

Leave of Absence

Tuesday, October 21, 2003

SENATE

Tuesday, October 21, 2003

The Senate met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Madam President: Hon. Senators, I have granted leave of absence to Sen. Christine Kangeloo for the period October 17, 2003—November 17, 2003.

SENATOR'S APPOINTMENT

Madam President: Hon. Senators, I have received the following correspondence from His Excellency the President, Professor George Maxwell Richards.

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By His Excellency Professor GEORGE MAXWELL RICHARDS, T.C., C.M.T., Ph.D., President and Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

/s/ G. Richards

President.

TO: MRS. JOAN HACKSHAW-MARSLIN

WHEREAS Senator Christine Kangeloo is incapable of performing her duties as a Senator by reason of her absence from Trinidad and Tobago:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE MAXWELL RICHARDS, President as aforesaid, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 44 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby appoint you, JOAN HACKSHAW-MARSLIN, to be temporarily a member of the Senate, with effect from 21st, October, 2003 and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of the said Senator Christine Kangeloo.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago at the Office of the President, St. Ann's, this 17th day of October, 2003.”

Oath of Allegiance

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OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

Sen. Joan Hackshaw-Marslin took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.

**APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)**

Bill to provide for the Service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th day of September, 2004, brought from the House of Representatives [*The Minister in the Ministry of Finance*]; read the first time.

Motion made, That the next stage be taken at a later stage in the proceedings. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Enill*]

Question put and agreed to.

PAPERS LAID

1. Address by His Excellency George Maxwell Richards T.C., C.M.T., Ph.D, President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, at the opening of the Second Session of the Eighth Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, at the Parliament Chamber, the Red House, Port of Spain on Monday, 29th September, 2003, at 10.00 a.m. [*The Minister of Public Administration and Information (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith)*]
To be printed as a Senate Paper.
2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation for the year ended September 30, 1999. [*The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. the Hon. Conrad Enill)*]
3. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation for the year ended June 30, 2003. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Enill*]
4. Annual audited financial statements of National Helicopter Services Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2002. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Enill*]
5. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Tobago House of Assembly for the year ended September 30, 1999. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Enill*]
6. Draft Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2004. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Enill*]
7. Draft Estimates—Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure for the financial year 2004. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Enill*]

Papers Laid

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8. Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the statutory boards and similar bodies and the Tobago House of Assembly for the financial year 2004. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Enill*]
9. Draft Estimates of Development Programme for the financial year 2004. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Enill*]
10. Public Sector Investment Programme 2004. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Enill*]
11. Public Sector Investment Programme 2004—Tobago. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Enill*]
12. Draft Estimates of Revenue for the financial year 2004. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Enill*]
13. Review of the Economy for fiscal year 2003. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Enill*]
14. Social and Economic Policy Framework—2004. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Enill*]
15. Social Sector Investment Programme 2004. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Enill*]
16. Reports on the Eastern Regional Health Authority for the fiscal years 2000/2001 and 2001/2002. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. L. Saith*]
17. The Integrity in Public Life (Furnishing of Information) Regulations, 2003. [*The Attorney General (Sen. The Hon. Glenda Morean)*]
18. The Integrity in Public Life (Prescribed Forms) Regulations, 2003. [*Sen. The Hon. G. Morean*]
19. The Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2003. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Enill*]

SUMMARY COURTS (AMDT.) (NO. 3) BILL

Bill to amend the Summary Courts Act, Chap. 4:20 [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

**MUTUAL ASSISTANCE
IN CRIMINAL MATTERS (AMDT.) BILL**

Bill to amend the Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters Act, 1997 [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

MEDIATION (NO. 2) BILL

Bill to provide for mediation in Trinidad and Tobago [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

FAMILY PROCEEDINGS (NO. 2) BILL

Bill relating to family proceedings [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

POLICE SERVICE BILL

Bill to make provision for the efficient management of the Police Service, to consolidate, amend and revise the law relating to the Police Service and for other related matters [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

POLICE COMPLAINTS AUTHORITY BILL

Bill to establish an independent body to investigate criminal offences involving police officers, police corruption and serious police misconduct and for other related matters [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

CONSTITUTION (AMDT.) BILL

Bill to amend the Constitution by providing for the establishment of a Police Management Authority, and for other related matters [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

**APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)**

The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill):
Madam President, I beg to move,

That a Bill to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year October 01, 2003 to September 30, 2004, be now read a second time.

Madam President, this is a money Bill and was approved in the other place on October 15, 2003. The Bill provides for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sum of \$16,042,116,932 under the various heads as indicated in the schedule of the Bill.

In the course of preparing for this budget, we met with a wide cross section of the national community who gave of their time and effort in a consultation process. We wish to place on record our gratitude for the pride which they have shown in their country and above all in their hope that Trinidad and Tobago will remain a society that is strong, responsive towards changing circumstances, and sensitive to the needs of those adversely affected by those circumstances. In the main, their views reflected their determination that their children would inherit an even better Trinidad and Tobago and indeed a better world.

We would also like to express our gratitude to the technical officers in the public service, in particular those in the Ministry of Finance who worked tirelessly to generate this comprehensive budget documentation which has been laid in Parliament. These include the *Review of the Economy 2003*, which provides an assessment of the conditions in the domestic and international economy. In particular, it analyzes developments in the productive sectors as well as in certain other key sectors such as fiscal, monetary, financial and trade; *The Social Sector Investment Programme* which

provides an overview of our interventions to alleviate poverty and improve our delivery of services in the area of human development; *The Social and Economic Policy Framework 2004*, which charts the course in the medium term for the achievement of our social and economic agenda on our way towards Vision 2020; *The Public Sector Investment Programme*, which establishes the national development goals in respect of human capital development, economic diversification, modernization of infrastructure and effective governance and empowerment; *The Draft Estimates*, consisting of the details of revenue and expenditure; and the development programme for the financial year 2004.

We all recognize that Trinidad and Tobago is a resource rich country and that our richness and wealth lie in the diversity of our people. We have always responded to values espoused by our national community. Madam President, you will recall that in our 2003 Budget we articulated the vision of this administration to make Trinidad and Tobago a developed country in the shortest possible time and certainly by the year 2020. Our 2004 Budget theme—Charting the Course to 2020—Empowering People—is reflective of those shared values and represents a clarion call to move our country to another phase in our journey. This vision is rooted in upholding and advancing the human dignity of every individual irrespective of race, colour, religion, culture, ethnicity, gender or social origin. Such dignity must be based on self-reliance and self-help and the confidence in the ability of individuals to promote their own development and that of their communities and the nation at large. We see Trinidad and Tobago as a prosperous and progressive society; catering to the needs of our citizens, a preferred place to live, raise children, do business, work and go to school. Economic growth will be inclusive of and socially responsive to the needs of all segments of our society. It would be based on the full participation of the population and promote wealth creation among all income groups.

Trinidad and Tobago will be a society of creative thinkers, innovators and entrepreneurs, engaged in a process of lifelong learning. All citizens would be given equal opportunity for personal growth, self-expression and active participation in their own development. We will be a society that will look after our elderly and our less fortunate. In the society of 2020, poverty and unemployment would have been significantly reduced to minimal levels, if not eliminated all together. Indeed, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago will be enjoying a high quality of life, based on the highest standards of modern human development in the areas of: education, health, housing, transportation, basic amenities such as water and electricity, telecommunication, personal security, social services and the environment. The society will be cohesive and caring, with

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strong spiritual and ethical values and a deep sense of nationalism. It will celebrate the diversity of its people and function on the principles of democracy, human rights and social justice.

Crime and violence will not be tolerated. New and improved standards of governance will provide the context for all public and private sector undertakings. The Government would be effective and close to the people and function in accordance with the highest standards of public accountability and integrity. This budget builds on these principles and begins to rearrange priorities consistent with these national objectives.

Yet, at this point in time, we cannot be oblivious to the escalating crime situation in this country. *[Interruption]* That too. Our citizens are under siege. We must and shall respond to ensure the safety of our communities.

We have developed an 11-point Crime and Justice Programme which would provide additional resources for safety and security for our citizens. The crime plan, which has already been articulated in the other place, seeks to realize the social and economic rights of our people. It represents a set of policies aimed at strengthening partnerships in our communities, hiring more police officers, expanding policing strategies, increasing the vehicle fleet and improving communications. We are enhancing the capacity in crime prevention and we are combating money laundering. On behalf of the national community, we appeal to those on the other side to support the Government in this exercise which, clearly, is in the interest of all our citizens.

Madam President, we will now give an account of the manner in which the Government has discharged its responsibilities over the last year. You will recall that we articulated our Vision 2020 at a time when the world was beset by substantial risks and uncertainties. The lingering and negative effects of the tragic events of September 11, 2001 were impacting on global economic conditions. Now, almost one year after, international economic developments have been broadly characterized by instability, emanating from geopolitical uncertainties, economic slowdown, the outbreak and spread of disease, environmental disasters and the continuing poverty of close to three billion people, mainly in the developing world. Our region has not been spared. The continuing threat of terrorism has crippled the travelling business in many of the region's territories. While the flow of private/foreign direct investment to many of our neighbours has lost its momentum, Trinidad and Tobago continues to attract substantial foreign direct investment.

Despite the risk and uncertainties in the world economy, our overall performance in 2003 has been impressive. Our economic and financial

information indicates that real economic growth increased by a robust 6.7 per cent, driven by the energy sector which grew by 9.5 per cent. Growth took place in a stable non-inflationary environment, 3.6 per cent down from 4.2 per cent in 2002. However, there was a temporary rise in the unemployment rate which resulted largely from the softening in global and regional demand. Interest rates have gradually been reduced and the expectation is for further downward movement due to recent Central Bank action to reduce the reserve requirement of commercial banks and the commensurate action by banks to reduce their prime lending rates to single digit. The trade balance was in surplus at US \$2.9 billion. The external reserves now stand at US \$2.4 billion; the equivalent of 8.5 months of imports. The flexible exchange rate remains realistic, competitive and stable. The fiscal accounts were in broad balance with surplus of \$28.9 million and this is after allocating \$497 million to the Revenue Stabilization Fund. The mobilization of foreign direct investment continues to create productive jobs and to generate sustainable income, in particular, in the energy sector. For the five-year period 1998—2002 foreign direct investment averaged just over US \$600 million per annum.

Madam President, during the review period the deepening and widening of our industrial base continued. At the core of this programme are:

- the establishment of the Atlantic LNG Train 4 Project, which will generate a host of downstream industrial activity creating sustainable jobs;
- the establishment of two new industrial estates, one at Wallerfield and one at San Fernando;
- the disbursement of more than \$30 million to small entrepreneurs by the National Entrepreneurship Development Company;
- the establishment of the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP) to develop entrepreneurial skills and to provide long-term employment opportunities, while addressing the environment; and
- the establishment of the Estate Management and Business Development Company Limited (EMBD) to stimulate economic activity through the establishment of industrial and agricultural estates as well as commercial and housing complexes on the lands formerly owned by Caroni (1975) Limited.

Madam President, our state enterprise sector is becoming increasingly efficient through the application of wide-ranging microeconomic reforms in this sector. Accordingly, we expect the creation of good quality jobs in the national

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economy, thereby bringing down the unemployment rate to single digits and a reduction in the overall public sector debt.

As an emerging market economy, our financing needs are generally satisfied by the international capital markets and our economic performance is continually assessed by the international financial community. As you are aware, Madam President, our solid economic performance, in recent years, including our debt management practices, have earned us an improved investment grade rating from the international rating agencies.

The Government is committed to maintaining the sustainability of our existing debt situation and pursuant to our prudent debt management strategy, the central government debt was reduced from \$20.7 billion, in September 2002, to \$20.3 billion in September 2003. On the other hand, contingent debt of the state enterprises sector rose from \$11.8 billion to \$14.6 billion and generally emanated from the restructuring of Caroni (1975) Limited and to advance certain infrastructural programmes. These activities are special one-off operations and such debt is being phased out in the context of the funding needs of the public sector by being brought under the control of the central budget and more significantly, parliamentary oversight.

Overall, Madam President, our total public sector debt was \$34.9 billion or 51.5 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in September 2003. This is compared with \$32.6 billion or 54.8 per cent of GDP in 2002.

However, since 1996, the Central Bank has shifted its monetary policy operations to a market-based system in which debt instruments are used for managing liquidity. The resources mobilized by the issuance of these securities are sterilized in the Central Bank and are available for the redemption of such debt. At the end of 2002, the stock of open market securities outstanding totalled \$2.7 billion or 4.5 per cent of GDP.

Our overall public sector debt is viable and sustainable. In fact, our external debt servicing cost represents a mere 5 per cent of our exports of goods and services. This, notwithstanding, our present debt management strategy is not only aimed at maintaining its sustainability, but also at containing its servicing cost and ensuring that all debt is transparent and accountable. We have started to act on two fronts. Firstly, we have been taking advantage of lower domestic interest rates to refinance our high-cost domestic debt from the past and we also intend to take advantage of the prevailing lower international rates to refinance our high-cost external debt. Secondly, as I have indicated, we are eliminating recourse to contingent debt.

Despite lingering uncertainties in the international economic environment, we dare say that the country's macro-economic circumstances have improved considerably. Moreover, the Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund, upon their conclusion of Article IV Consultations with Trinidad and Tobago in June 2003, confirmed our own internal assessments of our favourable economic performance, in particular, our ability to achieve sustained economic growth, along with a steady decline in unemployment and in a low inflationary environment.

Madam President, in particular, executive directors commended the Government for its prudent management of the economy in spite of global and regional slowdown, acknowledged the effectiveness of the current exchange rate arrangements, viewed the restructuring of Caroni (1975) Limited as a positive step and urged Government to maintain its momentum of its structural reform agenda, and also agreed that the objective to achieve developed country status by 2020 through establishing a highly educated workforce, and strengthening infrastructure is commendable.

Moreover, Madam President, the international rating agencies have validated our economic performance. In fact, as early as in April 2003, after an extensive and exhaustive review in Trinidad and Tobago, Standard and Poor's saw it fit to assign an improved investment rating to our sovereign debt from triple B minus to triple B.

Clearly we are on a trajectory to attain our developmental objectives of sustainable growth, poverty reduction, employment generation and improvement in the living standards of the national community.

Madam President, a principal component in our economic programme are policies designed to improve the national well-being of our citizens, based on major social interventions. We are doing this by addressing the standard of living of our citizens, particularly in education, health, housing and our social safety net programme.

I take education first. Education is pivotal to the development and enhancement of our critical resource, our human capital. To this end, we are determined to provide quality education to all the nation's children. I will now highlight some of the key steps the Government has taken in this regard:

- we are modernizing our education system in a number of areas including curriculum reform;

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- the strategic decentralization of education administration;
- the construction of new schools and upgrading of existing schools;
- we have provided book grants and a loan system for textbooks;
- we improved security at 310 schools;
- we advanced the establishment of the new University of Trinidad and Tobago;
- we supported construction of facilities for the Institute of Business; and
- we initiated the process for achieving universal pre-school education before the end of the decade.

I now turn to health. Our health sector is being reformed with two principal objectives in mind: to contribute to enhanced national health and to enable easy access to health facilities for all our citizens. In that regard, we refurbished, upgraded and equipped a number of health facilities. The new Princes Town District Health Facility was opened. New health centres were constructed in a number of areas in north, south and central Trinidad and Tobago. The long-awaited Scarborough Hospital was started as well as the new wing for the San Fernando General Hospital. We commenced a new programme of training for nurses. We provided free of charge, medication for chronic diseases to the elderly and the physically challenged; and we contracted a significant number of foreign medical professionals to complement our existing national capacity.

Madam President, housing is also a basic necessity. The Government believes that every citizen has a right to adequate and affordable housing. As such, we have embarked on an accelerated housing development programme to ensure the availability of this basic necessity, particularly among low and lower-middle income single parent households, thus providing the basis for creating wealth for the recipients. Government's housing thrust will not only create additional employment opportunities during the construction phase, but it will stimulate domestic demand for core industrial products, including cement. Additionally, existing National Housing Authority (NHA) apartments are currently being upgraded. Squatter regularization is bringing security to thousands of our citizens.

In the Accelerated Housing Programme:

- 260 houses have been completed, while contracts have been awarded for the construction of an additional 2,298 housing units;

- we have exceeded our undertaking to upgrade and to refurbish 237 of the 351 NHA apartment buildings;
- refurbishing of sewerage treatment plants at Couva and Harmony Hall have been completed;
- works are ongoing at Maloney, Malabar and La Horquetta;
- and infrastructure upgrades have commenced at Rice Mill in Arouca, Harmony Hall in Gasparillo and La Paille in Caroni.

10.30 a.m.

Madam President, it is widely recognized that for a modern and globally competitive economy, there is simply no alternative to providing safe drinking water, proper sanitation, efficient ports and airports, competitively priced power supply and extensive ground transport networks. These areas have assumed added significance as Trinidad and Tobago positions itself to take full advantage of existing opportunities and compete on a global level. During the past year:

- the water supply has been improved through the completion of 132 projects;
- construction on the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) Wastewater Project has continued and is at an advanced stage of completion;
- a new electricity distribution system has been introduced to cater for new industrial loads in the Point Lisas area;
- planning for five new highways is at an advanced state; of these, two would exit San Fernando—one would provide access to Point Fortin and the other would provide access to Mayaro;
- construction has begun on approximately 75 kilometres of roads including Cedar Hill Road, Couva Main Road, Diego Martin Main Road, Guaracara/Tabaquite Road and the Southern Main Road;
- construction has also begun on the extension of the Diego Martin Highway from Sierra Leone to Wendy Fitzwilliam Boulevard;
- work also began on the Santa Rosa Bridge as part of the dualling of the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway to Wallerfield. The extension of the Solomon Hochoy Highway from St. Joseph Village, San Fernando to Golconda was completed; and
- works began on the stabilization of a number of landslips on the North Coast Road and the Moruga Road.

The Government has faced frontally the challenge of broadening economic participation. We recognize that widespread economic empowerment has a central role in sustaining our current growth trajectory as well as in improving the distribution of income and opportunities.

Our social programmes are intended to ensure the inclusion of all our citizens in economic life by providing critical income support to vulnerable groups and these are: the elderly, the infirm, young children and people with disabilities. The programme also seeks to expand abilities and opportunities through training. In fiscal year 2003, we spent approximately \$1.7 billion on social and economic development to bring all our people into the mainstream of national development. These programmes have touched the lives of more than 163,000 such citizens:

- the Social Help and Rehabilitation Efforts Programme (SHARE) was expanded with the food distribution programme increasing its coverage from 8,000 to 15,000 households at a cost of \$19.7 million;
- training programmes for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and CBOs produced 12,164 graduates;
- the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) which now includes a women's programme—targeting single parents in households—provided 60,000 jobs of which 24,000 were occupied by women at a cost of \$125 million;
- the On-the-Job Training Programme (OJTP) and Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) were expanded to benefit 2,832 and 2,500 persons, respectively, at a cost of \$60 million;
- the Old Age Pension Programme provided income support to over 63,000 senior citizens at a cost of \$750 million;
- the Disability Assistance Programme provided benefits to 8,000 citizens at a cost of \$60 million.

Moreover, two additional programmes serve to promote entrepreneurship and create sustainable medium term employment to persons who have been otherwise marginalized in the distribution process:

- the National Social Development Programme completed 132 projects at a cost of \$66 million; and
- the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP) spent \$80 million on environmental and associated projects.

Madam President, the public service is a critical ingredient in shaping an efficient, competitive and productive economy. The public service must possess the capability to provide the highest degree of citizen satisfaction possible. To this end, our continuous reform initiatives in the public service are realizing efficiency and productivity improvements. Our latest effort is the adoption of the national plan for the information communication and technology sector, which will establish electronic government, and a communication backbone to create connectivity among all departments of the public service. A more effective public service is critical for the attainment of our vision for this country.

Madam President, let me now turn to our programmes and policies for the next fiscal year. We have designed this year's budget against a background of slow and uncertain world economic growth although with some positive signs in a number of regions. Firstly, the *World Economic Outlook* published by the International Monetary Fund in September 2003, is projecting that the world economy would grow at 4.1 per cent in 2004, somewhat above the 3.2 per cent for 2003.

Secondly, as has been our policy in the past, we have been guided by the oil price assumptions in the *World Economic Outlook*, and our baseline price for crude oil, in this financial year, is US \$25 per barrel. Thirdly, as in previous years, any revenue in excess of budgeted levels for oil and gas will flow into the Revenue Stabilization Fund.

Madam President, I am reasonably convinced that the growth projections of the International Monetary Fund could be enhanced through a trade-led revival. Notwithstanding the collapse of the Fifth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization held in Cancun in September 2003, we expect that advanced countries would respect their long-standing commitments to open their markets to developing countries, phase out subsidies in agriculture and remove quotas and high tariffs on goods of interest to us, in particular, textile, clothing and steel, and bring the multilateral trade negotiations to closure by the stipulated time frame of December 2004.

Trinidad and Tobago assumed the chairmanship of the Intergovernmental Group of Twenty-Four on International Monetary Affairs and Development on October 1, 2003. In this capacity, we intend to leverage our direct access to the advanced countries through their Governors of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to spearhead coordination on trade issues, and to continue to push for a new and balanced equilibrium in the relationships between the 183 developed and developing countries that are members of the international financial institutions.

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Our economic strategy recognizes the critical role of institutions and markets that give rise to a globally competitive economy while at the same time lending support to the broad objective of creating sustainable and good quality jobs. I will now highlight key aspects of the Government's reform agenda in the areas of finance, trade, pensions, taxation, state enterprises and local government.

Financial Sector: We recognize the inextricable link between financial development and sustainable economic growth and, as a result, we envisage an enhanced role for the financial sector in mobilizing savings and directing those resources to their most productive uses. We cannot understate the importance and integrity of the financial sector, and of ensuring that the financial resources are efficiently and effectively managed. In this regard, a Cabinet appointed committee reviewed the financial sector and its report, in the form of a Green Paper, was laid in Parliament. The comments received from the public would inform a White Paper, which is now being drafted. The White Paper would be brought to Parliament before the end of the year, with an implementation schedule for financial institutional strengthening.

