementation of your budget, Minister.

I thank you.

**The Minister of Finance (Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira):** Mr. Speaker, at this very late hour, or should I say, very early in the morning, I wish to commence



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my winding up on the budget for 2009/2010, with a comment made by the Member for Chaguanas West when he thought, perhaps, that I was not listening to him or hearing him. I think it really sums up the approach that one would want to take.

He said that the Government had one fault: It could not leave money alone. So what does that mean? What is the implication in that? Clearly the implication is that this Government indulges in squandermania; this Government is irresponsible; this Government is profligate; this Government has no sense of responsibility when it comes to the people's purse.

Last evening we heard from the Minister of Public Utilities. We have heard from the Minister in the Ministry of Tertiary Education, the Minister of Works and Transport and the Minister of Tourism. All of what they have said clearly contradicts the statement of the Member for Chaguanas West.

In fact, the release of the Standard and Poor's report last afternoon, puts paid to that argument, puts paid to that lie.

#### ADJOURNMENT

**The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert):** Mr. Speaker, the hour is very late and, as a consequence, we are all tired.

I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Wednesday at 10.00 a.m. when the Minister will complete her winding up and we will complete the committee stage.

We will also be doing the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, which is part of this whole process, and also the debate on the Excise Duty Orders with respect to alcohol and tobacco, which, again, is part of this budgetary exercise; then, hopefully, we could all take a little break, while the other place debates the fiscal measures.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 1.22 a.m.*