Additionally, we are strengthening certain items of legislation such as the Insurance Act, the Financial Institutions Act, the Securities Industry Act and the Co-operative Societies Act. These amendments will provide for enhanced prudential and supervisory practices, and ensure that our financial system can meet the challenges of globalization and financial liberalization:

- we are integrating the supervision of insurance companies and pension funds with that of other financial institutions, and legislation would be brought to Parliament before the end of this year;
- we are introducing legislation early in the new year to govern the mutual fund sector;
- in collaboration with the Central Bank, we are strengthening the capital market, and an initial step would take place in November 2003 with the establishment of an auction system for placing bonds on the domestic capital market; and
- we are collaborating with the local financial sector to promote the establishment of a regional credit rating agency.

As a small highly open economy, trade, particularly in non-oil commodities, is vital to continued economic diversification, growth, development and poverty reduction of this country. In order to extract maximum benefits from the liberalized environment:

- we are undertaking a business expansion and industrial restructuring programme with resources from a trade sector loan from the International Development Bank (IDB);
- we have strengthened the EXIM Bank of Trinidad and Tobago; and
- we are simplifying the approval process for new investments, bringing new foreign investment promotion legislation to Parliament, accelerating the finalization of bi-lateral treaties and strengthening the Anti-dumping and Countervailing Duties Act, as well as the Fair Trading Bill.

Government recognizes that the attainment of the Vision 2020 goal demands an adequate minimum level of retirement income for those who are incapable of providing for themselves and, therefore, there is need to accelerate the pension reform process. We are awaiting the financial report of a working group on pension reform. This report is expected to provide us with a framework within which pension payments will be placed on a self-sustaining basis, and would ensure portability of pensions, as well as the integration of the national insurance scheme and old age pension.

We have gone a step further and taken the decision to increase old age pension and the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) retirement pension to a minimum of \$1,000 per month with effect from October 01, 2003. The increase in contribution rates will be spread over a three-year period commencing January 05, 2004.

Madam President, more than a decade has elapsed since we last undertook a comprehensive reform of the tax regime. Moreover, we are reasonably assured that a climate for investment and growth is crucially dependent on a tax regime, which is not only efficient and effective, but fair, equitable and balanced. For this reason:

- we are undertaking a comprehensive review of tax administration to improve tax compliance;
- we are simplifying and modernizing the tax system;
- we are establishing the Revenue Authority which would combine the operations of the Board of Inland Revenue and the Customs and Excise Division; this authority would be a unique governmental institution with greater flexibility and autonomy blending the strengths of the public and private sectors, and while being fully accountable to Parliament; and
- we are also reviewing the Value Added Tax (VAT) regime with a view to improving its revenue performance.

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The Government is committed to raising economic and productive efficiency in the state enterprises sector through, where appropriate, the introduction of the private sector into the operations of certain enterprises, and generally through improved corporate governance practices.

Local government has become an important instrument for deepening democratic processes. An accountable government requires a participatory government and, to this end, the Municipal Corporations Act would be fully implemented.

Madam President, Trinidad and Tobago must remain a competitive and productive economy. Our flexible exchange rate is competitive and realistic. We must, at all costs, maintain the comparative advantage, which we have been able to establish in the production of a substantial amount of our goods and services. We are indeed committed to the development of a strong, resilient and competitive economy that can withstand the vagaries of the changing global environment.

To this end, we are ensuring that our energy sector, while it will remain the main engine of growth in the foreseeable future, it will at the same time, attain its fullest potential in achieving sustainable economic growth and development through forging greater linkages with the rest of the economy. In this regard, we are also ensuring the expansion of the non-energy sector so as to increase its contribution to total output.

Madam President, I will now highlight our efforts at increasing activity in both the energy and non-energy sectors. As you are aware, the energy sector contributes approximately 25 per cent to our Gross Domestic Product. It goes without saying that due to our substantial efforts, the climate in the energy sector remains buoyant. In 2003 the sector grew by 9.5 per cent. We are continuing to monetize our natural gas resources and among some of the initiatives are the following:

- we have recently concluded agreements for the establishment of Train 4 of Atlantic LNG;
- we are exploring the possibility of processing Venezuelan gas in our domestic facilities;
- we are promoting the construction of new ammonia and methanol plants and a gas refinery as well as initiating feasibility studies for a gas to liquids project and an aluminum smelter for which a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has already been signed;

- we are issuing new exploration and production licences;
- we have initiated a feasibility study for the Caribbean gas pipeline;
- we are upgrading the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery;
- we are reviewing the use of compressed natural gas for a mass transit system; and
- we are exempting small producing companies from the petroleum production levy.

Madam President, there is a clear need—particularly at this juncture of our economic development—to promote domestic investment in the energy sector. Activity on the proposed new industrial estate at La Brea is already moving in this direction, with the establishment of the Offshore Platform Fabrication Yard, the production of which has high export potential.

We are reviewing the fiscal regime for the energy sector in light of the fact that the existing legislation does not deal effectively with revenues from natural gas production. The new regime for oil and gas would come into effect on January 01, 2004.

Our energy sector, as you will no doubt appreciate, has become vital for our growth and sustainable development. Our recent oil discoveries will push our daily average oil production to approximately 133,000 barrels per day in 2004. Our natural gas production is 2.93 billion cubic feet per day, or 488,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day. We have been monetizing the gas.

Madam President, we now have three LNG plants, which absorb 57 per cent of natural gas, and work on an additional plant has begun. There are nine ammonia plants, one urea plant, five methanol plants, four iron and steel plants, and four generation plants. This is great, but the story does not end there.

The energy sector is leading to sustainable development of the non-energy sectors. The Government is intensifying the links between the energy and non-energy sectors. Substantial downstream industries are being created. When Train 4 is operational, we would have attained a volume of natural gas production to establish a viable world-scale 850,000 metric tons per year ethylene cracker on which a plastics industry would be built. Additionally, an aluminum smelter plant has now become feasible. Downstream utilization of smelter output is used in the production of wire rods and cable, as well as fabrication activity like wheels. These activities would generate good quality jobs and contribute towards the diversification of our national economy.

Madam President, the non-energy sector has continued to exhibit strong growth. In 2003 the non-energy sector grew by 5.9 per cent, following growth rates of 3.9 per cent and 3.3. per cent in 2001 and 2002, respectively. We are in no doubt that our policy programmes, in particular, our corporate tax reduction are having the desired beneficial impact across the major sectors.

Agriculture remains the life-blood of a large segment of our population and the Government intends to realize the full potential of the sector. High on our policy agenda is the modernization of the sector with new and appropriate technologies. We must create new opportunities and attract new entrepreneurs. We need to expand our agro-processing sector and, indeed, we must elicit new entrants into this sector. We are providing critical support to the sector in terms of infrastructure, financial and technical assistance and marketing support as follows:

- we are reforming the fiscal regime for the agricultural sector: an initial allowance of 100 per cent will be applied to capital expenditure in plant and equipment for approved agro-processing activities; tax credits and investment allowances will also be provided;
- we are reviewing the market structure of the cocoa industry to identify specific actions to improve market efficiency and to stimulate investment;
- we are improving land management and administration;
- we are improving agricultural infrastructure; and
- we are training 1,000 individuals in the basic programme and 100 graduates in the advanced programme in the Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture.

The restructuring of Caroni (1975) Limited has presented us with an opportunity to create an environment in which agricultural activities stand the best chance to be competitive and boost growth in the non-energy sector. We intend to utilize some of the 77,000 acres formerly used by Caroni (1975) Limited to produce a constant stream of dynamic start-up small businesses so as to catalyze growth and development not only in the agricultural sector, but also in the manufacturing sector.

As part of our strategy to develop further the non-energy sector, we will continue to promote the manufacturing and services sectors as twin engines of growth. We must build on our recent gain. Growth in the manufacturing sector

has averaged 7 per cent and in the services sector 3.8 per cent over the period 1999—2003. These sectors generate and sustain good quality jobs. We must continue to strengthen and upgrade these key economic sectors to position Trinidad and Tobago as the manufacturing and financial centre of the Caribbean and the gateway to the Americas. Accordingly:

- we are discussing the elements of a trade assistance programme with the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association (TTMA) to determine the assistance required by the business sector to penetrate new markets;
- the standing committee on business development chaired by the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance is now undertaking a comprehensive review of the manufacturing and services sectors with a view to identifying the adjustment needs of the business community; and
- we are commencing physical infrastructure development at the 1,100-acre Wallerfield Business Park as another growth pole in the country which will accelerate the rate of assimilation of technology and raise our global competitiveness.

These initiatives are being undertaken in conjunction with the Business Expansion and Industrial Restructuring Programme, as well as an expanding array of bilateral investment agreements, a re-engineered EXIM Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, and a more facilitative mechanism for foreign investment approvals.

We are creating a modern state-of-the-art information and telecommunication infrastructure to secure our future competitiveness. When finalized, the national broadband policy will bring high-speed access to individuals, schools and communities, thereby upgrading technical skills across a broad spectrum of the national community. The Government would assist the small business sector in employing e-commerce technology as a business enabler, and we are in the process of improving information dissemination with the strengthening of the Central Statistical Office.

Madam President, our continuing competitiveness demands efficient and reliable physical infrastructure. In this regard, we will continue the modernization of our infrastructure by expanding our highways, improving drainage, providing an efficient sea transport system between Trinidad and Tobago, and constructing, maintaining and restoring public buildings as follows:

- beginning in 2004, the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway would be extended to Wallerfield;

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- beginning in 2005, the Solomon Hochoy Highway would be extended to Point Fortin;
- our programme of flood alleviation would be continued by constructing the Mamoral Dam and Reservoir Project;
- drainage works would be upgraded on a number of rivers: Marabella, Caroni, Ciperó, Vistabella, North Oropouche and Richplain Ravine;
- coastal protection works would be undertaken in Manzanilla/Mayaro;
- certain historical buildings would be restored over the next two years— President's Residence and Office, Queen's Royal College, Holy Trinity Cathedral and the associated deanery, Mille Fleurs and Stollmeyer's Castle; and
- the port of Port of Spain would be upgraded into a modern and competitive entity; as an initial step, Berth 7 would be reconstructed.

Madam President, as articulated in the *Social and Economic Policy Framework 2004*, the Government views efficient transportation as critical to economic activity particularly in the delivery of goods and services. Accordingly:

- a comprehensive national transportation study would be initiated;
- a new passenger ferry would be acquired to service the route between Trinidad and Tobago with the intention of improving both passenger travel and the delivery of cargo;
- the runways at Crown Point and Piarco would be upgraded and a new navigational aid system would be acquired;
- a new permits and vehicle registration information system would be implemented over the next two years; and
- in order to minimize the loss of lives on our highways, the use of the Breathalyzer would be introduced.

Madam President, we are also committed to the enrichment of our unique and diverse culture. This represents a unifying strength of our national identity and contributes significantly to our economic transformation and development. We are now preparing a strategic plan aimed at developing our cultural and creative arts. As an initial step, the Academy of the Performing Arts would be established.

I now turn to priorities for Trinidad and Tobago. Madam President, you will recall my restatement of the Government's objectives in the 2003 budget. At its

heart, was our goal to make Trinidad and Tobago a developed country by 2020, if not before. For small open economies like ours, we have to think hard about the world we live in—a world that is becoming increasingly more complex. It is a difficult world where poverty and inequality exist side by side with prosperity. Accordingly, as we progress economically, we have to consider how to protect the most vulnerable groups in our society. We have to ensure that growth leads to greater equity and prosperity for all. These are the challenges we face and our response is articulated in this budget. Accordingly, we would continue to address the lifetime concerns of our citizens, in particular, education, health, housing and national security, including prison reform.

Education: Education remains a major instrument for the social and economic transformation of Trinidad and Tobago. We are modernizing our education system to provide training and knowledge as well as skills and aptitudes relevant to the needs of a globalized environment. Government also remains committed to increasing access to education, particularly by the poor and disenfranchised. Accordingly, some of the programmes include:

- a National Curriculum Council and a Teacher Professional Development Programme;
- the loan system for books in key subjects for students in Forms I and II which is being expanded while a \$1,000 book grant is being provided to students in Forms III to Lower VI;
- the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) which is being introduced in secondary schools in the new academic year;
- the School Feeding Programme which is being expanded to provide 90,000 fully subsidized lunches daily, as well as 25,000 breakfast meals five days a week;
- the school transport service which is being expanded and 200 maxi- taxis would be engaged to assist in school transportation in rural areas;
- security which is being strengthened in 28 high-risk secondary schools;
- the University of Trinidad and Tobago located at Wallerfield which will commence operations in September 2004; a campus would be located in Tobago;
- pre-school education would be universal by 2010 and, to this end, 200 centres are being built and teachers trained over the next four years; and

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- companies providing early childhood care centres would be provided with an appropriate package of incentives.

Madam President, let me turn to health, which is another lifetime concern. Improving the quality of our health service remains central to the work of this Government. Freedom from illness is one of the most important ways in which people can escape poverty. We have therefore embarked on a wide-ranging programme to enhance the delivery of health care in Trinidad and Tobago. Some of the initiatives are as follows:

- a national health policy is being formulated to articulate clearly the scope and coverage of public health services and to clarify the role of private institutions in the delivery of health services;
- in 2004, we are developing new standards for the quality of health care in our public and private health sector;
- forty new ambulances would be acquired in 2004;
- magnetic resonance imaging, CT scan equipment, new X-ray machines, five mammography machines and much needed basic and sophisticated diagnostic imaging devices would be provided to our hospitals;
- construction would begin on the National Oncology Centre, the St. James District Health Facility and the Point Fortin District Hospital;
- eighteen health centres and six district health facilities would be upgraded;
- the Port of Spain General Hospital, the San Fernando General Hospital, the St. Ann's Hospital, the St. James Infirmary and the Sangre Grande District Hospital would be substantially improved;
- the Chronic Diseases Assistance Programme (CDAP) relief would be expanded to include a wider range of free medication for diseases such as arthritis, asthma and depression;
- a new National Mental Health Programme is being implemented;
- the National Health Insurance is being reviewed; and
- access to anti-retroviral therapy is being expanded for HIV/AIDS patients, and also the programme for the prevention of mother to child transmission.

Madam President, I will now turn to housing. I have already provided you with an accounting of our high-level performance in addressing the acute housing

shortage in the country, particularly among the low and middle-income groups. We are providing affordable and accessible housing; we are creating sustainable settlements and communities; we are eliminating the marginalization and discrimination of the physically and mentally challenged; we are catering for households headed by single women; but we can only achieve these objectives through a balanced public/private sector partnership. Accordingly:

- the National Housing Authority is being re-organized and its role would be limited to that of managing properties and maintaining housing estates;
- the living conditions in regularized settlements are being improved by providing security of tenure and developing programmes of aided self-help;
- urban renewal is being driven by the Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago;
- a rent to own programme is being introduced; and
- the programme of financing low cost housing is being introduced; we would provide a subsidy of \$36,000 to beneficiaries with an annual household income of \$12,000—\$27,000, and a subsidy of \$24, 000 to beneficiaries whose annual household incomes are between \$27,001—\$44,000 for the construction or purchase of a new house.

11.00 a.m.

Madam President, we have already outlined an eleven-point crime programme which should represent a framework to deal with all aspects of crime in the society. We wish now to provide you with the supporting infrastructure. Police presence in our communities and response time would be improved through an expansion in vehicle and equipment, and an enhancement in technology, as well as the recruitment of an additional 1,000 police officers.

New police stations are being constructed over the medium term in 12 communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago. The police computer system is being installed to transmit voice, data and video to police vehicles on patrol and in pursuit of criminals. The communication network of the Ministry of National Security is being strengthened; reporting and analytical tools with appropriate links within the criminal justice system are being acquired and training will be strengthened in key areas. Prison reform is high on our agenda. We shall upgrade the prison facilities and introduce rehabilitation programmes. A central

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component of our prison reform agenda would be the introduction of a parole system.

We are all becoming increasingly aware of the need to preserve the environment and the impact of the environment on human health. Here in Trinidad and Tobago our people are making greater demands that we institute measures to protect and preserve the environment consistent with our commitment under international agreements on the environment.

A major concern of the Government is the increasing exposure of our citizens to the effects of lead emissions which can lead to serious health problems particularly in our children. The continuing use of leaded gasoline imposes a serious threat to the health of our nation. Accordingly, the Government has decided to immediately phase out leaded gasoline from the Trinidad and Tobago market. A new grade of unleaded gasoline of 92 Ron, would be introduced on a phased basis and would replace the leaded super gasoline on the local market by April 01, 2004. Regular leaded gasoline would also be completely phased out of the domestic market by that date. The phasing out of leaded gasoline would be accompanied by differential adjustments on the wholesale and retail margins leading to adjustments in the retail prices at the pump.

I have already shared with you the successes of our social programmes. The Social Sector Investment Programme has been making decisive interventions in our national community as we seek to alleviate the hardships of the most vulnerable groups in society, to rehabilitate others and to prepare our young people for the world of work. Accordingly, we have extended and strengthened certain existing programmes. We have also introduced new programmes, and we are establishing a number of other programmes to be administered by the Ministry of National Security and Rehabilitation. Additionally, a Family Life Management Programme will offer training in parenting, family and life skills; and the Child Labourers Programme will be rehabilitated to address the issue of children scavenging in landfill sites.

We have put in place a national sports policy, the central thrust of which is the creation of a Sport Commission of Trinidad and Tobago, which will promote sport as a viable business activity. A public/private sector partnership is critical for ensuring appropriate and viable funding for sports and culture and to this end, we propose to expand the existing fiscal and other initiatives to achieve this objective.

The national community has become keenly aware of the fruitful and harmonious relationship which now exists between the central government and

the Tobago House of Assembly. The fiscal responsibility and the quality of corporate governance in the PNM-led Tobago House of Assembly and the PNM-led central administration have undoubtedly made this possible.

For Tobago, we are proposing a recurrent budget of \$734 million and a capital budget of \$166 million, making total expenditure on Tobago for the financial year 2004, \$900 million. Beyond this, we will assist the Tobago House of Assembly to seek funding up to a maximum of \$400 million to undertake urgent and critical capital investment projects. Accordingly, expenditure on Tobago in 2004 will be \$1.3 billion. We are ensuring that a platform is created on which Trinidad and Tobago, side by side, can achieve developed country status by 2020.

Madam President, the total estimates of expenditure for the financial year 2004 is expected to be \$22,331,591,613 of which the sum \$16,042,116,932 is to be appropriated. The sum of \$5,929,474,681 represents a direct charge on the Consolidated Fund, while \$370 million represents expenditure from the various funds.

The total recurrent and capital expenditure on Government's fiscal operations is projected at \$19.105 billion, which represents total expenditure of \$21.331 billion, less principal repayments and sinking fund contributions of \$3.226 billion. We expect to generate \$18.792 billion on the revenue account with income taxes of \$2.7 billion, corporation tax of \$6.7 billion and taxes on goods and services of \$4.276 billion, being the major sources of revenue. With projected revenues of \$18.7 million and projected expenditure of \$19.105 billion, the fiscal balance for 2004 is expected to be in deficit of \$313 million or 5 per cent of GDP.

In 2004, we propose to implement a number of measures in order to give effect to our economic policy agenda. Here, I shall highlight seven of those measures while the others will be addressed in the Finance Bill, 2004.

Firstly, we are removing the 5 per cent tax on interest income earned by resident individuals from investments denominated in local and foreign currency.

Secondly, we are increasing the allowance for pensions out of a continuing concern for the plight of our pensioners.

Thirdly, we are increasing the disability grant and reducing the minimum qualifying age.

Fourthly, we are increasing the ceiling from \$450,000 to \$1 million for sponsorship in the arts and culture.

Fifthly, we are increasing certain tax rates on certain game tables.

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Sixthly, we are streamlining the collection of interest on VAT refunds. Seventhly, we are rationalizing petroleum-pricing arrangements.

Madam President, as you can see, this budget makes an important contribution towards the goal of transforming Trinidad and Tobago into a developed nation by 2020, if not before. With the solid economic growth-rates, rise in business confidence and a continuation of foreign direct investment flows, we are assured that growth would be accompanied by broad-based development. Solid macro-economic conditions have brought financial and economic stability, in particular stable inflation, decline in interest rates and a competitive exchange rate; and with these conditions improved savings and investment rates lead enhanced growth rates. Progressive broadening of the income security net, revitalized education, health and housing services and targeted poverty reduction initiatives are ensuring a unified society, which is fair and just and has a proper respect for the rights and responsibilities of all citizens.

Investment in social and physical infrastructure, technological advancement, economic diversification and industrial expansion in partnership with the private sector ensures that the national economy remains competitive and becomes a dynamic economic and financial force in the region. Government will continue on that path of reform and modernization of the economy. The Government has been honest, open, transparent and fully accountable to the national community. The Government has been at the vanguard in the fight against crime and corruption, and widening access to financial services and strengthening of the small and medium-sized businesses are leading to a sustainable broad-based and transparent approach to empowering people. Madam President, I now exhort all citizens to do their part for the betterment of our nation.

Madam President, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Sen. Wade Mark: Madam President, let me, first of all, welcome you back to this honourable Chamber. [*Desk thumping*] Let me also say very early that listening to the uninspiring monologue by my hon. senatorial colleague, one cannot but face the stark reality that the PNM is in a state of semi-collapse. It is only a matter of time before they self-destruct and completely collapse in office. Or, maybe, my hon. colleague would be soon joining the Attorney General, as her deputy in the Court of St. James. [*Desk thumping*]

It has been said that if you give a man a fish, he would have food for the day, but if you teach him to fish he would have food for life. This simple but yet

profound statement fundamentally distinguishes the philosophy of an intellectually vacuous, fossilized, unimaginative and uncreative PNM regime from that of a progressive, futuristic, knowledge-based and visionary United National Congress, the alternative government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

There are other fundamental, philosophical differences that separate the UNC from the PNM. For example, the PNM sees government policy as merely a tool to perpetuate their own political survival, whilst the UNC views it as a vehicle for the genuine transformation of our nation. The PNM's philosophy of governance is to discriminate, promote racial division and to divide and rule, whereas the UNC's philosophy is based on the principles of national unity, equality, social justice and inclusion. There are other crucial differences that distinguish the UNC from the PNM which I shall elaborate upon during my contribution.

The UNC is about building one another together. Our vision for the nation by the end of 2010, had we not be unceremoniously and unconstitutionally removed from office was and still is, to transform Trinidad and Tobago into the best place to live in the Americas, by mobilizing the diverse talents of our nation and the natural resources of our country, so that ours would be a knowledge-based society with a globally competitive, technologically driven and diversified economy that would sustain full employment, growing prosperity, equal opportunity, a secure life, social cohesion and a higher standard of living for all citizens.

The measures in the 2004 budget would result in the poor drifting further into poverty and the rich continuing to amass more and more wealth. In spite of its fancy rhetoric, when stripped of its barest essentials and subjected to sound and penetrating socio-economic analysis, the budget is nothing more than a wishy-washy, hodgepodge, ad hoc, cut and paste and scattershot package that fools no one but the Minister of Finance himself.

Madam President, I intend, during my contribution, to demonstrate to you the systematic and brutal hammer-blows inflicted on the masses of ordinary working people by this cruel and fascist type Manning administration over the last 22 months. I would demonstrate how the measures in this budget would further pauperize large sections of the working people and not bring about the so-called empowerment and liberation of those who are currently trapped in a sea of chronic dependency.

The comprehensive economic mismanagement and the emerging social stability arising from those backward policies combined with the unpreparedness

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of our society for global competitiveness, undoubtedly has set the stage for chaos, anarchy and profound social convulsion. As the alternative government, we shall also be advancing some limited measures aimed at pointing the way forward.

What is the state of play of the working people under this brutal and criminal regime called the PNM over the last 22 months? Let us examine the state of unemployment and underemployment in our country.

At the end of 2001, the unemployment rate stood at 10.8 per cent under the watch of the UNC. However, by the end of the first quarter in 2003, the unemployment rate had, once again, jumped to over 11 per cent under this incompetent and visionless regime, according to a recently published Central Bank report. These figures do not take into account the wholesale slaughter and merciless execution of over 9,000 sugar workers by this criminal PNM regime. Nor does it take into account the over 55 workers retrenched at the Business Development Company Limited; the heartless retrenchment of some 400 workers from the Tru Valu Supermarket chain; and the retrenchment of over 300 workers at Carlisle Tyre Company.

During the same period, over 600 loyal BWIA workers were retrenched. In addition, scores of temporary drivers were summarily dismissed by the management of TSTT; over 164 workers were dismissed at Sagicor; and close to 100 casual workers with countless years of service were dismissed by the Trinidad Cement Limited (TCL). That is the legacy of 22 months of PNM misrule.

Thousands of workers are now threatened with further job loss. Job security under the PNM has now become a virtual nightmare for workers throughout the country. Workers are at risk of losing their jobs over the next 12 to 18 months at the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago; at NBN; at the various Regional Health Authorities; at the Water and Sewerage Authority; at TSTT; at Petrotrin and at PTSC. There is also a threat to restructure the NHA; 700 workers out of 1,100 are to go at the National Housing Authority. The merger of the Customs and Excise Division with the Inland Revenue Department, and bringing into effect the Revenue Authority, would also witness the dislocation of public officers.

At the local government level, the jobs of thousands of daily-rated workers are now threatened by the CEPEP juggernaut. The retrenchment of thousands of ordinary working people under the PNM have had major socio-psychological ramifications and implications, not to mention the ripple effect that it is having on family life, domestic violence, alcoholism, substance abuse and the general rise in the crime rate in this country. It would seem that the only channel for job creation is inside the Cabinet boardroom. That is the only place jobs are being created.

The scourge of underemployment, which has been estimated by a report commissioned by the International Labour Organization (ILO) some years ago, at some 20 per cent, has worsened under the PNM. Underemployment is a situation where people are working to earn enough income to live in a moderately decent fashion. We observe this manifestation on a daily basis in the faces of thousands of ordinary workers employed in the so-called, makeshift work programmes such as CEPEP, the NHA Refurbishment Programme and the URP. These have spawned the economic and social landscape under the PNM during the past 22 months.

These workers have absolutely no rights under this brutal regime. They have been denied the right to joint trade unions; they have no provision for sick leave, maternity leave, vacation leave, casual leave and other basic working conditions, including a fixed cost of living allowance, which they are entitled to under law. Yet, we are being told by the hon. Minister of Finance about a so-called Vision 2020. This budget has really turned out to be, not a dream of a bright future for the ordinary people, but an Orwellian nightmare for our working people.

The brutality of the PNM does not stop there. It has extended itself to the grocery shelves, the parlours, the shops and the markets impacting harshly and negatively on the quality of life of every man, woman and child. As an example, a pack of Breeze laundry detergent, which cost \$19.99 under the UNC has now been increased to some \$26 under this vicious PNM regime in 22 months—*[Interruption]* “Dem! Ah does buy it!” A tin of condensed milk has gone from \$3.15 under the UNC, to over \$5 under the PNM; a tin of Milo has moved from \$12 to \$22 under the PNM; blue soap—that they laugh about—has gone from \$1.50 to \$3.00 under the PNM; Squezy from \$6.99 to \$9 under the PNM; and an ordinary pack of flour has gone from \$5.15, when we were in power, to over \$8 under that vicious and wicked PNM regime! So the poor people are under stress, but the brutality of the regime against the working people of our society continues, as new charges imposed on the shipment of imported and exported goods by the Shipping Association are expected to result in substantial and significant price increases to consumers as well as possible loss of jobs. Every conceivable imported good will be increased leading to a further erosion of the purchasing power of the ordinary citizens of our country.

Madam President, as if these things were not enough. There is a move by the PNM to introduce a new index of retail prices. This would constitute a comprehensive and absolute farce when implemented. It is designed to reflect a slower rate of price increases. It would de-emphasize major component elements that currently make up the basket of goods and services used in calculating the

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index of retail prices. The index of retail prices is essentially a consumer-price index and, therefore, measures changes in the prices of basic goods and services purchased by households.

The PNM intends to introduce this new index, which would cover the whole of Trinidad and Tobago and include all income groups. In addition, this new index would incorporate many new sections and items when it comes into effect. This proposed new padded index of retail prices is one of the strategies designed by the PNM to artificially suppress the cost of living and in the process compress and depress labour costs including wages and salaries. This is certain to impact negatively on the standard of living and the quality of life of the working class. In this scheme that the PNM is seeking to impose on the population, lobsters and oysters would be given the same weight as sausage. This may be a good index to properly assess and measure the recently improved and luxurious lifestyles of PNM Government Ministers, their wives and husbands and their high-flying friends and associates, but certainly not the ordinary man and woman.

Social benefits under the PNM have worsened over the last 22 months. Under the UNC, you would recall, we had introduced measures such as a national minimum wage; the Maternity Protection Act; amendments to the Industrial Relations Act, as well as the introduction of the Occupational Safety and Health Bill. Of course the PNM at that time, shamelessly, opposed and defeated this measure when they were in the Opposition. Madam President, to date, no concomitant measures have been introduced by the PNM regime to further advance the position of the working people.

Our nation's education and health care systems are vital to the standard of living and quality of life of the masses of working men and women. We cannot and dare not talk about empowerment without satisfying these two basic vital areas of social development. In this regard, the PNM administration has been a dismal failure. Our education system is currently being presided over by a hopelessly incompetent, inefficient and visionless Minister. This incompetence was recently manifested in the embarrassing failure of the Minister to meet a simple and elementary financial obligation to various private secondary schools, housing thousands of our nation's children. In the process, thousands of children and their parents were psychologically and emotionally traumatized without even the slightest hint of an apology emanating from the lips of the Minister of Education.

It is as though the education system has been infected by a new virus, a new strain, and a pest called the PNM. How can children successfully compete and

survive in the present fast-paced global marketplace given such overwhelming and comprehensive incompetence? There is need for fundamental reform in the current education apparatus. The education system must prepare our children to face the challenges of the global marketplace, so that we can compete and, at least, enjoy the opportunities arising therefrom.

Another example of the horrendous mismanagement of our society by the PNM is the manifest poor state of health care delivery, which is so vital to the well-being of the majority of the working people. Madam President, in a society where per capita income is over US \$7,000; where the GDP is in excess of \$50 billion; where we have had annual budgets exceeding over \$20 billion in the last two years; a poor man cannot even access as much as a Panadol or an aspirin in our health centres. What an indictment against this inhumane PNM regime? Working peoples children are being literally murdered through gross incompetence and comprehensive negligence as manifest in the personality of the outgoing Minister of Health.

11.30 a.m.

This, Madam President, is nothing new to the PNM administration. You will recall, I am sure, the infamous egg-nog fiasco resulting in the death of scores of innocent patients at the St. Ann's Hospital. To date, no one has been held accountable for this monumental tragedy, and we expect that, in like manner, it will be business as usual under the hon. Colm Imbert.

When we look at crime, as an example, and its impact on the working people of our country, we have to wonder whether my dear friend, Sen. The Hon. Howard Chin Lee, still sleeps comfortably at night. Madam President, the *raison d'être* of any government is to provide a safe and secure environment for its citizens to function and flourish without fear of being kidnapped, murdered, robbed or terrorized in their homes, their villages, their communities or in their country. What has been the record of the PNM administration? I am afraid, not good.

For the year thus far, there has been a record of 180 murders in this country. This figure far exceeds the total number of murders in the year 2002 by eight and we still have some two and a quarter months to go before year's end. At this rate, there is a murder being committed in this country every 29 hours under the PNM. I wonder whom Mr. Manning, the Prime Minister, is going to charge for treason for this one. It is clear that the PNM does not have a clue about how to solve crime. There is a total absence of a comprehensive, coherent and holistic policy to fight

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crime. The approach to crime fighting by the PNM has been ad hoc and reactionary. There has not been a proactive approach to crime. Instead, think tanks and anti-crime committees have been mushrooming, not to assist in the fight against crime but to lay blame at your feet and mine. This is surely a crime by these anti-crime committees.

Madam Prime—Madam President—“I go to say ‘Prime Minister’.” You seem to have some ambition for the future—the crime wave is leading to a massive brain drain. There is also an increase in capital flight, which will ultimately and negatively impact on the stability as well as erode the intellectual capital base of our country. It is estimated that of all the persons leaving Trinidad and Tobago, some 47 per cent are university graduates, yet the PNM talks blissfully about Vision 2020, oblivious to the fact that the intellectual capital necessary to establish and promote a modern and stable economy is being destroyed on a daily basis. They talk glibly about Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and the Caribbean Single Market and Economy.

In his Budget Speech, the Minister of Finance has declared war on the criminals in very dramatic style. How can you on the one hand issue a declaration of war on the criminals when the very Minister of Finance and Prime Minister continues to cuddle and caress these same criminals whom he dubbed “community leaders”? [*Desk thumping*] As one columnist remarked in a recent article in the *Guardian* dated September 16, 2003, and I quote:

“Politicians in this country must be regretting the day that they used certain elements in recent elections. When you associate with dogs infested with fleas, fleas become your constant companions.”

This is why, Madam President, we are not surprised that Mr. Manning has now turned his guns on the innocent, as manifested in the recent arrest of a number of persons involved in peaceful protests, including two elected Members of Parliament, and he has threatened in the process to increase the strength of the riot squad in an effort to further suppress the rights of the working people. He has gone even further, to establish a so-called hit squad led by one Brigadier Peter Joseph, reminiscent of the Papa Doc’s Ton Ton Macoute, Eric Gairy’s Mongoose Gang and Forbes Burnham’s House of Israel.

Madam President, Mr. Manning, the hon. Prime Minister, is beginning to exhibit dangerous tendencies symptomatic of his intolerance to opinions or views that differ from his own. Not simply satisfied with a hit squad, he has now publicly threatened to amend the Treason Act, which apparently is aimed at

silencing his critics. His Legal Affairs Minister and this country's new Attorney General has threatened to fingerprint every citizen and to issue each with a personal identification card. What can we expect next? Today the PNM targets the Opposition. Tomorrow it may be the Independent Senators. Next day it may be members of the media and the public gallery. Where and when is this madness going to stop?

What is emerging in our country today is a modern Frankenstein, which we would do well to collectively exorcize if we are to truly save Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Even the conservative *Guardian* newspaper was forced in two consecutive editorials on October 18 and 19, 2003 respectively to publicly condemn the dictatorial and fascist tendencies of the Prime Minister and has called on citizens to be ever vigilant because liberties are lost in simple steps. Madam President, the late Mahatma Gandhi reminds us that in the course of human history there have always been tyrants, despots and dictators, and always they have fallen. Mr. Manning and the PNM will fall. [*Desk thumping*]

The current crime crisis has impacted in a severe and negative way on our economy. The investment climate over the last 22 months has failed to attract both local and foreign investors of any significance, in spite of the various incentives and concessions. Not even the many reductions in interest rate by the Central Bank and the various commercial banks have been able to stem this negative tide. This is in direct contradiction to the high levels of investment experienced under the UNC when record levels of foreign direct investment, second only to Canada in the Western Hemisphere, were the order of the day. Madam President, the simple truth is, people are not borrowing.

How can we expect to attract foreign investors to this country when our own entrepreneurs are fleeing in droves as a result of the economic policy that seeks to promote group domination, racial superiority and divide and rule? How can you expect investors to come in? Madam President, it is little wonder that under this PNM regime foreign direct investment into the economy had dried up and even local businessmen are not investing in this economy. So bad is the situation that commercial banks are literally going cap in hand, on bended knees virtually begging people to obtain a "suckeye" loan.

The *Guardian* of September 29, 2003 stated in an editorial that Trinidad and Tobago is becoming the kidnapping capital of the Caribbean. Twenty days later their worst fears were confirmed. According to reputable global anti-kidnapping agencies, Trinidad and Tobago is now the kidnapping capital of the Caribbean and ranks second only to our Latin American neighbour, Colombia, on a global

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scale. Madam President, when I read this in the *Sunday Express* I thought really I was reading something about a Miss Universe pageant because these are the countries that normally excel at Miss Universe pageants, but today Trinidad and Tobago, under the PNM, has now been graduated as the country with the second highest number of kidnappings in the entire globe, in the entire world, yet the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation says he sleeps comfortably, he has no problem. I believe that the Prime Minister should send my hon. friend to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism as a junior minister.

To date, there has been, according to statistics issued by the under-resourced and undermanned anti-kidnapping squad, some 40 kidnappings for ransom and a total of \$66 million demanded by known abductors. Madam President, of these persons kidnapped, some 24 are Indo-Trinidadians, nine are Afro-Trinidadians, three are Chinese—not even the Chinese under the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation are protected—and five are of mixed race. Those are the statistics we got recently on this question. I wonder if Mr. Manning is going to charge the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation for treason here? He is not doing his job.

How can we on the one hand say that we would like to seek to be the headquarters of the Free Trade Area of the Americas whilst senseless kidnapping, murder and mayhem continue to rage out of control in our country? Can you imagine the international fallout that is going to occur if a diplomat were to be kidnapped or murdered in our country? This is just a thought, Madam President. Which foreign investor would want to come to this country with his family, given the current reality after just 22 months of PNM decay and degeneration?

The Minister of Finance stated in his budget speech that his Government is one that is honest, open, and transparent. Not so, according to Transparency International. Under the watch of the PNM, corruption in Trinidad and Tobago has collapsed by 30 per cent on the corruption perception index of this international agency. Madam President, we have declined to 43rd out of 133 countries whereas in 2001, under the United National Congress, Trinidad and Tobago was ranked 31st. Today, under the PNM we have gone to 43rd. Trinidad and Tobago has now moved from a score of 5.3 out of 10 to 4.6 based on surveys conducted, for the Attorney General's attention, between 2001 and 2003. Under the PNM watch, our country is being perceived as being more corrupt.

However, no one should be surprised, Madam President, least of all the Attorney General, who seems to be saying everything and anything to hasten her imminent departure to the Court of St. James. We anticipate the Attorney

General's contribution to this debate later on could well constitute her last in this honourable Senate. During her contribution to this debate, I intend to appeal to my colleagues on the Front Bench here to listen with rapt attention and silence in order to facilitate her passing.

Sen. Morean: You want to kill me, boy!

Sen. W. Mark: "Not me, is yuh Prime Minister."

Madam President, to date the corrupt PNM regime has not been able to adequately explain to the population the gross misuse of scarce financial resources in the following areas:

- \$80 million to 110 top ranking PNM supporters under the cloak of CEPEP;
- some \$75 million expended on the NHA refurbishment programme when the initial allocation was \$45.5;
- \$150 million to URP;
- \$16 million on the URP women's programme with hundreds of thousands of dollars gone missing through a wave of ghost gangs;
- a CEPEP contract to one Jacqueline Lazarus of Market Space fame and a well-known campaign manager for the Diego Martin West MP, Dr. Rowley—close to one million dollars—no explanation for that from the Attorney General;
- the infamous Water Farms scandal involving some \$40 million, Madam President.

As I am on that one, I want to let you know that the Trinidad and Tobago Transparency Institute has written to the hon. Ganga Singh a letter dated August 19, 2003 indicating, among other things:

"...it appears from the report that Mr. Lindquist's investigation satisfied his terms of reference, we are of the view..."

Transparency International:

"that these terms were too narrow."

Those terms were drafted by the Attorney General. The Attorney General drafted these terms and, therefore, it goes on:

"In particular they should have encompassed the action brought against WASA by Emmanuel Romain which you brought to the attention of the Honourable Prime Minister..."

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Madam President, Transparency International is saying that the terms of reference drawn up by the Attorney General and handed over to Mr. Bob Lindquist were too narrow so the Attorney General was involved from the start in a cover-up of that scandal at Water Farms. [*Desk thumping*] That is what Transparency International is saying, Madam President, and they behave as if they are holier than thou.

I have not even touched on the suspicious contracts issued to Trinre—I understand that is owned by Jerry Narace—Kensjay owned by Prof. Ken Julien T.C., and other corrupt acts. I have not gone into that. I would like the Attorney General, however, if she is still here, to investigate an alleged payment of a US \$3 million facilitating fee from a Hong Kong company called Hoover Lane to a former energy minister in the PNM who is today an energy consultant. This alleged facilitating fee was paid to the former energy minister to make sure that Hoover Lane got the exclusive distributorship of refined asphalt to Mainland China. The chairman of this said company, it is also alleged, received some US \$1 million from Hoover Lane. We hope that the Attorney General would investigate that one as well. These are statements that are coming to our attention and we bring them to you as the Attorney General in this Parliament.

Madam President, whilst the Attorney General is contemplating her departure, she may wish to advise her successor, the Member for Arouca South, to investigate the PNM acts of corruption and malfeasance in the following areas:

- the transfer of BWIA to Edward Acker and Associates;

You may seek the assistance of the Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance, the hon. Kenneth Valley.

- FCB write-offs of customer debts;

Your friend is not far from you, the Minister of Public Administration and Information.

- the La Brea industrial complex;

It went to the police. What is the state?

- Project Pride and Pegasus;

We want to get some information.

- the sale of National Fisheries;

We need to get information.

- the sale of Farrell House Hotel;
- the sale of TTEC power generating facilities;
- the sale of WASA to Severn Trent.

Those are acts of corruption that took place under the PNM and we need to get answers. Even when they leave office, when they are removed from office, the United National Congress will investigate all these matters.

Madam President, this regime has been, as you know, over the years, attacking the UNC left, right and centre and we would like the hon. Attorney General to pay some attention to these matters that I have mentioned. The Mighty Shadow described poverty as hell—how true. After some 22 months of PNM rule, the people are beginning to feel what the Mighty Shadow was trying to say. Under the PNM, we are told by the United Nations Development Programme that Trinidad and Tobago today is poorer than it was 22 months ago. From a position of 49th on the human development index under the PNM, we have dropped to 54th and this is a Government that talks about Vision 2020 and it cares. It said so.

Everywhere you go, there are signs of poverty, destitution, decay and degeneration, Madam President, and the PNM seems to be going about its business in a very happy manner. We have an economy today where all the macroeconomic fundamentals are supposed to be great and in place but, at the microlevel, we are in trouble and that is manifested through increased levels of crime, increased levels of poverty, increased levels of unemployment and growing underemployment. Where is this nation going after just 22 months of PNM misrule? People are crying rivers of tears. This is what is happening in this country. The PNM believes that if it gives and it hands out, it is going eventually to solve the problems. Problems of the type that we have in Trinidad and Tobago cannot be solved in that way. They have to embark on serious education, training, retraining and reskilling. That is what we have to do if we have to create what we call sustainable and well rewarding jobs. The gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen.

I come to the issue, Madam President, of the recent increase in the price of unleaded gasoline. This increase should not have come as any surprise to the population. Raising gas prices is a time-honoured tradition of the PNM. You would recall there was a time in this country when, before a budget speech was read, people would line up in their thousands jostling to have their gas tanks filled. This did not occur under the UNC. [*Desk thumping*] From 1995 to 2001, through several budgets, the UNC raised the price of gas only once and by a mere

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10 cents, and that was to facilitate the removal of the traditional licensing arrangement.

Madam President, it seems as if the PNM has a fetish for raising gas prices. They did it in '92, they raised it in '93, they raised it in '94 and they have raised it again now in the year 2003. Inflation rates will be affected. Already taxi drivers have begun to raise their fares and there are more increases to come. This is the kind of punishment that ordinary people are experiencing under this regime. One of the biggest frauds committed by this regime, and which emerged as a virtual sleeper in the budget, is the decision by the Government to increase National Insurance rates to fund its party's election manifesto promise to increase NIS retirement pension to a minimum of \$1,000 per month with effect from October 01, 2003. Madam President, it is you and I who are being called upon by the PNM to carry its election promise over a three-year period.

Madam President: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Senator has now expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Sen. S. Baksh*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. W. Mark: Thank you very much, Madam President.

So, Madam President, the Manning administration has betrayed its election promise and virtually hoodwinked the population. Mr. Manning and the PNM have now imposed on the NIB workers and the employers on the board of that operation and have instructed them to increase the contribution rate of 9.9 per cent to be funded by the employers and the employees in a 2:1 ratio. That is what has happened. It is the first time I recall that a government—a party—in an election period, makes a promise and then taxes you and I in an effort to fulfil that promise.

So from January 05 next year, if you were paying \$22 a week in NIS contributions and you are in the middle range, Madam President, "you gone to \$29", and then the following year, 2005, you go to \$31 and the following year, the third year, you go to \$33. So the Manning administration has hoodwinked the population by giving us the impression that they were going to raise revenue, either through Atlantic LNG or through higher oil prices but, at the end of the day, they have punished us and the middle class and the upper middle and the lower middle are going to feel the brunt of those increases that the regime has imposed on the working people.

Madam President, as it relates to pension reform, I would like the hon. Minister of Finance, junior that is, to indicate whether this working group that he mentioned in his budget statement is going to finally implement in their exercise the recommendations of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The International Monetary Fund, in its report to the Government in April of 2002 called for, among other things, the privatization of the public service pension scheme. It called for the elimination of early retirement. It called for increasing the retirement age to 65. It called for the reduction of the accrual rate from 2 per cent to 1 per cent of final salary. It said that public officers' pension should be reduced by some 5 per cent and that the maximum pension be reduced from 66 per cent of final salary to 40 per cent. I would like to know if the Minister of Finance could tell us whether the pension group that is now preparing major reforms would be implementing the IMF recommendations.

I want to look at the UTC/FCB merger fiasco. Madam President, the reckless approach to governance has again been manifested in wild statements being made by the Minister of Finance on extremely sensitive issues that can lead to an unnecessary loss of confidence in well established financial institutions. The premature announcement on a proposed merger alliance of the UTC/FCB by the Minister of Finance and the subsequent shameless and disgraceful dismissal of the former UTC chairman has dealt a serious blow to this over \$10.5 billion institution and its over 400,000 unitholders. Madam President, instead of apologizing and backing off from his irresponsible approach, the Minister of Finance and Prime Minister has now compounded the matter by innocently drawing into the fray the Governor of the Central Bank, who has now become the fall guy.

12.00 noon

Mr. Ewart Williams has been embarrassingly silent by recent remarks, but he has been blamed for the current crisis and confusion taking place at the Unit Trust Corporation (UTC). I would say, Madam President, that if the Governor has, or if he can muster the testicular fortitude, he would do the honourable thing and resign. Either he resigns as Governor of the Central Bank or he tells the country that Mr. Manning, the Prime Minister, has set him up and he has become the fall guy. [*Desk thumping*] It is unfortunate that a person of the calibre of Mr. Ewart Williams could be drawn into this kind of cheap politics because of what I call missteps on the part of the Prime Minister.

If one looks at the economic mismanagement of this society over the last 22 months, the evidence from the IMF report is clear for all to see. We are still trying to calculate in our own minds why the Prime Minister used an oil price of US \$25

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per barrel. Even a country like Norway, which is considered to be one of the most developed ones in the world, particularly as an oil producer, has used the conservative figure of US \$21 per barrel, we have used \$25 per barrel.

Madam President, if we are to compete internationally as a country and we are to find our place in this global economy, then there is no doubt that we must focus a lot of our efforts on productivity in the society. Workers, employers and Government must collaborate in this regard, but to bring about that kind of collaboration, we need a change of governance. We need a change of our institutions, the mode of governance has to change.

We need to enhance the skills of our people. We know that there are skill shortages in our country in many critical areas, particularly the IT sector, and if we are to become competitive within the framework of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) then there is no doubt that we need to reorganize the entire education apparatus and the way that we conduct business in this land.

Madam President, as we move towards what is called the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), we have to ask the question: Are we ready? Are the institutions ready for the FTAA? We would like to know the role and the state of the Customs and Excise Division, the Bureau of Standards, the Food and Drugs Division, and the Ministry of Consumer Affairs. These are the institutions that have critical roles to play in this particular area of our economic progress and development.

I would hope that the Minister of Foreign Affairs can also enlighten this Parliament on the state of affairs as it relates to the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME). Where are we in terms of its implementation and its realization? We need to have some clarification. We have been told that we are supposed to be part of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy, come 2004 along with Jamaica and Barbados. Where are we in this regard? We also learn that to even become part of the FTAA, not to mention the CSME, we need to amend over 100 pieces of legislation in this country, and the CSME is supposed to come into effect next year, and the FTAA is supposed to come into effect by January of 2005. Madam President, is it possible? We do not know.

What we would like to say is that in moving forward as a nation, as a society, we need to pay attention to harmony, unity and solidarity. We need to ensure that all our people are pulling in one direction and not in separate directions. We need a Government that can be more sensitive to the ethnic mix of our nation. We need to kind of debunk, as Sen. Danny Montano did in the last Parliament, the arguments that are advanced by racists such as Selwyn Cudjoe. Black racists!

I condemn black racists and Indian racists. There is no space for them in Trinidad and Tobago and, when you have men like Cudjoe, who is a Director of the Central Bank, promoting such racism and the Government remains silent, except the lone voice of the hon. Danny Montano, something is wrong, Madam President. I tell you today that as far as we are concerned on this side, in this country we have a lot of hope and a lot of opportunities for development, but we need changes. That is why we believe that the need for sweeping constitutional reform is critical for us to move forward. We have to change our Constitution, we have to reform our Constitution to avoid group domination in this nation.

Madam President, I think I have reached the point where you will soon stop me and I would not want to allow you to stop me. I will stop myself at this moment and I will ask you, Madam President, in closing, that there is this question of DesalCott and I want to raise the point just in closing, because I would like the hon. Minister of Public Utilities to respond. We are told that DesalCott sells water to WASA or WASA buys water from DesalCott for \$4.46 and, WASA in turn sells the water at \$7.50 per cubic metre to the industrial owners at Point Lisas, yet still we are being told that DesalCott is causing WASA to go bankrupt. We want the hon. Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment to clear the air on this matter.

Madam President, I thank you very much.

Sen. Mary King: Madam President, development economists like myself like to study budgets, both past and present, so that we can ascertain whether we are actually getting development movements. One may recall that in my contribution last year in this honourable Senate on the budget debate, I commented on the striking similarity between that budget and the previous one under the UNC regime. Both of them concentrated on strengthening the social sector. We saw attempts to improve the health sector by new equipment and cheaper drugs, increases in pension payments and, of course, larger allocations to education. Also, both governments subscribed to the idea of increasing the percentage of the secondary school cohort that receives tertiary education from the now current 7 per cent aiming at 20 per cent.

There is nothing wrong with the concepts behind these allocations, especially since 25 or 30 per cent of our households subsist below the poverty line, and our formal employment rate is now ascertained to be of the order of 11 or 12 per cent. If one really looks at the poverty level it suggests, however, that the real unemployment figure is very much higher.

Though we have always had employment improvement schemes, this present government has introduced one with a new wrinkle, and that is to introduce

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entrepreneurs in small business. This year's budget statement has been increased to \$225 million for CEPEP, so they are really satisfied with the CEPEP programme, so much so that we allocate \$225 million to it. My concern is whether this kind of entrepreneurship actually does anything in the creation of a sustainable economy.

Both governments in their past budget presentations appeared to recognize that it is necessary to diversify or to reinvent the onshore economy. Hence the present Government introduced formally its idea of Vision 2020 in last year's budget statement.

Again, both governments pinned their hopes on tourism, creation of industrial parks, Invaders' Bay and still see attracting foreign direct investment as the key to FTAA involvement and to our economic development. Also, we have general talk about increasing education so that we create a knowledge-based society, the building of the new university and the corresponding economy, of course. We also talk about telecommunications and now we have the National Information and Communication Plan which is going to provide us with the technological infrastructure, including e-government for our economic reinvention.

If we look at this year's budget, it is the same. We are spending more money on education and health and the other social services, and we hear the same rhetoric about this country will be a developed nation and we are hearing more and more about Vision 2020. This has not been accompanied by the plan and the Vision 2020 Committee is yet to report. I wonder if Minister Montano or any of the Ministers of Finance who are here today could give us any idea of when we may expect a report from the several hundred people apparently employed to come up with this vision.

One outstanding absence I note in this Budget Statement is—and there was over two hours of the Budget Statement—there is no mention of tourism as a pillar upon which we can build this economy. However, in the other place the related Minister has—and still claims—discussed the fact that tourism is the major growth industry in the region, but we have not mentioned tourism in the budget.

What is very interesting though is that previous budget presentations accepted the idea that the resources, the energy resources, were time-limited and had actually looked at time frames of 20 to 25 years. In contrast, this year, various Ministers in their budget defences went out of their way to point out that there are still “oodles and oodles” of oil and gas below our feet and with the help of foreign direct investment, we will remain on the gravy train.

This is not the impression gathered by the International Monetary Fund in the Country report. A study which we must admit was done in conjunction with the present Government and, if this is indeed true, and at the start of this era of plenty, the gas and oil sector can only grow at 9.5 per cent and figures in the budget suggest that there will be a reduction in growth in future, then oil and gas cannot give us the economy or drive the economy into the US \$30,000 GDP per capita bracket that we say we will be at by the time we reach 2020.

The conclusion is that with or without the rents from the price volatile oil and gas sector, development demands that the onshore sector has to be reinvented. None of the recent budget statements have addressed this problem in any coherent fashion. Even the discussion on the oil, the Revenue Stabilization Fund has centred around the volatility of energy prices and the need to buffer the economy in lean times and, there has also been some attention paid to saving for the next generation but, Madam President, the first call on any savings has got to be for the restructuring of the economy, taking into consideration the ability of the economy at any time to absorb the investments—that means without a negative effect on our economic parameters.

And this restructuring is the only guarantee we have of combating oil and gas shocks and passing on a lasting legacy to our progeny. This has already been done in the state of Texas. They have restructured and yet still remain the heart of the oil and gas sector in the United States.

Madam President, in making a critique of this budget, my contribution will address the tasks which face any government as it goes about the strategic management of the economy, and there are three main tasks. The first one is the management of the traditional economy, that is, the management of the economy so as to meet the traditional needs of the population. For example, the payment of civil servants, allocation to the various social services, utilities, health and, of course, education.

In other words, to maintain, to all intents and purposes, the status quo with some minor improvements and a traditional growth rate of 3 to 4 per cent using our existing industrial and commercial activities, but the second task is, in our case, the need for innovative management of the investments in the economy and the social services, such that the onshore economy is reinvented by correcting certain fundamental weaknesses in the economy.

The latter of these, addressing the fundamental weaknesses, I presume, is the subject matter of Vision 2020. Something that neither of the last two budget

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statements has addressed in any detail and, yes I will probably be told we are waiting on the 2020 Committee to report and that in the meantime we are clearing the land, a lá Minister of Trade and Industry in his recent submission.

The last task, the third task is an ongoing and important process, and that is maintaining the balance between the expenditure on and the borrowing between these two former tasks so that we ensure that an acceptable risk of long and short term objectives are met, given the expected income from the transiting economy and, of course, our loans. This third task obviously includes debt management.

The budget before us in my view has concentrated mainly on the first task. That is the preservation of the economic status quo, the provision of more social services. For example, some \$2.8 billion has been allocated to education, \$1.6 billion to health, a further, as I mentioned before, \$225 million to CEPEP, \$200 million to the URP and another \$1 billion into the National Social Development Programme. This is actually \$425 million in transfers to the social services, and it is actually for unsustainable jobs which do nothing for economic development. The only item which has a larger allocation than these is \$5.8 billion for debt servicing, but I will return to that later.

Madam President, we are now hearing that there is another proposal to give us full employment in three years' time. I wonder if this is an expansion of the CEPEP. *[Laughter]* We can only conclude that this is independent of the jobs that would have been provided by the Vision 2020 team.

Some of us actually think that welfare services delivered by the State for clients or wards of the State have no place in a market economy, or that support for the poor by transfer of payments is a noncompetitive tax on the economy. But I still admit, and agree, that until we reinvent the economy, special attention has got to be paid to being our brothers' keepers. However, we have problems. Madam President, when one goes down the list of allocations, one sees that of this \$22.3 billion, only \$1.7 billion is allocated to the PSIP for development of our infrastructure and other systems. And, if this is what we have to depend upon to even maintain the status quo, then I think we have to think again.

The problem here is that in spite of the Vision 2020 talk, there is nothing visible in the budget which could be the start of our investment into any reinvention. And again, I would probably be told that a large part of this is being put into education, into ensuring that we have a healthy nation or even that \$3 million is going into the initial stages of the new university and another \$20 million is going into the Wallerfield Industrial Park.

I would like to bring some focus and attention on the evidence that there is a severe imbalance between our proposed spending this year on economic and social programmes versus that on economic reinvention. But before I develop what is really required, let me consider the strategic management of even the spending on the conventional economy.

It is usual, I would presume, to have objectives for this expenditure and to have particular strategies to be adopted, but of importance, it is necessary to have a monitoring and control function that goes with all of this. Madam President, just as an aside here, the Joint Select Committees of this Parliament were created to give oversight to the Executive. However, it pains me to report that these committees are struggling to perform these monitoring and control functions because of difficulties even to attract the necessary quora at meetings. But, to me, of even more importance is the seeming lack of understanding by some of those involved of the role and the power given to these committees by the Constitution and, as a chairman of one of those committees, I hope that these are just teething problems and that we get over them very soon.

I think, Madam President, that since at this time we are looking at monitoring and control, perhaps it is an opportune time to look at the figures that were thrown out by the speaker before me on the Transparency International survey where it was reported that Trinidad and Tobago has dropped by 30 per cent. I would just like to correct that figure as the explanation for the drop in the number of countries is that 32 countries were added. So if one was 30 last year, one could be anywhere between 30 and 133 because of the fact that other countries were added.

What is really of importance is the index. What is the score that the country got from those people who were interviewed, and the score that they got was 4.6. That went down from 4.9 last year to 4.6 and, therefore, it went down by 0.3. If one looks at 0.3 over 4.9, one is really looking at a drop of 6 per cent. I just thought that we would fix that figure now so that it is on the record that Trinidad and Tobago dropped from 4.9 to 4.6, and if we had subtracted countries rather than added countries we may have gone up in number but it would be of no significance.

To return to the budget, even without quoting the scientific evidence, it is clear that our education system, including our secondary system, has failed us. The performance of our students in English Language, Mathematics and Science and Technology does not augur well for transforming our economy. Instead, it suggests that the destruction of the economy may be imminent because of the growing illiteracy in English Language and Mathematics.

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Madam President, it has been stated that 45 per cent of our people are functionally illiterate. But the problem is not only with, for example, the children from disadvantaged homes. The evidence also points to poor teaching right across the board. Yet, the budget continues to talk about proposals; another proposal to establish a national curriculum council; one to establish a teacher professional development programme to improve teacher training skills, and the budget advises us further, that we still have to create a modern educational system that is able to provide training and knowledge, as well as foster skills relevant to the development of the needs of Trinidad and Tobago. I wonder if these proposals are similar to the proposal to build a bridge between Trinidad and Tobago.

I would like to ask what really have we been doing with the billions of dollars we have been spending on an education system that continues to be inadequate? We repeat year after year that we need to upgrade the educational system so it can take us into the realm of the knowledge-based society. I dare say that the control and monitoring aspects of the strategies now to be implemented in our education system leaves much to be desired. We really need to get down to the business of monitoring and control in our implementation.

Madam President, I would like to turn to the issue of one of the most important threats to our present socio and economic system, and that is our crime problem. Crime in its very simplest form is about stealing the economic rewards of others who have gained it by exploiting the economic system. We are not talking here about crimes of passion. The continuing spate of kidnapping, the increasing white collar fraud are all impediments in the way of even maintaining the status quo, far more reinventing our economy, but we have over the past three to four years seen many initiatives but few of which have had any lasting effects on the escalating crime rates.

We know that the control of crime needs to have long-term and short-term measures. The short-term ones relate in part directly to the kind of police service that we have, and this is not a new problem. The many reports—and it goes back to the Victor Bruce Report and the O'Dowd Reports—on the surface point to shortcomings, the chief of which seems to be the general calibre of the people who choose to become policewomen and policemen.

This apparently is compounded by the promotion system within the service itself. These methods maybe were good enough for the good old days of the police force when we were not so sophisticated, but today the face of crime has become very much sophisticated and violent and it needs to be able to attract recruits at various levels and from various educational strata across the society.

The budget talks about increasing the size of the service, acquiring new equipment and implementing stricter laws. More of the same which has proven to be inadequate, however, it has told us about the new unit, Special Crime Fighting Unit. Many comments have been made about this one, and one which I made the day after the budget was that the creation of this force, or this unit, implies that the present police service is not fully trusted. However, it could be positive. It could be both the nucleus of the kind of staff that the service needs desperately, and one that can rid the service of the spectre of corruption that haunts it today. The Police Reform Bill is yet to come back to the House and I hope when it does that it will address all of those concerns, including recruitment.

Madam President, still on crime, I am sure as a mother you read just as I did with horror of the accident in which a child aged 14 years was shot dead at 2.30 in the morning while liming outside a bar in St. James. His mother's response was that he liked to lime and that he did not listen to her. It is clear that many families in our society are in crisis. A situation exacerbated by poverty, the inability of our education system and our education institutions to attract and keep our boy children there, and the absence now—

Madam President: Hon. Member, I would let you continue when we return from lunch. This sitting is now suspended for lunch and we will return at 1.45 p.m.

12.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.45 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Sen. M. King: Madam President, before we took the lunch break, I was looking at the crime situation and talking about the Special Crime Fighting Unit and suggesting that, perhaps, this could be the nucleus of the development of the kind of service we need at the moment to rid the service of the spectre of corruption, which seems to have been hovering over it for many years. I was also discussing the report of the 14-year-old boy who was shot outside a bar in St. James, and his mother's response that he liked to "lime" and did not really listen.

When we have situations like this, it is very clear to me that we have many families in this country in crisis, which is exacerbated by poverty. Also, we have the inability of the educational institutions to attract and keep our boy children, and we have the absence now of many mothers from their homes. Our disadvantaged children are, actually, unsupervised while their mothers are out working and some of them working in make-work jobs like the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) and the Community-based Environmental Protection and

Enhancement Programme (CEPEP). These mothers are obviously exhausted after their one or two jobs, and some mothers even work at night, I understand. Obviously, they cannot cope with their children, and may end up even ignoring them.

My question is: Why is it that our social services are not getting to the source of the problem and directly giving assistance and financial aid to these families that are in crisis? I do not think it is good enough to say that we do not know who or where they are; we have to find that out. Our mothers should be at home to influence our children, who are under massive and adverse peer pressure today. Some people say that poverty and unemployment are not the causes of crime, but the existence of these in a home contribute to the breakdown of family life. I do not think anyone can argue that. I really think we need to get down to the business of finding out how we can help these families directly.

Madam President, I would like to look now at the health sector. The fiasco that is the Regional Health Authorities (RHA) has its origin in bad strategic management of the whole sector. How can one manage a system or even a hospital in which some of the employees are public servants, responsible to the ministry, and others, who are doing the same job, are on contract to the same authority with different working conditions? This is a management nightmare. Further, there are, indeed, very archaic rules that govern the working conditions of the medical staff, and private sector work is part of this problem. It is counter productive, no matter how much money we throw at health, to have this continuing fight between contract staff and the ministry. The sufferers are the poor people, who particularly suffer under these circumstances.

Of course, it is important to buy new equipment, right-hand drive ambulances, new Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) machines, that we keep spares for the X-ray machines, and that we have walk-in autoclaves in all our hospitals, but it is obvious, I think we have all seen it, that none of these are of any use if we do not have committed and well-qualified staff. The budget presentation has spoken very little about this human resource problem.

It is embarrassing for a country of our stature, with such riches—as the Minister of Finance told us this morning, “We are rich”, and there is richness in the diversity of our people—to have to import doctors and solicit aid from the United Nations (UN), while we have a world class medical school and we subsidize our nationals at this school. They have to be bonded over to serve our country on graduation, even as we continue to increase the numbers trained; that is the only way to get out of the dilemma.

I started by talking about the task facing governments in managing economies. I would now turn to the second and most important of the tasks with which I feel our Government is so charged, and that is the reinvention of our onshore economy. The fault of the energy-based economy, which is a particular instance of the plantation economy—in our case it is oil and gas—is that the production schema does not include layers that produce, routinely, innovation, invention and the associated entrepreneurs.

One of my colleagues made the comment just this week that the reason the United States continues to be such an economic power is because of, for example, the existence of schools like MIT and Caltech of Route 125, and Silicon Valley. These form part of the innovative and inventive layers of the US economy. It is well known to those who have studied even basic economics, that mechanics, tool pushers, accountants and even lawyers, do not drive economic reinvention. The onshore economy has always been here in support of the offshore, and provides the very basic needs of our people.

Our current private sector entrepreneurs are very happy with their lot: they make adequate returns on investments by buying and selling and by being commission agents, and are in no need of innovation or inventiveness to conduct their business. Reduction in the reserve requirements or the reduction in interest rates will not encourage our private sector to invest in any high risk, innovative production capacity. With more money they would build more malls and gated communities, all of which depend on the vibrant energy sector. The foreign investor dominated energy sector can source whatever innovation it needs from abroad, yet we are sitting in a situation in Trinidad and Tobago where the opportunity exists to supply some of that innovation and inventiveness locally, but, for some reason, we cannot get the small and medium entrepreneurial enterprises created.

Madam President, the fundamental task facing the Government is to create these innovative layers for developments and the associated small entrepreneurial enterprises. I am sure I would be told again that that is what is before our Vision 2020 team, and they are going to tell us what we need to do. But they have been working on that for well over a year and up to now all we have seen and had is a very enjoyable cocktail party. Perhaps, the Vision 2020 team has been overtaken by the Julien Committee on Job Creation. I do not know, but we need to find out what they are thinking as far as innovation goes.

I have read all the documents that came with the budget speech such as the *Social Economic Framework* and the *Review of the Economy*, and I was amazed

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at the number of times I read the words “innovation” and “business incubator”; they appeared several times. Everyone is so involved and yet everyone seems so uncoordinated. One must warn, however, that though business incubators may have a role to play in the reinvention of our economy, they could fall flat on their proverbial faces, like the one sponsored by the National Alliance for Reconstruction, if they are not part of the system, not part of the diamond, which I have already discussed in this Senate, time and time again, and I will repeat it this time.

Madam President, in my contribution during last year’s debate, I raised the point, and defined the diamond as a tight integration of, one, knowledge in specialized centres of excellence, two, business development units, three, a local branding market, and the fourth most important, venture capital or corporate venturing. The whole shebang, I think, has to be lubricated by Government’s involvement. The absence of any one of those four points of the diamond would see the collapse of the entire initiative.

The private sector, on its own, has not succeeded over all these years to put together a diamond. The PNM almost got it together at Point Lisas, but due to poor financial management of the debt crisis of the 1980s and 1990s, they lost it. Today, I appeal to the Government that a similar intervention has to be made. I must also point out that increasing the numbers of our tertiary graduates to 20 per cent of the secondary cohort, on its own, will not drive reinvention. General degree training is not what drives centres of excellence; that is not what they are about. We have to create the equivalent of the development and research, over time of course, of the MITs and Caltechs of the US. When I look at the budget allocations, I see nothing that could start this diamond. When I look at the fiscal measures and incentives, again, I see nothing that could start those diamonds, and I am deeply saddened that the boom has started, the days of plenty are here, and no investment is being targeted for this reinvention.

Madam President, I think I would be remiss in my duties if I did not lead on to a discourse on the financial balances and debt of Trinidad and Tobago. The budget statement tells us that the present debt is 51.8 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP), or \$34 billion, showing some increase during the last fiscal year. Furthermore, even with the largess from the energy sector, the intention is to borrow another \$3 billion this year.

In the budget speech the Minister of Finance stated:

“Notwithstanding the increase in the debt...Standard and Poor’s, improved our long-term local currency debt credit rating from Triple B minus

to A plus, the long-term foreign currency debt from Triple B minus to Triple B, and short-term foreign currency debt from A minus 3 to A minus 2—All positive upgrades and the results of high performance Government.”

Our increased credit rating, to my mind, has a lot more to do directly with the sustained increase in world prices of energy, energy products and the increased production of the country in the energy sector. I dare say that the performance of the Government, approving foreign investment, which we seem almost to revere, and trying to get more rents, had little to do with the Standard and Poor’s improved ratings.

Madam President, while we are on the oil and gas tax structure, I would state here that I strongly support the move to review the current oil and gas taxation structure, because if anyone had read the Justin Ram thesis it would show us the miniscule percentage of the whole value chain in the sector that accrues to Trinidad and Tobago as a country.

We need to note also that the largest block of expenditure planned for this year 2003/2004 is roughly TT \$6 billion, \$5.8 billion rounded off, for debt servicing. This surpasses expenditure on any other item, even the recurrent wages and salaries and the large chunks going to education et cetera. What is also interesting is that the revenues scheduled to accrue to Government from the energy sector is about \$5 billion. So when you look across the board, our debt service is a sum of the order of the money transferred from the energy sector to the Government coffers. I think that should be repeated: Our debt service is a sum of the total of the order of the money transferred from the energy sector to the Government.

There are two concerns here: The first is that many of us have been clamouring for the Government to use its windfall energy sector savings to reinvent the onshore economy. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) Country report on Trinidad and Tobago was the first to raise the alarm of the possibility of the unavailability of this funding. The report postulated that there would be some growth up to 2008, and a decline thereafter. With this \$34 billion debt burden, and assuming that we could pay this off in, probably, 10 years, all the while, we are incurring new debt. This year we are borrowing \$3 billion. It appears that there would be very little left to restructure the economy, if we are to continue this pattern of expenditure. Maybe the hope is that we get further foreign direct investment expansion in the offshore sector, with the corresponding depletion of the gas and oil. It does deplete; it is not a renewable resource.

I am sure I am going to be asked, “How could you say so?” I would be told that our energy resources are not running out; we have “oodles and oodles” of oil

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and gas in the ground. But of concern to me is that there are no figures like Ryder Scott figures, to back that up; so we appear to have a problem.

Madam President, the other concern is: What was or is the purpose of this massive debt? The budget statement claims that the increase in debt was due to losses, and so forth, of the state enterprises including Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) and the fixing up of Caroni (1975) Limited. I am on record as stating, as a rule of thumb, that a figure, as a percentage of GDP for maximum debt, is meaningless if the reasons for the debt are not analyzed by new productive capacity versus non-productive spending, and bearing in mind always the cost of defaulting on its repayments.

Nothing in this or previous budgets suggested that the debt was used to finance new productive capacity. This budget actually states that some of it will be used to finance losses. So this is an indication of a downward slide, even at the start of a boom. It is borrowing from the future to finance today's expenses, yet without increasing productive capacity on any sustained basis. This is not development nor is this even stasis; this is decline.

Unless I have read the figures wrongly, this budget and the last one are not about economic development. It is certainly not about reinvention of our economy. This economy is not expected to grow in 2004 as much as it did in 2003. It would be very difficult to get the expenses down in the future, since they are mainly transfers to social services. The spending consists of a redistribution of income to the population with an increase in social services. With 25 per cent of us living in poverty, no one can complain about the alleviation of short-term suffering; but I think one can complain about the lack of balance between the alleviation of the suffering and the investment required to bring about a sustainable economy which, in the longer term, will result in less unemployment and, thus, less poverty. We have to re-look at those balances.

Finally, energy prices have always been volatile, a phenomenon that drives the disparity in price predictions. Standard and Poor's seemed to have taken the risk that our energy sector can continue to support the present debt. However, with a fall in price and a mere \$1 billion in the Revenue Stabilization Fund, our debt could become the noose that hangs our economy, just like in Argentina.

In conclusion, this budget statement is a continuation of the last, and it still ignores the need to reconstruct the economy. Though its accompanying documents do mouth all the platitudes about economic development and building a knowledge-based economy, the allocation of resources do not support this at all.

There are also fundamental problems in the present social and economic systems that relate to the kind of education that is being offered to our children and the escalating crime that is threatening to engulf us. Yes, money is being allocated to these, but without the proper objectives and the strategies—actually, what Sen. R. Montano called the “benchmarks”—and of utmost importance, the monitoring and control functions, we may as well be throwing money into the galactic black hole.

The joint select committees of this Parliament, for that reason, have got to be empowered, and soon, so as to ensure these monitoring and control mechanisms. The economy being energy based, being a plantation economy is, therefore, subject to price cycles and reducing resources. We have been warned by the country report of the IMF that all may not be well, that we should be careful how we spend any increase in our earnings.

Madam President: Hon. Senators, the speaking time of the hon. Senator has expired.

Motion made, That the speaking time of the hon. Senator be extended by 15 minutes. [*Sen. Dr. E. McKenzie*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. M. King: Thank you, Madam President. I probably just slowed down a little, because I need two minutes. This budget does not heed the IMF’s warning, but we can delude ourselves that there is no end to the oil and gas bonanza and we have “oodles and oodles” of oil left.

As a final comment, I would like to suggest that, perhaps, we have already found the techniques to harvest the natural gas trapped in the massive deposits of the undersea hydrates. If we have done so, I think the country should really know, and then we would say, “Yes, we have oodles and oodles of gas and oil”. So, I wonder.

I thank you, Madam President.

The Minister of Housing (Sen. The Hon. Martin Joseph): Madam President, I am privileged to address this honourable Senate on the Government’s housing programme, to state our accomplishments for 2003 and to share our proposals and projections for 2004 and beyond.

The vision of housing the people of Trinidad and Tobago is systematically being realized in accordance with the Prime Minister’s promise of making our

country a developed nation by the year 2020. It is in the context of this vision that the programme of the Ministry of Housing and its agencies must be viewed.

The mission of the Ministry of Housing is to facilitate the provision of affordable and acceptable housing solutions through the creation of integrated and sustainable communities. In the process of developing homes, we are optimizing our management skills, improving our work ethic, providing employment, empowering our low and middle income citizens through home ownership, developing infrastructure, joint venturing with the private sector and, generally, instilling hope and pride in our populace. We are nation building.

The Ministry of Housing and its agencies: the National Housing Authority, the Land Settlement Agency and the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee, together with the Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago Limited, the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company Limited, and the Tobago House of Assembly (THA), have embarked on a mission to strengthen our country by providing its citizens with affordable and accessible housing accommodation.

My contribution will focus on several key areas pertinent to the 2003 housing programme, namely the 2003 construction programme; employment creation; provision for small contractors; the urban renewal programme; institutional strengthening; transformation of agencies; financing arrangements; information technology infrastructure; funding; achievements for 2003 and, finally, projections for 2004.

The 2003 construction programme: By December 31, 2003, a total 1,952 housing units will be completed. An additional 847 units will be delivered by March 2004. As noted in the Prime Minister's national budget presentation in the Lower House and the Minister in the Ministry of Finance this morning, we fell short of our projections for this period. However, our totals represent a figure that is eight-fold the number of houses that the previous government built during its tenure. In addition, the following were achieved under our refurbishment programme: 320 apartment buildings were painted; 135 roof repairs were done; electrical repairs done on 320 buildings, and beautification works on all the building grounds.

Employment creation: I listened with astonishment this morning to my friend, Sen. Mark, as he talked about all the areas in which jobs were being lost. During construction, 3,543 persons were employed on our ongoing projects; this represented both skilled and unskilled labour, masons, plumbers, carpenters,

electricians and labourers. [*Desk thumping*] A total of 47,628 persons were employed during phase one of the refurbishment programme. In terms of employment creation, as a result of our project, 3,543 persons were employed. [*Interruption*] In terms of our refurbishing programme, some 47,628 persons were employed.

Graduates from the Helping Youths Prepare for Employment (HYPE) programme have been employed on our construction sites, and have also formed themselves into a company which is being used in the ministry's infill lots programme. This initiative reflects Government's commitment to develop the youth of our nation.

Provisions for small contractors: To ensure the continued viability of small contracting businesses, the Ministry of Housing has taken measures to ensure that 10 per cent of all contracts awarded for housing construction are given to small contractors; this is in keeping with the Government's mandate.

2.15 p.m.

This programme was launched in the second quarter of 2003 and approximately 22 small contractors have been awarded contracts so far. This measure will continue into 2004 and beyond.

The Urban Renewal Programme: In fiscal year 2003, the Government embarked on an urban renewal programme designed to improve the quality of life in low and middle-income areas and to address problems in our urban centres with improved services and infrastructure. This programme is on stream at Beverly Hills, Laventille and Roy Joseph, San Fernando.

At Beverly Hills, we will be constructing nine three-storey apartment blocks comprising 168 apartments, and at the Roy Joseph site 20 residential three-storey buildings are being constructed which will comprise 120 two-bedroom and three-bedroom units. It is projected that in March 2004, 48 units will be completed at Beverly Hills and 30 at Roy Joseph.

Overall, the labour force for the two projects are 163 persons. Steps have been taken to ensure that, as far as possible, employment opportunities are created for members of the local community.

Institutional Strengthening: In light of Government's policy, the ministry undertook a review of its present staff structure and resident competencies and established four new organizational units to facilitate the realization of our stated objectives for the housing sector.

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These include Housing Policy Facilitation and Implementation Unit which is designed to promote inter-agency coordination, policy improvement and refinement; Corporate Communication Unit responsible for the development of the communications, customer relations, public relations and community outreach policy and plans; Information Services Division to provide an integrated seamless online IT platform for the ministry and its agencies; Programme Monitoring and Co-ordinating Unit to effectively implement and monitor the Inter-American Development Bank assisted Second National Settlements Programme.

This Government understands that to attain our desired goals, the best organizational structure and modern management techniques must be implemented. In keeping with present policy direction and to enhance their effectiveness and efficiency, a restructuring programme was approved for two of the ministry's agencies; the Land Settlement Agency (LSA) and National Housing Authority (NHA).

Transformation of Agencies: The Land Settlement Agency is being transformed to focus on squatter regularization and containment. During the agency's last four years of operation, the following deficiencies were observed: not one squatter had been regularized, the operating cost of the LSA was approximately TT \$50 million, the agency failed to actively pursue the collection of outstanding revenue owed to the Project Execution Unit (PEU)—this was estimated at approximately \$25 million—and the agency failed to effectively manage the major infrastructure project at Oropune which had cost overruns that exceeded \$4.7 million.

Currently, the enabling legislation, the State Lands (Regularization of Tenure) Act No. 25 of 1998 is being amended by the Attorney General to reflect the new mandate given to the Land Settlement Agency.

In August 2003, Cabinet agreed to restructure the National Housing Authority and streamline its operations in order to improve its efficiency and effectiveness. In the last six years the NHA:

- constructed less than 400 housing units;
- utilized \$40 million annual allocation to pay wages;
- experienced a 64 per cent non-compliance rate in mortgage payments; and
- experienced a 78 per cent non-compliance rate in payment of rent. This resulted in an overall debt of \$475 million, \$135 million of which relates to rental and \$340 million to mortgage.

This restructured authority will manage and maintain its estates, rationalize and restructure its mortgage portfolio, discontinue direct construction and maintenance of houses and concentrate on facilitating the home construction process.

This is the first phase of a two-phase process involving the eventual transformation of the NHA into a limited liability company independent of the Statutory Authorities Service Commission.

Financing Arrangements: As a caring Government concerned with the improvement in the quality of life of its citizens, home financing has been made more affordable. Government has adopted a three-pronged approach in achieving this measure:

1. Mortgage rates for prospective homeowners have been reduced from a high of 12 per cent to the present level of 6—8 per cent for homes costing under \$450,000.
2. A reduction in the deposit requirement for accessing mortgage loans. Prospective homeowners can now obtain a mortgage of 95 per cent of the construction cost, a 5 per cent increase from the 90 per cent that previously obtained.
3. Increased benefits for homeowners through mortgage interest tax deductions of up to \$36,000 annually.

Information Technology Infrastructure: As a complement to these initiatives, the information technology infrastructure has been upgraded to provide the Ministry of Housing, its agencies and stakeholders with IT professional services and integrated systems needed to efficiently and effectively fulfil the Government's objectives for the housing sector.

In this regard, a Home Application and Fulfillment System (HAFS) has been developed. Also installed is a Local Area Network (LAN) connecting the ministry and its agencies, as well as a Wide Area Network (WAN) connecting the sub-offices. A new telephone system that allows access to the ministry and its agencies via 623-HOME has also been installed.

We have extensive plans for information technology for fiscal year 2003—2004. These include:

1. Procurement and implementation of information technology solutions for the automation of core applications within the ministry, its agencies and key stakeholders;

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2. Establishment of a land bank GIS Database and Land Management System to facilitate optimization of the workflows associated with land use identification, approvals and allocation for housing solution construction;
3. Development of a budget management and reporting system to facilitate more timely and accurate budget administration;
4. Launching of Internet access points within the ministry, its agencies and stakeholder offices to facilitate public access to Home Application and Fulfillment System (HAFS);
5. Deployment and use of the Government's Human Resource Management System Project (IHRIS) within the ministry and its agencies; and
6. Connection to the Government's public service backbone for wider access to solutions provided by the other government ministries and agencies.

Funding: The Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) is the source of funding for capital projects of the Ministry of Housing and its agencies.

Madam President, in 2003 under the PSIP, the ministry received the revised allocation of \$39.1 million of which \$37.6 million or 96 per cent was expended. Areas of focus in the PSIP included:

- Squatter regularization
- Refurbishment of sewage treatment plants
- Purchase of new elevators for four NHA nine-storey buildings
- Upgrade of IT infrastructure
- Refurbishment of housing estates
- Accelerated housing programme

Joint Venture Arrangements: The ministry and its agencies have partnered with the private sector to fund the construction of housing units. The joint venture arrangements are an example of Government's commitment to public/private partnership to ensure the efficient delivery of housing units.

The Inter-American Development Bank: The IDB is another source of funding for the ministry's projects. The Government has entered into a contract with the IDB for financing US \$40 million for phase I of the Second National Settlements

Programme. The Inter-American Development Bank provided US \$32 million and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is providing counterpart funding of US \$8 million.

The objective of this programme is to establish a more equitable, transparent, and sustainable system of affordable housing through:

- Improving housing conditions for low-income groups;
- Making public expenditure for housing more efficient and equitable; and
- Providing incentives and assisting institutions, both public and private in their transition to new more market-driven roles.

Under this programme, 5,400 families are expected to benefit from the squatter upgrade component; 3,000 households are expected to benefit from subsidy component. Households with an annual income between TT \$12,000 and TT \$27,000 will be eligible for a mortgage subsidy of TT \$36,000 and households with income between \$27,000 and \$44,000 will be eligible for mortgage subsidy of TT \$24,000.

One thousand, one hundred low-income families are expected to benefit from matching grants to undertake home improvements; and sector and institutional development studies aimed at addressing strategic sectoral bottlenecks are to be commissioned.

Achievements for 2003: Madam President, allow me to further itemize the achievements of the Ministry of Housing and its agencies for 2003.

National Housing Authority: The NHA was allocated \$15.1 million to undertake several projects under the development programme. As at September 30, 2003 more than 90 per cent of the allocation was utilized for infrastructure works, refurbishment of sewage treatment plants (STPs), and other miscellaneous works at housing estates in Maloney, Union Hall, Harmony Hall, Couva and Port of Spain.

As one of the agencies implementing the accelerated housing programme, the National Housing Authority is expected to deliver 1,753 housing solutions by the end of 2003. This will be facilitated through the following programmes:

- The Infill Lots Programme providing 578 housing units by year end and employing 1,754 persons. The housing units will be constructed at the following locations: Caroni Village, Union Hall, Buen Intento, Harmony Hall, Bon Air West, Malabar, Couva, Debe, La Paille, Edinburgh 500,

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Charlieville, Boys Lane, Dyette Estate, Cunupia, Plaisance, Mayaro, and Graham Trace, Sangre Grande.

- The Joint Venture Programme will realize the provision of 691 units by December 2003 in the following areas: Pleasantville, Rio Claro, Palo Seco, Malabar, Boys Lane, Barataria, Ramgoolie Trace, Tarouba North, Carlsen Field, Ojoe Road, Mayaro, Buen Intento, Mount Hope and Valsayn.

Additionally, a total of 484 housing units will be delivered by the end of the year from the Oasis Project in Diego Martin, Roystonia Housing Project in Couva and the Southern Garden Project in Point Fortin.

Recovery of Vacant Lots: The NHA has begun a programme aimed at recovering and reassigning vacant lots in its existing housing estates. It is estimated that a total of 3,500 building lots are vacant. The agency has begun the process of lot retrieval and reallocation at areas including Cedros; Dyette Estate, Cunupia; Edinburgh 500, Chaguanas; Debe; Harmony Hall, Gasparillo; Boys Lane, D'Abadie and other areas across the country.

Distribution of Deeds of Lease: The Authority also accelerated its distribution of deeds of lease and mortgage deeds to beneficiaries of housing units and building lots. To date, a total of 3,512 deeds of lease and mortgage deeds have been delivered to beneficiaries.

Recently, the NHA received the head lease for Diamond Vale, Diego Martin. This means that residents can now receive good title for their property. However, there are thousands of beneficiaries on NHA housing estates in Trinidad and Tobago who are not in receipt of proper title.

Government has therefore taken a decision to address this long outstanding problem via the introduction of the National Housing Authority Vesting Act, 2003. This Bill will be included on the Government's legislative agenda during this parliamentary session. Areas to be vested in the authority include Powder Magazine, Cocorite, Couva, Malabar, Toco and Embacadere, San Fernando.

Private Sector Participation: The agency proposes to broaden its partnership with the private sector in the provision of low and middle-income housing. Developers will be invited to identify a portion of their housing developments for the low and middle-income earners.

Refurbishment Programme: The NHA's housing estates will continue to be upgraded through the programme of refurbishment of apartment buildings in 2004. The following works will be undertaken:

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- Repainting 22 buildings
- Plumbing 56 buildings
- Electrical works 40 buildings
- Roof repairs 66 buildings

During this phase of the programme, it is expected that 6,000 persons will be employed.

Revenue Collection: In light of the high non-compliance rate in the payment of rent and mortgages to the NHA, the Authority has embarked on a collection programme, which will take the human element into account.

Land Settlement Agency (LSA): The LSA commenced infrastructure works, including the construction of roadways, drainage systems, water reticulation and sewage lines on seven squatter sites located at Sea Trace and River Estate, Diego Martin; Southern Gardens; La Paille, Caroni; Rice Mill, Arouca; La Platta, Valencia; and Harmony Hall, Gasparillo.

These sites fall under the Squatter Regularization component of the IDB assisted second national settlements programme. Infrastructure works are at various stages of completion and are expected to yield 640 serviced lots. These projects have generated employment for approximately 206 persons.

Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee (SILWC): As at July 31, 2003 the SILWC disbursed loans totalling \$5.5 million to facilitate the construction and delivery of 100 two- and three-bedroom houses.

To date, 79 houses have been completed and a further 21 units are expected to be completed by December 2003.

As at September 30, 2003 approximately 29 houses have been repaired at a cost of \$0.7 million. A total of 173 houses will be constructed in 2004. In addition, three sites namely: Brothers Garth, Williamsville; Orange Field Road, Phase II and Bien Venue, La Romaine are being developed and are expected to yield 201 serviced lots.

SILWC presently has inadequate office accommodation at Couva and provision of \$3 million has been made in the 2004 budget for the construction of a new head office building.

The Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago (UDeCOTT): UDeCOTT has facilitated the construction of 99 housing units as at September 30,

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2003 at the following sites: Carib Gardens, Arima—45 two-bedroom townhouses and Oropune Gardens, Phase 1B Arouca—54 two-and three-bedroom single family units.

Construction work is currently in progress on eight sites, which are expected to yield overall 591 housing units by March 2004.

Projections for 2004: For fiscal 2004 the sum of \$108.6 million has been allocated to the ministry under the PSIP. This allocation will be used to undertake projects including:

- The IDB assisted Second National Settlements Programme to facilitate squatter site upgrade, the provision of new homes through a subsidy system and home improvement grants and \$57.1 million would be used in that respect;
- Continuation of the Accelerated Housing Programme, \$20 million;
- Implementation of Cabinet's decision to provide home improvement grants of \$10,000 to improve the existing housing stock of the country, \$10 million;
- Continued development of the Information Technology Infrastructure; and
- Completion of refurbishment works at the Sewage Treatment Plants at Maloney and Malabar.

Madam President, this is a substantial amount of information, but it is truly the result of a government at work. The Prime Minister is committed to expeditiously eliminate the acute housing shortage particularly among the lower income groups.

The Government is committed to improving the quality of life of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We will forge partnerships between community groups and non-governmental organizations to assist in the upgrading of squatter settlements.

We will continue to embark on a programme of urban renewal to improve the standard of living throughout the country and we will also continue our Accelerated Housing Programme until our target of 10,000 houses per annum is met. We will also continue to work with the private sector to meet citizens' needs for housing solutions.

Madam President, permit me to make two comments before I close. The first is an appeal to our landlords. There is a situation in this country where, because of

the acute housing shortage, many of our citizens are forced to rent units and there are some unscrupulous landlords who continue to take advantage of our citizens. There are situations where in some instances the rent is raised every month, there are also situations where landlords, in order to get people out of the house will remove the roof, or disconnect electricity. You will be amazed at the stories we hear from time to time. Because they can take advantage of an imbalance between demand and supply, they are taking advantage of our citizens.

I appeal to landlords that the situation will not continue to be like this and at some time the balance will shift. I appeal to them in the meantime to have a heart and not take advantage of our citizens who are forced to rent. That is my appeal to the landlords at this time.

Madam President, the second appeal is to our citizens. When last we checked our database, there were 40,000 persons who had applied to the ministry for affordable housing. This is what is driving the need by the Government to ensure that we construct 10,000 houses per year to take care of the backlog and meet current demand.

I appeal to our citizens to be patient. We cannot build 40,000 houses overnight and we are trying our best to make sure that we provide acceptable houses. Even as we build low-cost houses, it must not mean that they must be sub-standard housing. Even though the people say give me anything, these are the same people, if given sub-standard housing, will turn around and criticize you.

A house is a lifetime investment so we have a responsibility to ensure that we provide adequate housing. So I am appealing to our citizens to be patient, things are happening, the Government is building houses and we will address this chronic need for housing solutions. [*Desk thumping*]

Finally, Madam President, all we have said today could not have been achieved without the assistance, commitment and dedication of a number of persons operating in different areas. I am pleased to report, Madam President, that I cannot put down a brick, I cannot build a house, so we have to rely on the Ministry of Housing and all its staff who are committed and working hard to make sure that a restructured Ministry of Housing is able to ensure that the Government's mandate is delivered.

The other agencies: NHA, UDeCOTT, LSA, SILWC, and Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance (TTMF) are working together and I want to compliment them publicly for the contribution they are making.

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Finally, the contractors and builders are also making sure that we deliver on the promise. I extend both the Government and the people of Trinidad and Tobago's appreciation for the work they are doing.

I thank you.

Sen. Prof. Kenneth Ramchand: Madam President, I thank you for granting me this opportunity to contribute to the 2004 budget debate. It is some time since I have had occasion to enjoy your attentiveness and tolerance and I am sure if I run over the time you would not see the clock.

I am grateful to Sen. Smith for his understanding and for exchanging speaking time with me.

Madam President, I intend to reflect on how the budget statement treats with education, but before I do so, I must refer to some of the technical issues that professional accountants and economists are sure to bring to the debate.

As far as I can make out, the Government proposes to spend about \$1.7 billion on its development programme for the financial year 2004, almost twice as much spent in 2003. This is quite remarkable.

Whether one is running a household or one is a steward over a country's resources, it is easy to slip into the mindset that you must do everything possible to increase revenue and exercise almost stingy control over expenditure. It is a very acceptable default position. People and countries whose wealth depend upon sustainable production brought about by thought, discipline, resourcefulness and a creative husbanding of domestic resources, people who are in charge of their economy never say money is no problem, and they would be the last one to move as if they believe easy come easy go.

One can be abstemious and self-denying to an uneconomical degree. You hold on to the old mattress, but you pay more to deal with your back pains than a new mattress would have cost. So it is good to find a government that seems to have exorcised our historically determined fear of scarcity, our ex-slave, ex-indenture, formerly colonized fear that there is not enough for everybody.

It is good to find a government that is not timid about increasing expenditure on behalf of all the people but it is devoutly to be wished that we are not doling out cash to reward supporters, or to sweeten up the electorate for the next election, and it would be bad if we were just flinging money blindly and wildly at the social problems that beset us.

Former Independent Senator, Martin Daly wrote in the *Sunday Express* column of October 19:

“In rich Trinidad and Tobago we throw money, not enlightenment at social problems. Bling, bling is more than a style. It has become political sustenance.”

I hope this is not true of budget 2004. Common sense requires us to hope that the projects we are now funding are in our long-term interests and potentially self-sustaining.

Good management requires that we do not enter into such a high level of expenditure this year that we cannot keep up the payments if something goes wrong on the revenue side next year. Prudence requires that no matter how good things look now we should remember that Dame Fortuna is a flighty mistrust. Fortune’s wheel is ever turning and we must never fail to budget for the rainy day. And it should go without saying that responsible management will insist not just upon a balancing of the books. Any crook can balance the books. We must insist upon value for money.

2.45 p.m.

Madam President, think about this value for money. For each of the last 10 years the amount of money allocated to education has been rising; for each of the last 10 years the quality of education has been sinking. The education system continues to fail us. Why is this? A cynical logician could claim that the more we spend on education, the less do individuals and the society as a whole get in return. A strict overseer would insist on finding ways of measuring value for money and not allow functionaries to fool the Auditor General by getting the sums to add up in the estimates. A thinking person would notice that in sectors other than the education sector, the same perverse returns occur and this would lead one to wonder whether there are deep-seated issues about who we are, where we are and where we want to go that need to be explored before we can orient spending more effectively.

I raise these concerns in general form at this time but hope to refer to them more specifically when I go into some detail on spending on education. On page 10 of the *Social and Economic Policy Framework 2004*, we read:

“Government, through its Vision 2020 objective is seeking to systematically put in place a long-term planning framework that would inform development and implementation of various initiatives throughout all sectors of the society

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with the ultimate goal of achieving developed country status for Trinidad and Tobago by the year 2020.”

Madam President, if you know how I get vexed when I hear this thing about “developed country”. I do not know what gets me more vexed: hearing them refer to the national football team as the “Soca Warriors”; the Jamaicans as the “Reggae Boys” or to talk about “developed country status”. Madam President, I do not know if at tea time you can give me a definition of “developed country”, and if you cannot supply a definition, maybe you could give me a few examples. Is the United States of America a developed country? Is the United Kingdom a developed country? Are France and Germany developed countries? And if they are, do we want to be like them? Do we want to subscribe to a notion of “developed country” that puts the emphasis on material advancement; that puts the emphasis on the setting up of infrastructures, the main purpose of which is to secure such material achievement against all comers? Nowhere do we betray our innocence and our colonial mentality, our lack of self-esteem more tellingly than in our mindless embrace of the millenarian hope of developed country status by 2020, by which we mean being like the “biggies and baddies” I have just mentioned.

We have never enslaved, indentured, colonialized or ethnically cleansed anybody. We have never invaded, bombed or occupied. We have never overthrown leaders of other countries or trained and equipped others to do so. We have never engaged in war or threatened to use nuclear weapons. We have survived slavery, indentureship and colonialism and still we have turned around and invented music and the 20th Century’s only new musical instrument. If anybody is qualified to tell the world what “developed country status” ought to be, it is we. [*Desk thumping*]

The Caribbean man who wrote *Return To My Native Land*, describes the spirit of independence and creativity, the unique gifts we have to offer to the world, the great understanding that we have to offer the world when we accept ourselves and our landscape. Self-acceptance, for Aimé Césaire, leads to a miraculous mobilizing of natural and human energies.

I know you would be vexed, Madam President, if I do not quote from the book. He is just talking about accepting all the things that have happened to him and accepting his place, and in that moment of self-acceptance something starts to boil up in him. I quote from pages 136—140:

“And now suddenly that force and life assail me like a bull, and the wave of life encircles the papilla of the hill, and all the arteries and veins move with

new blood, and the enormous lung of breathing cyclones, and the hoarded fire of volcanoes and the gigantic seismic pulse which beats the measure of a living body in my firm embrace.

And we are standing now, my country and I, hair in the wind, my little hand now in its enormous fist, and force is not in us, but above us, in a voice which pierces the night and the audience like the sting of an apocalyptic hornet.

And the voice declares that for centuries Europe has stuffed us with lies and bloated us with pestilence,

for it is not true that the work of man is finished

that we have nothing to do in the world

that we are parasites in the world

that we have only to accept the way of the world

but the work of man has only begun

and it remains for man to conquer all prohibitions...

and no race has a monopoly of beauty, intelligence, strength

and there is room for all at the rendez-vous of conquest."

Madam President, if we want to talk about "developed country status" we can tell the world about developed country status. If you look at the evil and injustice carried out by the so-called developed countries for centuries, you will agree that it is we who have to define the notion of "developed country" for ourselves and offer that definition to a world that seems to have lost its way.

Madam President, I want to know: Has the Government asked itself whether the social and cultural transformations that it wants to effect can be achieved with the kind of economy we now have? Has it done an honest and unflinching analysis of the nature of the economy and the society, to understand the sources of the problems it wants to solve through all these various initiatives throughout all sectors of the society? I find this question posed in an admirably leading manner in an article entitled: "Thorough stock-taking called for" in the *Express* of September 22, 2003. The author, Mr. Lloyd Best finds the Caribbean economic landscape different from that of most of the rest of the world in that it is "the extreme example of a population and business community for which international trade and payments are pivotal activity". The Caribbean is a case in which "export

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activity is no spill over from domestic transactions” but “has been our primary preoccupation”.

According to Best, in Trinidad and Tobago, as in the rest of the Caribbean, “the offshore sector is the focus”, and even where there is an operating inshore sector, it “invariably undertakes a good measure of satellite production, dependent for its lifeblood on the foreign exchange generated offshore.” I feel if the Government understood this, then they could say “we are trying to carry about social transformation” because they would know the way in which they have to transform the economy and they would know that if they do not transform the economy they are spinning “top in mud” with all these various disparate approaches.

For Best, a key marker of structural change is “the extent to which our economy achieves internal propulsion employing domestic investment and national business control”. And the overall measure of success is “the rate at which inshore growth and transformation outstrip their counterparts offshore.” We need to develop the inshore economy and remove this oppressive focus on the offshore sector.

Madam President, nowhere in the budget statement can we find even a hint that the kind of adjustment described by Best might be desirable or possible. Nowhere can we feel that the various initiatives throughout all sectors of the society add up to a systematic targeting of pressure points calculated to force changes in the structure and nature of the economy. When you read this budget presentation you feel that no thought has been given to this kind of transformation process and this is revealed, very tellingly, in the omission of “Agriculture” from the list of specific issues that the budget statement tells us we must focus on in the opening. Yet on page 33 of the *Public Sector Investment Programme, 2004*, we read:

“The development of the Agricultural sector is critical to the achievement of sustainable economic growth and diversification.”

You read on and there is no mention of production for home consumption; no determination to work towards some degree of self-sufficiency in food production; no planning for the development of land that recognizes we just cannot afford to use our best agricultural land for anything but agricultural purposes.

At least twice a year in this Chamber I make the crackpot suggestion—I think it is a crackpot suggestion because nobody bothers with me—that our

consumption of dhal, channa, red beans, peanuts and soy products should force us to ask: Why can we not put our agricultural scientists to work to make it possible to grow these crops here; provide employment; lease prime agricultural land to small farmers and make a determined and specific effort to cut the food import bill by half? If I was a younger man, you see they are giving away land down there; I would go and say, “I want to set up a farm; I growing peanuts and soy.” I would get rich faster than them.

The same reluctance to address fundamentals is seen in the proposals made with respect to poverty. In the section of the *Social and Economic Policy Framework 2004* entitled “Implementation Matrix”—that must be a new movie—we come across the phrase: “Poverty Alleviation”. Between pages 48/93 to 52/93, there are a number of strategies for alleviating poverty. I ran to my dictionary—I know what it means, you know, but I do not want to get it wrong—to check up on the word “alleviate”. To “alleviate” is to make more bearable. So these people do not want to get rid of poverty, you know; they just want to make me bear it better. I would have thought that you would want to eradicate poverty. Why do they want to alleviate it? Let us eradicate it. That, to me, would have been a more appropriate agenda. But if you keep talking about poverty alleviation, you are signaling that you accept the inevitability of poverty. You are signaling that you are investing in poverty.

You cannot just plan on giving away food hampers and open up soup kitchens every day. That is alleviating poverty; that is not eradicating poverty. Poverty is a symptom of something unjust and immoral in the economic system and if you are serious about dealing with poverty, you have to understand the causes of poverty; you have to understand how the economy works; see how the economy creates poverty, and you might even have to ask yourself—because you are discovering it—if profit-making for some depends upon the existence of poverty; if profit-making requires that over 50 per cent of the population should be held to semi-slavery under the poverty line. If you ask that question, you know it is true, and if you know it is true and you have a conscience you would say, “Well, I have to change this economy.

I know they do not listen to this, you know; this is too high for them, but I am enjoying myself. I am having a good time. I know posterity would read the *Hansard* and say, “Ay, they had a bright fella there, boy”. When I dead and gone, man go be reading the *Hansard* and saying, “the last of the commies”.

It is only when you interrogate the economy in this way that you can gain the knowledge to begin to dream of changing the world. It is only then that you would

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be able to let yourself be struck off your high horse so that you might become a true believer and an apostle of transformation. The distance of this budget from real people and the interest of people, and its coldness, make me want to quote from a Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe who, in a novel called *Anthills of the Savannah* addresses the trouble with Nigeria. He does it in the reflections of an intellectual and poet called Ikem, who is trying to work out, how does he make being somebody whom Lloyd Best would call a member of the validating elite who has been trained in Europe and who has his degree and a good job—how does a person like him relate to the political struggle in this country; how does a person like him do something for the poor people of his country. This is Ikem. He begins to wonder how the government has failed and he thinks to himself. I quote from pages 130—131, *Anthills of the Savannah* by Chinua Achebe:

“The prime failure of this government began also to take on a clearer meaning for him. It can't be the massive corruption though its scale and pervasiveness are truly intolerable; it isn't the subservience to foreign manipulation, degrading as it is; it isn't even this second-class, hand-me-down capitalism, ludicrous and doomed; nor is it the damnable shooting of striking railway-workers and demonstrating students and the destruction and banning thereafter of independent unions and cooperatives. It is the failure of our rulers to re-establish vital links with the poor and dispossessed of this country, with the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation's being.”

Madam President, the general point I want to make is that the strategies outlined for social, economic and cultural transformation in the budget are severely limited by the fact that the Government has given little or no thought to the fundamental task of understanding and changing the economy. This lack of penetration, this reluctance to come close to reality, this failure to plumb origins or root causes, is to be seen in the treatment of education.

I feel I would finish before the hour, which would be a record, but I would try not to. The education provision is large. The Development Programme gives the Ministry of Education \$350 million; just the Development Programme. The Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education received \$55 million. We are not even talking about recurrent expenditure, because that pushes it up into the billions. So it is a lot of money. In the year 2004, looking at the system before we get to tertiary education, the allocations are as follows:

Secondary \$232 million, mainly buildings.

Primary \$88 million, mainly buildings. I wonder if the Minister of Education

can tell me why I am not getting the Icacos Government School, because I see in the estimates of the Development Programme:

Construction of Icacos Government School, 2003 estimate—\$300,000

2003 Revised Estimate—blank

2004 Estimate—blank

Those people in Icacos have been suffering for years because the school broke down and they got accommodated in a church and over 30 years ago a fellow who had an estate gave the village a piece of land for a school. So we do not have to buy the land; we have the land. But for years now the poor people there have been begging for a school and I think they had been promised one. So I hope the Minister of Education would explain. Maybe you are getting a prefabricated one to just come and drop there. That would be good.

Sen. Manning: Thank you very much for giving way. The designs for that school are now being done and, hopefully, somewhere in the dry season of next year construction would start. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Prof. K. Ramchand: Madam President, if I did not know that the Minister was such a nice person I would feel she “set meh up”. [*Laughter*] But still it is good to know for sure that this is happening.

I quoted those figures: Secondary—\$232 million; Primary—\$88 million; Pre-primary—\$5 million. I would come back to this but I would tell you right now, that whole thing is upside down. We should be spending more money on pre-primary and primary than on secondary. But I would come to that in a moment. I just want to be fast and say that I think that the University of Trinidad and Tobago should be located in San Fernando and it should have been on the grounds of the technical institute, except that “fellas” are building a mall there now. If you are going to have a second university in Trinidad and Tobago, I feel that Wallerfield is the last place you want to have it; you want to have it where there is sugar, oil—this is the Technical University of Trinidad and Tobago and that is an area where that kind of technical university would have a very tight and close relationship to occupation and industry. Not only that, it would make life easier for people too. You would not have to travel from Icacos to Wallerfield. If we get a primary school in a few years’ time, we would get “fellas” who want to go to university.

I would not say any more about that university just yet. I want to speak about the secondary provision. I have said it before, but I would say it again. I have very

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grave doubts about the Secondary Education Modernization Programme (SEMP) performance and about whether we are getting value for money. Technically, we cannot get value for money from the way this project is being done. Because if you have the job of devising a new secondary school curriculum, you have to devise the whole curriculum and say: "This is what we are doing over the course of five years. At the end of five years this is where we are reaching". Then you could work out what you are doing in year one; what you are doing in year two, three and four. You cannot come and say, "Okay, we are doing the first year syllabus"; you send that out. "We are doing the second year syllabus"; you send that out. "We could send out a draft of the third year syllabus." So they do not even know what is four and five as yet. So how can you plan a curriculum in this piecemeal manner?

There is something wrong in the whole conception of the thing. I have also said there is something wrong about the reliance upon foreign consultants. There is something wrong about the public relations. I spoke to teachers in the school and said, "I hear you all get years one and two of the new syllabus". They said, "I don't know about that, boy; that thing just drop there and they say we have to teach it. I hear the principals get training but the principals not telling us anything." So I have my doubts.

3.15 p.m.

Madam President, look at these figures. The Secondary Education Modernization Programme (SEMP) is getting \$75 million in 2004; testing assessment and evaluation, \$2 million; curriculum development, \$2.5 million; teaching and learning strategies, \$32 million; school upgrade, \$25 million; expenses of SEMP coordinating unit, \$4 million; institutional strengthening, \$5 million; professional development, \$3 million; consultancies for six sub-components, \$1,500,000. It looks and sounds good, but I do not know what we are getting under those various headings. We are paying too much for whatever we are getting. What is that? Is that to train the teachers? Is it to train the students and principals? Is it to train the SEMP people? I do not know. I am very worried about this. We are spending all this money, one today, one tomorrow and in ten years it would reach the fifth year and the first year would be out of date again. It would start all over again and they would have to borrow more money.

I am unhappy about the operation of SEMP for the reasons I have given when you consider the source of the intake into the secondary school system. You could devise the most elaborate school secondary system and if the children coming there cannot read and write, what is the use of it? You are wasting money. I

believe that our secondary and tertiary systems are built on rotten foundations. The money ought to be spent at the pre-primary and primary levels. We are not only talking about academic weakness but also emotional and psychological unreadiness. It has been obvious for a very long time that the primary foundation is weak. If we want to educate our society we have to ensure that the children come out of a base that has educated them and helped to make them emotionally stable and well-balanced people. This is very necessary all over the world but I cannot deal with all over the world. Given our history and situation, we need to ensure that our children are given the kind of love, warmth, parenting and a sense of hope that many do not get because of the nature and inequalities in our society.

In 1999, I wrote a piece about the primary school system. I seek your permission to read from it. The book in which it is found is called *Contending With Destiny*. The article from which the piece comes is called "The Lost Literature of the West Indies". The section I am reading from has to do with education.

The time has come for us to conclude that our independence is compromised and vulnerable. It is so because we go through series after series of external motions and development plans without having discovered or seized the inner country whose fundamental reality, only the creative imagination seems to be intimidating.

What we need is a complete revamping of the system of education in the region in the light of our own answers to the questions what is education and what is education for? Somewhere in the new dispensation there would have to be made philosophically a living connection between education and the arts of the imagination. This would be reflected in a commitment to use the creative arts as a means in the delivery of education. What is called for is a series of measures designed to raise the level of consciousness and the degree of self-knowledge through the entire population and in the whole region. The system of education in the region should ensure that every person is at least trilingual for ordinary communication and for accessing the rich literatures of our region and the school curriculum in each set of territories should include exchange visits to the others to enhance familiarity and to facilitate language acquisition.

Governments are flinging money at education and there is encouraging talk of secondary school places for everybody, but education means something more than just providing school places for everybody. It means liberating ourselves from the controls and persuasions that came built in with

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the existing system. It means refusing to take the economist's view in which education is replaced by human resource development and which people are reduced to being economic resources to be developed or exploited, rather than human beings needing space and time for personal fulfillment.

It means abolishing competitive exams for secondary school places and abolishing also the books, teaching practices and curricular that these have spawned. It means recreating the teaching material used in our schools especially at the primary level. In our country, education means starting all over again with primary schools and developing a system that recognizes the need to offset the disadvantages caused by poverty and the absence of a home life, whether through poverty or from the fact that in many households where both parents work, the child is deprived of both educational help and emotional sustenance.

In practice, this may involve not setting up early childhood care and education centres separate from the schools; lowering the compulsory age and beginning primary school earlier and involving adults in the community as adjuncts to teacher. The primary school would have to be designed according to our particular needs and would need therefore to serve a curriculum requirement and physically create a sense of hope.

Madam President: The speaking time of the Senator has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Sen. Dr. E. McKenzie*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. Prof. K. Ramchand: Thank you, Madam President and hon. Senators.

I went on to offer a physical design of the school which reminds me of something else that worries me about SEMP. The schools have been designed and the curriculum has not been made. When they are finished with the curriculum they might find that the design does not suit it.

When I wrote that I did not quite grasp the size of the problem. A few years later I realized that you cannot start with the primary school you have to go further back. Certain social changes make it necessary to think about what happens to children and what we do to them before we initiate them into the rituals and routines of the primary school. We have an increase in the number of families where both parents are working. There is the growth of poverty with parents who do not work or work haphazardly and where they share a struggle to

survive in depressing physical conditions which affect negatively the quality and quantity of parenting. There are the distance between the home and the place of work; the loss of time in commuting and the tiredness when the parents get home to do any kind of parenting. They have invented this abominable phrase called “quality time”. Give him 15 minutes “quality time”. You could give your boyfriend 15 minutes “quality time” because you have your work to do. All time spent with children is quality time. They need it. The zero to three cohort needs it all the time. The three to six could take it all the time if they get it.

These new factors force us and the values that are developed, where parents think that they have to leave the kids with caretakers because they need to go out there to get money. Much research has been done about the need of children for parenting. By parenting, you could include an adult in lieu of the parent. It is not a matter of taking care, it is developing a kind of interaction between the adult and child. The child is an apprentice adult. The child associating with the adult or parent would learn how to live. The child picks up that more intuitively and easily out of the association than from anything you can tell them in the classrooms. If you want to teach moral and spiritual values just have a mummy and daddy who have moral and spiritual values. *[Interruption]* I know lawyers do not know about that. They only know about crime. *[Laughter]*

Sen. R. Montano: The last President was a lawyer.

Sen. Prof. K. Ramchand: Madam President, I refer to two books. Whatever the budget said I was going to talk about this today. The first one is called *Children First* by Penelope Leach and the second is, *Awakening Children's Minds* by Laura Berk. One comes from the United Kingdom and the other from the United States. I do not think that the authors know one another. Both of them present up to date research on the relationship between parent and child and the emotional bonding. Both have come to the conclusion that you cannot separate parenting from education when you are dealing with the child. You cannot introduce education too fast into the process. From zero to three, the emphasis is on parenting and intuitive learning. Between three and six, you might get a blend of mainly parenting and a little learning.

The perversity that has fallen on societies like ours is that there are preschools now that are just drilling these little children to get to the primary school. They are giving them a lag so that they could start getting ready for the Secondary Education Assessment (SEA) three years earlier than they get into the primary school. That is a perversion of that second period. In that period you make use of make-believe play; get them to do things, move around, paint, sing, dance and act

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out things. You have to create an environment and put people and other children around them from whom they would learn. Having discovered the importance of parenting in the early stages, the research has also found that even in the later stages of the child's education, the interaction with the adult is a very great learning device.

I would try to explain a technical thing called the zone of proximal development. It comes from the work of a Russian psychologist called Vygotsky. He said that the zone of proximal development is the distance between the child's actual development and potential development. In the interaction between the child and the adult, the child has the confidence that he is in his actual zone, but the relation with the parent pushes him into the potential zone. The child's potential development is determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. The zone is the dynamic region in which new capacities form as children tackle culturally meaningful tasks with a mentor's assistance.

“...a crucial aspect of parenting and the central aim of education is to provide children with experiences in their ‘zone’—activities that challenge them but that can be accomplished with sensitive adult guidance. Consequently, parents and teachers carry much responsibility for ensuring that children’s learning is maximized—...”

Studies about the parent/child relationship in early childhood have given us the equipment to fight back the attitude that is growing in the world, that you have heredity, the environment, peers and the parents have no influence. Forget them. That is not true. Psychologically, the parent has a fundamental and an undeniable role in the education and emotional development of the child. Madam Minister of Education, I feel that these books and the long bibliographies attached to them give us material to think about what we are doing with our children in the primary school and the kind of educational system we wish to construct.

Thank you.

Sen. Arnim Smith: Madam President, I start by saying that nobody could do any good for the people of this country if the crime situation is not brought under control. My contribution is to show the incompetence of the present Government in dealing with the crime situation. At present, the Government chooses to deal with the crime situation by not appointing a commissioner of police. Clearly, they have their choice for Commissioner of Police. Their choice is ACP James Philbert, the most junior of all the ACPs. He is the PNM's hit man. He is the man who

searched Sadiq Baksh's house and the house of the Leader of the Opposition. It was alleged that he went to the prison when it was shut down at 9.30 p.m.

Madam President: You should be a little careful about any accusations you are making about someone who cannot defend himself in the Senate.

Sen. A. Smith: Madam President, I am not making accusations. This is recorded in the Dhanraj Singh case. It is a fact. He went to the prison and recorded a statement from the murder accused Elliot Hypolite to charge Dhanraj Singh for murder. This man has been harassing Members of the Opposition.

The PNM Government refuses to deal with the real problem of solving crime in this country. The real problem is dealing with the rogue elements in the police service. There are all kinds of disguise and they are not dealing with the rogue elements in the police service because they are their friends and supporters. The entire country knows that the entire police service is contaminated with many rogue elements, yet, Manning and the PNM refuse to deal with them because they are their supporters and well wishers. The police know the kidnapers and criminals. They work with them. Some of these rogue elements work with the members of the police service. Some of them are filthy rich particularly, officers in the anti kidnapping unit. You can "lime" for an hour on any block in this country and the smallest peewat on that block could tell you those involved in kidnapping; the police officers who are their friends and those involved in murder and all kinds of crime, yet the police refuse to act.

The Prime Minister as head of the National Security Council ought to have, if not all this information, information pertaining to that. They are prepared to play politics with the lives of the citizens of this country. This Patrick Manning administration and the incompetence of the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation deliberately allow crime to get out of hand in this country. They turn a blind eye. They make all kinds of excuses. Kidnapping is going on and the Prime Minister said that there is something fishy about it, something that is not real.

The Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation comes up with a plan every Monday morning and it fails. They know that they had their plan a long time. Their plan was to allow law and order to break down to the point where they can now form squads against the people of this country.

Sen. Dumas: Madam President, that is an improper motive that is being said against the Prime Minister of this country and the Senator here. I am suggesting that cannot be done.

Sen. A. Smith: Let the Senator here defend himself. I am saying that every plan he has come up with has failed. The Prime Minister refused to accept that the kidnapping was real. I am not making any allegation. He said it was fishy. After that happened the Prime Minister announced that he was taking a soldier who was trained in combat and shoot to kill to be in charge of crime.

He announced that he was forming a riot squad. What has changed in this country for us to require a riot squad? There is an increase in crime and we need crime fighters, and police officers trained in crime detection. We do not need a man trained to shoot to kill and a riot squad. The purpose of a riot squad is to deal with demonstrations, to beat people when they assemble. It is clear that they know that the policies in this budget would backfire on them; create massive unemployment; bring hardship to the citizens and they would take to the streets. They are preparing themselves in advance. When the people take to the streets to demonstrate, he would send the riot squad for them to beat and lock them up.

I want to warn the media who choose to keep quiet on certain issues. The first people a riot squad beats is the media. They are the ones with the evidence because they have the cameras. Remember Bloody Tuesday and the march against the South African cricketers around the oval. Keith Shepperd and Charmaine Baboolal could tell all “yuh” the rest.

Next in line to get licks would be the trade union leaders. They would bring the people on the street to demonstrate against these hard measures. So, Mr. Errol Mcleod, Jennifer Baptiste, David Abdullah and Robert Guiseppi, it is time to stand up and say something. Stop playing games. The media must talk now or they would pay a dear price. The Prime Minister informs the riot squad that that goes for Members of Parliament. That is to distract the trade unionists and the labour leaders. The plan is to have the squad ready to beat people when the measures start to backfire on him. I do not know if he is forming a next flying squad or a mongoose gang, so they would take care of those in serious opposition to him. Sometime you would wake up and hear somebody is dead because he “shoot” at the police.

3.45 p.m.

They arrested people in Port of Spain and carried them in the bushes; they killed them and then put guns in their hands and said that they were guerrillas. We know all about that, Madam President. They are now trying to introduce those same measures on the population. While that is happening, however, some of the senior police officers continue to be loyal to the Government. On Monday,

October 06, 2003, Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) Allard was very loyal to the Government and the Prime Minister when he went to Chaguanas to stop the peaceful march against crime.

Madam President, anyone with good sense would have understood that if people were marching against crime they were marching in support of the State and the police. But that offended the police so people were arrested. While ACP Allard was being loyal to his Government, his Prime Minister was in the Parliament “busting” his throat, announcing a new man—a soldier—in charge of crime. When the media said to the hon. Prime Minister: “You have presented a budget with no Members of the Opposition there.” His response was: “I knew a long time ago that they were not coming.” Madam President, the only way he could have known they were not coming—Let me tell you something, Madam Minister [*Interruption*] Madam President. Sorry.

Sen. Mark: Probably you are anticipating in the future—the reshuffle.

Sen. A. Smith: I am not. Madam President, as far as I know, every Member of the Opposition was on their way to Parliament that day; even I, as a Senator, because we decided to caucus here. Members of staff could tell you we had asked for Committee Room No. 4 or No. 6 to be prepared for our caucus at 12.30 p.m., and then Members would have gone across to the Parliament. We had no plan to boycott. We were all on our way here and we got calls informing us that our colleagues were locked up, so we went in solidarity with them. Madam President, the only way the Prime Minister could have known that we were not coming to Parliament was if he had been in the plan to lock up our colleagues.

Sen. R. Montano: Political interference with the police!

Sen. A. Smith: Madam President, that is the only way he could have known that we were not coming.

Sen. R. Montano: Political interference! Deny it! Deny it! [*Interruption*] Rubbish!

Sen. A. Smith: Madam President, when people express their feelings about the crime situation in this country we hear talk about amending the treason laws. It seems as though the hon. Prime Minister does not understand that this world has become very small because of global communications and the Internet. We do not have to write and send messages to anybody around the world.

Sunday morning I read an article in the *Express*, which said that we are second in kidnapping in the world. I would imagine the Prime Minister would

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charge the *Express* for treason too because it is giving the country a bad name abroad. Everybody abroad is reading it. I am sure people have been calling all the Members on this side, on that side and members in the public gallery. People who have families and friends abroad are panicking and calling to find out what is going on in Trinidad. “Ah frighten! Ah doh want to come home. Ah eh comin’ for Carnival.” We are hearing that people are giving the country a bad name and they should be charged for treason. Madam President, this man reminds me of a movie I saw when I was young named *Mad Dog Cole*.

One tries to understand what kind of people we really have in positions, who make decisions for our country and who do not even have simple basic understanding. The Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation is on record saying: “The figures are confusing; it cannot be true because I saw 17 on top and 23 below and if we are 23 we should be on top.” He is on record as saying that! He does not even understand that the people say in Colombia one in every 17,000 is kidnapped and in Trinidad one in every 23,000 is kidnapped so that makes us second. He is saying because we have 23 and they have 17 we should be first. Madam President, and they are making decisions to run this country! We really have to ask ourselves where we are going as a nation. [*Interruption*] There are voices on the airwaves.

This country is rampant with crime. The criminals have taken over! The country is on fire! While Rome is burning Nero is fiddling and saying: “Hand me my weeping glasses, Whitehall is leaking.” [*Desk thumping*] Who cares about Whitehall leaking? Nero is saying when rain falls they have to bob and weave in water. Madam President, the population has to bob and weave from bullets every day! [*Desk thumping*] Nero is calling that collateral damage. So clearly, I say, this man reminds me of the movie I saw: *Mad Dog Cole*—total madness!

Madam President, as I said, it does not matter how much money is spent in the budget; they could spend as much as they want on education, sporting facilities, culture and whatever. They are spending on education and you know what is happening, people are not sending their children to schools; they are sending them abroad.

Sen. Seetahal: That is the rich?

Sen. A. Smith: Those who could afford. They are building sporting facilities, playgrounds, organizing cultural activities—they feel people mad to come out at 6 o'clock in the evening to go and sit in a playground with their children and next thing they are hearing is “patow tow, tow”? Madam President, nobody is making use of those facilities.

The Government's first commitment and priority is to deal with the crime. [*Desk thumping*] If they were serious about dealing with crime they would first go inside the police service and deal with the rogue cops. Madam President, forming another squad does not and will not solve the problem. They have a tendency, as soon as something is not working, they leave it as it is and open something else. Everybody says URP is corrupt, so they leave URP and open NHA and CEPEP. There are rogue cops in the police service who are tarnishing the image of the good cops—95 per cent of the cops in the police service are good and loyal— [*Desk thumping*—but the others are the ones whom they are afraid to touch because they are their supporters and they are powerful and influential in the police service. The Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation continues to be a dead horse!

Madam President, it was reported that five policemen beat and killed Shawn McLeod in a police station. That created a public outcry and in order for the police to quickly cover it up they charged one officer. They took the officer to a Justice of the Peace at 12 o'clock in the night to get bail. He was charged for manslaughter—unlawful killing. We did not hear a word from the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation nor from the Attorney General who was breathing down our necks telling us not to give kidnappers bail. Madam President, when a man is kidnapped he is still alive. A man was beaten and killed and they carried the officer to a JP at 12 o'clock at night to get bail. This is one-sided justice. They did not only get bail, you know, when he came to court in the morning his colleagues brought him in a heavily tinted car so that the media could not take his picture. To this day nobody has seen a photograph of him.

Madam President, it is all right for them to have a heavily tinted car to carry a policeman to court but every day they are causing long lines of traffic jam, blocking innocent citizens and ripping the tints off their cars. As I said, it is one-sided justice, Madam President.

Two police officers found some bags of cocaine somewhere in Moruga or Mayaro but they bypassed every police station from Mayaro to Port of Spain; even the head of the Eastern Division and came to Port of Spain. They took what they wanted out of the bag and handed the balance over to the police in Port of Spain. The result of that is the two officers were transferred out of the anti-kidnapping squad; so you see that anti-kidnapping squad was corrupted all the time. The officers were transferred from that squad and sent to another station where they could contaminate younger policemen. They should have taken more serious disciplinary action against them. The Minister of National Security and

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Rehabilitation, the head of the National Security Council, was silent. The Attorney General, who is also bringing Bills here and saying the UNC does not agree with anything, was also silent. They want to talk about no tolerance on crime; war on crime; what kind of war are they declaring? They should declare a war on the people who are part of the police service if they want to clean it up!

The Colonial Life Insurance Company (CLICO) is bringing the former mayor of New York to this country. I would go but I would not advise any Member of the Government to go. What Giuliani is going to tell them they cannot do. When Giuliani became the mayor of New York, it was the 45th highest state with respect to crime but when he left, they were the 3rd lowest. Do you know why, Madam President? He put decoys in the police service; in the prison service and ripped out every rogue cop there. That is the way it is supposed to be done. He cannot tell them to do that. [*Desk thumping*] They would not do that; so it is better they do not go and listen to him. Madam President, that is the way to do it, not to bring in a soldier. Giuliani did not bring in a soldier.

Madam President, they came with a budget and said, well, war against crime so they funded the Ministry of National Security and Rehabilitation with large sums of money to upgrade it. The Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation waited until two weeks ago when the president of the Second Division Police Association told the police officers not to work with the soldiers unless they have proper equipment, and then ordered 100 police bullet-proof vests. How serious was he all the time? So they came with a budget, which has allocated a large sum for the Ministry of National Security and Rehabilitation just to fight crime. Madam President, do you know what they are, in fact, doing? They are funding the ministry to fight crime on the one hand and they are funding the institutions that create crimes on the next hand, through the Community-based Environmental and Protection Enhancement Programme (CEPEP), National Housing Authority (NHA) and Unemployment Relief Programme (URP). [*Desk thumping*] Everybody knows that is where the murders are taking place. They are spinning top in mud. Madam President, that is their dollar for dollar plan. Our dollar for dollar plan is on education. Their dollar for dollar plan is to fund crime on the one hand and fight crime on the other hand. [*Desk thumping*] Do you understand, Madam President? So we are going nowhere.

Madam President, they virtually admit—I remember standing here last year and talking about the murders, killing and corruption in the NHA, and they laughed. They said that was not true. Do you know what the Prime Minister said recently? He said that he is reopening the NHA programme but he is putting the

soldiers in charge of it because it is creating crime. That is an admission of something that they denied last year.

Madam President, two Sundays ago, the headline on the newspaper was that the lives of the CEO and Chairman of NHA are being threatened because they are now prepared to clean up corruption. The corrupted people now want to kill them. All the time we were telling them what was happening but they were denying it because at that time they wanted the votes. [*Desk thumping*] Madam President, that would not do anything for this country.

They blame the UNC every time something happens. When Dhanraj Singh won his case the Attorney General said it was UNC who charged him. The UNC set him up. The Director of Public Prosecutions had to clear the air. So clearly what the Attorney General is saying—because the old people say what you think someone else would do is what you will do. So the Attorney General probably does interfere with the administration of justice for her to say that the former attorney general interfered with it.

[*Sen. Morean stands*]

[*Sen. Smith remains standing*]

“I eh giving no way, you know, Madam.” Madam President, I am not giving way.

Sen. Morean: Madam President, on a point of order.

Madam President: Are you on a point of order, Senator?

Sen. Morean: Yes, Madam President.

Madam President: The Senator is on a point of order.

Sen. A. Smith: Okay.

Sen. Morean: Standing Order No. 35(5): “Imputing improper motives...” Not only that, Madam President, the Senator is misleading the Senate saying what I did not say. I did not say what the Senator is saying that I said. What I did was respond to something that someone said. That is all I did. I did not say anything relating to a trial. I responded to something that the Member for Siparia said, where she wanted an enquiry to be conducted into why a witness was given immunity. I simply responded: “How could this Member ask for an enquiry when she was part of the administration which gave the witness immunity? All these things took place under an administration of which she was a part.” It had nothing to do with anybody else. [*Interruption*]

Sen. A. Smith: Madam—

Madam President: One moment please! Sen. Smith, we have had an explanation. We have to accept the Attorney General's explanation.

Sen. A. Smith: I have a copy of the *Express* dated October 11, 2003, you know. [*Interruption*] She did not deny it.

Madam President: We have to go by what the Attorney General has said and I would suggest that you do not impute improper motives to any Senator.

Sen. A. Smith: I am not imputing improper motives. I have a copy of the *Express* here. But if she denies it—She did not deny it in the media. And the Director of Public Prosecutions dealt with her. [*Interruption*]

Sen. D. Montano: Are you questioning the President's ruling?

Sen. A. Smith: I am explaining something to the President, Mr. Montano.

Madam President, Transparency International says that this country is corrupt more now than before. It also says that there was no accountability for the money that was spent on the enquiry into the airport. The hon. Attorney General said that Transparency International meant UNC corruption and they meant the Airports—

Sen. Dr. Saith: On a point of order, Madam President. Could the Senator please quote from the page of the Transparency International Report on which that statement was made?

[*Sen. Smith remains standing*]

Madam President: I cannot have two Senators standing at the same time. The Senator in on a point of order.

[*Sen. Smith takes his seat*]

Madam President: Dr. Saith, let me hear your question.

Sen. Dr. Saith: I am asking, Madam President, whether the Senator would quote from the Transparency International Report and give us the date and page from which he is quoting.

Madam President: Sen. Smith, do you have the Transparency International Report?

Sen. A. Smith: I do not have it, so if she wants to deny it that is fine. As I said, they blame the UNC for everything.

The Minister of Health has been in that position for two years. Thirteen babies died at the Eric Williams Mount Hope Medical Sciences Complex Hospital. What did the Minister say? The UNC deliberately run down the hospital so their friends in the private sector could get patients to attend their hospitals. One knows, clearly, that people who can afford private hospitals will not go to the public hospitals. If the public hospitals are run down people who just cannot afford the private hospitals would have to stay and suffer in the public hospitals, so that does not make sense.

Madam President, when people live in denial there is a price to pay. They blame the UNC for everything, I hope they continue. If somebody has a sickness and their sickness is God's sickness and they refuse to accept that it is God's sickness, they blame voodoo, obeah and black magic and they go up and down the country looking for all kinds of spiritual help. They take sea baths, bush baths, blood baths, people beat them with "coki-yea" broom, light candles on their heads and say things on them but the end result is that they will die of the sickness that they have and that is the way the PNM will die. They will continue to live in denial. [*Laughter*]

I listened to the debate in the Lower House. I listened and read the contribution of the hon. Member for St. Augustine, Mr. Winston Dookeran. He made a very useful contribution to the budget, warning the Government that if it took certain measures it would cause some disaster down the road. The Prime Minister in his reply mentioned both the Member for St. Augustine and the Member for St. Joseph as making good contributions. But the Member for Arouca North who rose immediately after the Member for St. Augustine, decided to embark on character assassination telling him: "You joined a dead party! You joined a party that emptied the Treasury. You joined a party that the population rejected." Madam President, what did that have to do with the budget debate? I felt embarrassed to know we have that level of ignorance in our Parliament. My only consolation was when I remember the old people saying: "What you expect from a bag of coals more than dust?" When you take a man from wetting lawns and cutting plants in the Botanic Gardens, under the Ministry of Works, and make him a minister, that is the reply you would get.

Madam President, I want to tell you, those on the other side must be saying who is me to say where a man comes from. But I have said it in this Senate already, I was born and grew up in one of the toughest ghettos in this country but when I come here, I come here as a man who has elevated himself, and as a director of the second largest poultry company in the whole of the Caribbean. [*Desk thumping*] Madam President, as I said, they continue to live in denial.

The hon. Prime Minister continues to interfere with the running of the police service in this country. Whenever he is in power he interferes with the running of the police service. In 1993, he tried to dismiss the then Commissioner of Police, Jules Bernard, and that resulted in police officers marching around the Red House. Today, he is refusing to appoint the Deputy Commissioner Everald Snaggs, as Commissioner of Police. When he does those things, he demoralizes the entire police service. All those loyal policemen eventually drop their hands. Right now they are closing down stations and so on, and it is the population that becomes vulnerable! Madam President, we must guard against that, and we must let our voices be heard against those kinds of crazy actions by people who are bent on being dictators.

Madam President, I came here last year and I remember speaking about Laventille and its surroundings from which most of the murders, high rise in crime and everything is associated—Laventille, Beetham, John John—there are two Laventilles—up the hill, Morvant. I came and I spoke about the Government doing something serious to deal with those people and the crime situation. Those people have supported PNM governments from 1956 to now. When the PNM lost 33/3, they won in that area. Do you know what those people have to show for that? The crime statistics would show that they have the highest crime in the country. That is all they have to show for their support because of neglect by this wicked PNM regime.

4.15 p.m.

Look at Laventille! This is a recent picture of Laventille; house on top of house. What do you expect to come out of there? What do you expect more than crime? I told “yuh all” that last year. “Dey” could hide gun in any track, any trace; hide cocaine, shoot a police when ‘he’ coming. Police are not going up there you know! Police “duz” drive around in the road in “dey” van. “Yuh” think they stupid to come and go between “dey.” So they cannot deal with the crime! I tell “yuh all” and “ah” saying it again; out of the \$22 billion, \$1 billion is not too much to invest in Laventille. Get these houses down, move some of the people out temporarily and bring them back. Develop this place to be a middle-class or lower middle-class area like Sixth Avenue in Barataria or Malabar or Coconut Drive. Do something! All ‘yuh’ talking about putting three-storey buildings. “All yuh” building projects, concrete barracks. When these people and “dey children in dem house,” as 7.00 o’clock in the night “dey” come outside because it is a sweat box, so “dey liming and then dey get involved in crime.”

Give the people decent homes, spend money on them “Dey support you. Why all yuh so heartless. These are all yuh supporters. Dem would ded fuh all

yuh Dem is the people who duz say, when yuh tell dem, but look all yuh suffering, dey say we know, we like it so. All yuh treat them good nuh. All yuh hah no heart. What all yuh do?" Put plasters on sores, open political projects and call it social projects. [*Desk thumping*] Like the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme, National Housing Authority and Unemployment Relief Programme. Everything this Government does is aimed at electioneering. The election is over but they still "scampaing," They "ent" campaigning you know, they "scampaing." Everything they do is geared towards votes. I warn them today, that sooner than later they will self-destruct because the people out there are talking. The voices are crying.

There is an organization which was recently formed called the Council of Elders of Laventille. They trying to deal with "'dey" crime; they trying to get people together; they trying to meet with some representatives of the Government. They have some people, one called Eulalie James and Fitzgerald Hinds, "all dem duz do, particularly Fitzgerald Hinds, is mamaguy people in his brudder house." He cannot even walk through his constituency because he "fraid." I could go dey. I could go on one ah dem blocks and sit down. Because I is ah man ah de people. Dem mamaguy the people. So I call on dem, it is time to stop the 'scampaing' and do something positive for the people of Laventee." That would help deal with the eradication of crime.

Madam President, I thank you.

The Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment (Sen. The Hon Rennie Dumas): Madam President, the Government of which I am proud to be an hon. Member, places heavy emphasis on performance in the service for the people of Trinidad and Tobago; accountability in providing that service; transparency in the actions taken in pursuit of the provision of that service; strategic planning in ensuring that the fundamentals of development are right; and ensuring that the development that we embark upon is sustainable. It is in this framework that I welcome the opportunity in accounting to the nation and to this honourable Chamber for matters under my portfolio of Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment, as well as to provide some perspectives on the policies, the strategic initiatives, the programmes and projects planned for fiscal 2003/2004.

Madam President, the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance provided a platform for planning the country's growth, development and the sustainability of that development to the year 2020 within the framework of the theme of this year's budget speech *Charting the Course to 2020: Empowering People*. It is a

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vision for which I am proud to join despite the sneers of “understanding development” and “refusing to be a slave”. I am quite clear that the budget which the Prime Minister eloquently and effectively outlined within which are the key imperatives of this theme, had ample focus on developing and maintaining our social capital stock and on sound and sustainable economic pillars. Furthermore, he took particular care to ensure that the state’s resources were equitably distributed to all sectors and sections of our society, reinforcing our motto of caring for all, especially the underprivileged and the socially disadvantaged.

Madam President, one of the imperatives of development of any country is the establishment of a long term vision that encapsulates broader development objectives for the country in general and even for those who may not be clever enough or well trained enough to understand its impact on their own individual development.

The current PNM administration has developed a growth path for this country known as Vision 2020, that has won the support and ardour of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. In outlining the vision, four main imperatives were identified for the country’s progress. It is within the framework of these that the country’s wealth is recognized as dependent on the energy sector and carefully crafts the plans and programmes to ensure that that wealth is invested for the future growth and development of the country, all sectors, all communities, and all families in this country.

It is clear that in the analysis that informs that vision certain diseconomies are highlighted. We could note them as: increased urbanization, water, air and noise pollution, the existing income differentials; the expanding production of waste by the modern economy we are seeking to establish; the long-standing problems of de-afforestation and land degradation that has started quite a while now and continues in some areas; and, furthermore, the lifestyle diseases and consumption habits that exist. When we face these problems we identify certain deficiencies and, therefore, we must address them. We must address the living conditions including elimination of poverty, provision of adequate supply of water and electricity, and environmental conservation. We must address employment generation, infrastructure development, environmental management and the issue of international competitiveness. If we examine these five, the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment clearly has a pivotal and critical role to play in the realization of Vision 2020.

The functions and responsibilities directly impact on these five core areas. Madam President, as we are all aware, the provision of adequate water, provision

of adequate sanitation, a proper electricity supply, preservation of the environment, conservation and enhancement of that environment, are very important components of our millennium development goals. These goals have been internationally accepted as markers of a country's management of its own self and in caring for the people that inhabit that country.

Madam President, it is, therefore, with some pleasure that there is a significant change in the way the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment is being addressed presently, because the capacity of the Ministry has been changed in the last year and continues to change.

We met a ministry in which the clear policy of the last administration was to run down the capacity to manage the forest, for example. But, we had a clear decision to eliminate the posts of forestry officers in which 55 of them were removed under the last administration. I am happy to report that we have a reversal of that policy and the forests of this country are being re-peopled primarily from the Ministry with the establishment of 42 new positions as forestry officers.

The propagation stations which were falling down around the ears of the persons who inhabited them are now in place and the process of recreating the nurseries and the products of those nurseries to make them available for the programme of re-afforestation and the enhancement of the watersheds of the country are in place.

The communication systems which were not in place under the last administration are now being put in place as there is a modern system that we would make sure would not allow certain people to disrupt our vision as we carry on efficient communication within the Ministry.

The community environment enforcement initiatives which are to be established, would be staffed with persons with the responsibility to be in constant communication with the various communities across the country with the intention of addressing the programmes that the Ministry would run with the various communities.

Madam President: Hon. Senators, we shall now take the tea break. This honourable Senate is suspended until 5.15 p.m.

4.32 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.15 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Sen The Hon. R. Dumas: Madam President, moving away from the question of administrative reform in the Ministry, we will look now at the environmental

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programme that takes off from the acknowledgement that good environmental health would be a critical indicator for the quality of life the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago would enjoy. This is one of the major policy goals with respect to the environment in the context of Vision 2020. Therefore, good environmental stewardship should be a critical component of our development strategy. It is for this reason that we have placed the issue of good environmental management at the centre of the national development agenda.

The environment represents a source of natural capital flow that is related to one's natural capital stock, and usually one's actions in support of the drive to economic development decrease the stock of natural resources as well as generate waste resulting in environmental deterioration. With a combination of resource depletion and environmental degradation occurring simultaneously, the environment loses its vitality and productivity affecting the availability and quality of the natural capital available to ensure a quality of life for our citizens.

I am happy to be part of this visionary and innovative administration because it is the first time in the history of this country that the national budget has generated such intense national debate about the environment. I must also point out to hon. Members of this honourable Senate that this is the first budget ever presented in the history of this country that could be described as a "green" budget. [*Desk thumping*]

There have never ever been previously such generous allocations to the environmental programmes, the preservation of neither the quality of the environmental capital nor a dedication of such resources to the projects and activities in a national framework for development.

Madam President, for fiscal 2004, the Government has allocated approximately \$1 billion on matters that could be considered part of the environmental management programme. It is therefore clear that it is attempting to lower the rate of environmental degradation as well as to enhance and to rehabilitate our environment to ensure a continuation of a quality flow of goods and services from a good quality environmental stock of capital.

Even as the national environmental debate rages on, it is clear that there has been some genuine misunderstandings of the role that the environment plays in development. But it is also true that there has been some deliberate misrepresentation and misinformation concerning many aspects of the environmental agenda.

By presenting this "green" national budget and generating this public debate on the environment, the Government has, in fact, succeeded in sensitizing the

population and awakening their consciousness with respect to its responsibility for good environmental stewardship. We note the criticisms. We note that when one invests in cleaning up the wastes that people created previously, we face criticisms. When we invest in re-establishing our natural capital stock through the re-afforestation programme we are criticized. When we phase out leaded gas that negatively impacts on the human health and degrades the environment then, of course, more criticisms.

These investments are intended to enhance the quality of the lives of our citizens. We are therefore satisfied that they are extremely critical parts of the investment in the quality of the capital available to our people, and we make no apology for that investment since people are, in fact, our priority.

Our approach to environmental protection, conservation and management includes establishing new and appropriate institutions to engage in analysis of the environment and movements in the environmental framework; strengthening the existing institutions to better engage in environmental management, expanding and strengthening the legislative framework that deals with the environment; developing appropriate strategies for better implementation of these regulations and appropriate legislation; increased investments in sustainable environmental management and to promote public participation in environmental management.

This Government recognizes that it cannot ensure the protection of its environment by itself. Every citizen, both private and corporate, has to recognize the tremendous benefits of maintaining the integrity of the environmental capital. It is therefore critical that we start with the question of public awareness and education initiatives. The main focus of these awareness and education initiatives include ensuring that one understands the importance of the country's wetlands described as the lungs of the nation; ensuring that we prevent and protect against forest fires and that we attend to the multitude of abuses to the environment, which have been occurring, mostly air and water pollution and indiscriminate garbage disposal.

Our public spaces must also come in for attention and as such we plan to undertake activities such as development works to the Queen's Park Savannah which are now ongoing; continuation of the rehabilitation of the facilities at the Botanical Gardens; improvement and expansion of works at the Emperor Valley Zoo and, of course, the examination of the possibility of the establishment of a zoo in South Trinidad; improvements to the management of our natural forest; development of the Caura River facilities and environmental protection generally throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

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We exist in a country with a wide bio-diversity. The numerous pieces of plants, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, insects, fish and countless unique eco-systems must be properly protected.

The Forestry Division: As was previously pointed out, this was an area that was being run down under the previous administration. We manage 192,000 hectares of state forests distributed within 35 forest reserves and 11 game sanctuaries in Trinidad. These have previously been under threat. The world recognizes that the forests are the mainstay of the global environment. If one takes note, one would find that there are pretty good quality capital in this country. It is not by accident that Tobago got rewards for winning the last award in the Main Ridge reserves. It is a matter that it is reaping the rewards of deliberate policy practised 300 years ago in declaring the Main Ridge a forest reserve. We must take regard of that process and so establish and re-establish reserves now that would ensure that the sustainability of our own development is uninterrupted. Moreover, the rural population lives in close proximity and in close conjunction to the forest and other natural reserves. It is these rural people who must use this natural capital stock to enhance their own lives and to guarantee their own existence, and the continuance of the quality of life for their children. Therefore, we owe a particular duty of care to these parts of the Trinidad and Tobago population.

The Forestry Division, as it seeks to carry out its responsibilities, encounters a number of problems. Last month we got the news that a number of the oldest and largest teak trees in the western hemisphere which were planted in Trinidad, at Quarry Road, Siparia in the year 1913 had been illegally removed. The felling of these trees is the destruction of part of our forest patrimony. We consider this a heinous crime. The investigations continue and we hope to be able to lay appropriate charges very soon. The investigations are carried out by a forest protection facility within the Forestry Division. This facility, this division, this department must have new people and the staff is going to be increased.

5.25 p.m.

In support of these and other related measures, Cabinet has given approval for the employment of an additional 30 forest officers, graduates of the Eastern Caribbean Institute of Agriculture and Forestry—an institution which the last administration had left to die, of which there has been no recent intake nor recent graduates. This institution will be back on stream. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, I have heard people scoff at the \$50 million given to the Ministry of Works and Transport for the Watershed Protection and Enhancement

Plan to deal with drainage. The drainage of the headwaters that come out of the Northern Range is a critical expenditure involving the management of the impact on the environment. Added to that, the Government has agreed to the reforestation of the watershed management programme to be carried out by the ministry; 33,000 acres of land throughout Trinidad and Tobago—in an area in which we have a management responsibility for more than half a million acres—or just about 50 per cent of the land mass of Trinidad and Tobago, is a drop in the bucket. When we hear people scoff at the activity which has never been done before—this is a programme which no government, including the last administration, had the guts to attempt nor the management skills to understand what that kind of investment in natural capital means. I am happy that this Government understands what that programme would mean and is making an investment in a very long-term capital development project.

It is intended that these lands in Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited, the southern watershed, San Pedro, Morne L'Enfer, Cap-de-ville and Erin, lands in Tabaquite, Ecclesville, Mac Nair as well as the critical watersheds of the Northern Range are all going to be paid attention to in this programme. I am happy to report that more than one million seedlings have been produced by the Forestry Division over the last six months and are now available for planting over the next period. [*Desk thumping*] The preparatory work to get those lands in order, and to make sure that we tend them over the next period, is being undertaken with the fullness of the support of a regenerated Forestry Division.

Madam President, the problem of forest fires is difficult to manage and is devastating during the dry season as we have recently experienced. We must note that these fires are perpetuated because we have emptied the forest of people who are pursuing legitimate activities, but this Government has agreed to repopulate the forest. Under the Forestry Division's reforestation programme we expect to have 2,500 people in those forests engaged in both the enhancement and protection of our natural capital.

It is sometimes said that one should let water fall off one's back, but we have had some professionals—entrepreneurial environmentalists, I like to call them—who point out to the population all the things they think should be done, but refuse to indicate that with every step they take their hands are held by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. We have had Green Leaf here and Tropical Relief Organization there talking about the work they are doing and they fail to do one thing: They fail to acknowledge that along every step of the way they are assisted by the Forestry Division. We have been assisting these groups by

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supplying them with all the plants, training and support. It is time, maybe, that we say that because the impression is being given that they do these things on their own and in a cry to access some funds, which they think we are holding, they say some things that are quite, I think I prefer to say, less than true.

With respect to the sawmills sector in Trinidad and Tobago, we had the situation in which saw millers had the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in court and not a log was moving from the forest. I am happy to point out that we were able to devise a policy for giving the saw millers access to the products of our forest which have resulted in a satisfied saw milling community.

Through programmes of research and development the wetlands of this country are being paid attention to. Whether we talk of Nariva, Caroni or Godineau Swamps, all of them are part of the Forest and Conservation of Wildlife Act and we are carrying out enforcement and development of recreational facilities.

Madam President, a system of incentives has been set up and the Forestry Division is encouraging communities as well as private land owners to deal with forestry so that, again, we can increase the size of the country's logs. All of this would be developed further as we move strategically to develop the critical national forest policy for which the team has been identified by the Cabinet of this country.

Horticultural services, Madam President, is a small division which had all its facilities falling around its ears. Some attention has been paid to them. They have contributed 320,000 forestry plantlets to be made available across the country and they have sold more than half of them to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. The sale of this planting material, the fire protection for biodiversity conservation as well as the promotion and promulgation of local species to replace and to avoid the situation in which we are introducing foreign plants throughout the country which we know not what the impact of those are on our own ecology and systems—

We come to the situation of the quality of our air. I would just report that up and down the country, sensible and sensitive people are quite happy that the Government has taken the critical step of removing lead from the fuel that was powering the cars in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

The Environmental Management Authority (EMA) is reformed and it is taking a conscious strategic position that its responsibility is to facilitate development in the country which is wholesome and sustainable. We are working hard to remove

the image that the EMA is a barrier to development. What it does mean is that the EMA is moving to become an institution that seeks to educate people—who come to seek its approvals—and walk hand in hand with them advising on how to attain these approvals. Some people would prefer to see the EMA as a stumbling block to development and that is certainly not the way the Government seeks to go. Whether we talk about vehicle emission standards, water pollution rules, or whatever, the EMA is a factor that fosters our development.

Madam President, solid waste management is a neglected area in this country and what we could note is that the Solid Waste Management Company Limited (SWMCOL) which was set up to manage this facility, and to ensure that we do not end up as a wasteland, had suffered seven years of degradation under the last administration. The SWMCOL is now a reenergized organization. The responsibility for solid waste management is being faced fully and you will see that there is funding for the development of a national solid waste management system without which we could never call ourselves a developed country. Waste management policy and investment has to be driven by a sound policy and the expectation is an integrated systems approach that would drive that policy.

Madam President, the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP) was an initiative of the hon. Prime Minister. What is noteworthy is that its expectation was that there would be empowerment of people living in a community taking responsibility to so organize themselves that they would be able to improve the environment within which they live. You know some people ignored the waste, they drove through the dirt and the filth that was so clear on all our highways and byways, they walked through that to go to work and they never counted the cost. They never counted how people lived in the situation or the expansion of employment opportunities which have occurred—5,700 workers in the last year. People who we were told were marginal, prideless, without drive, indisciplined, non-contributors to the economy of this country, have transformed themselves into organized groups capable of having pride in themselves and their affinity to this programme and working in their communities.

People have been throwing stones at them—of course the stones are being painted—but the reality is that these have been opportunities for the creation of viable businesses for a particular kind of training and for pride. The problem is that some people associate that programme, and the organization they see in that programme, with an organization that was made to beat them in an election. They joined the organizational capacity that they see in cleaning up the country,

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physical and otherwise, with the cleaning up that occurred in the country politically over the last period. I do not know if there is any crime in the people who were capable of beating you politically also being capable of cleaning up the country.

Madam President, do you know what we forget? During the period in which CEPEP was set up, the drive was non-participation—Do you remember that?—civil disobedience and do not participate in any government programmes, therefore, some people did not apply. When the advertisements went out, year after year, month after month, we were hearing day after day: “Where are the advertisements?” We brought the proof here, the date, the picture, the copy of which went to every newspaper, yet we heard the same thing, it was not advertised. That is not true. People did not have an opportunity to apply—that is not true. What is true is that an organization has been set up which is capable of cleaning up the country and the pride that these people have done this with is recognized and the country has decided to spend money on expanding the programme.

I hear some people describe themselves as “development economists” and other things like that, and they criticize the programme. Some people teach Economics at our university, but when one listens to them one understands why we have to build a new university. The fact is that classical or neoclassical economists do not count green. They do not do green accounts, so they do not put into the economy, and factor into the economy the flow of benefits that come out of money spent on green activities, so they see it as waste.

They do not see that as you build a proper public accounting system—as soon as we came to the point where we said that this thing has a value and this will be paid and this will be received and this money shall go into the economy—that in your subsidiary accounting what you did in fact say is that this is a valuable part of our economy and therefore must become a factor in what some people like to call the onshore economy. If you do not spend money on your environment then what you are doing is leaving out the value of your natural capital stock. If you do not count the money you spend in that direction as part of your development expenditure, what you are saying is that money spent in those directions have no part in your development; and that cannot be true. It is demonstrated not to be true. Do not teach our children that.

Madam President, we live on islands and therefore the Institute of Marine Affairs (IMA) is a critical part of our research and development capacity. The Government has allocated \$8 million to the design and construction of new

headquarters for the IMA. The IMA has been stuck at the edge of the peninsula and has been neglected over the last period. The research has not come into use in the design and development of Government's policy and programmes. We turn our backs on the marine areas and use them as our back doors. It is time we understand that the marine area is a critical resource in the development of any population living on an island. Therefore, it is with that understanding that the IMA has also received money to do a report on the state of the marine environment of Trinidad and Tobago. That is a first by this Government of which I am quite proud.

Madam President, nothing has happened with the water resources management in this country. We are in the process of developing a water resources policy. We went throughout Trinidad and Tobago last year to converse with the population on water resource management and the report is being finalized. That is for the establishment of a national water resource management authority. The legislation has been put in place, in a certain preliminary way, and the intention is that the authority will come into being soon. There is a slew of legislation to support these initiatives.

Madam President, I know, and I note, that the leader of the Senate team of the Opposition has said that there are some good things that they are going to support during this period which will be quite a change from the last period. I am sure I can urge him to support the environmental agenda. I have that wish because I am sure that if they examine carefully what is happening they would recognize that the environment is really a critical capital resource that requires our management and protection and also their support.

Madam President, biotechnology is a new area of the technological revolution that is going on now. With the help of the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), funding has been provided to address the bio safety issues in the country in conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and the Ministry of Legal Affairs. This is part of the slew of multilateral environmental agreements that we have made over the years. We have made these a number of times without, it seems, the intention or the will to follow through with both the learning and the programming that come with them. We take occasion to take responsibility to follow these.

As an example, we hosted the Barbados Programme of Action Review that was held in this country over the last two weeks. In that programme the Caribbean region's preparatory meeting was hosted by the ministry and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the end product was to participate in that review in the international programme in Mauritius.

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Madam President, I think we should say something about the Green Fund. What we would say about the Green Fund is that it has been accumulating but the Government, in being responsible, having examined the rules, the law and the intended stated policy for the use of the Green Fund, has recognized that there is need for rationalization of those arrangements and would therefore require new legislation which would be brought to the House shortly. There is also funding available for the environment for which the rules will be made by the Parliament. The money is not lost.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, could I ask my hon. colleague whether it is the intention of the Government to abolish the Green Fund?

Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas: Madam President, no, it is not the intention of the Government to abolish the Green Fund. The Green Fund continues. We only want to make sure—

Sen. Mark: You only want to restructure it?

Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas: We only want to make sure that the fund actually falls into the hands of communities which would be using it for the management of environmental issues in their communities. Some people have organized to get it, some people have organized to spend it, some people have organized how it should be done and not necessarily by the communities in their own right. We want to ensure that it is the communities in their own right that spend the money.

Madam President, the public utilities are part of the responsibilities of the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment. This sector is the lifeline of the country and the economy and a critical input in our competitive capacity. In this regard the generation and distribution of electrical energy, the provision of adequate and clean potable water, communication by mail and electronic means constitute a country's driving energy as it were. These are drivers in growth and development, and determines significantly the quality of life of the citizens of the country.

Our approach to lending strategic management and leadership to the public utilities sector is informed by a management framework that uses a five-point performance and reporting management system, namely: we examine profitability; we examine asset accumulation; we examine social responsibility; we examine environmental consciousness and we ensure health and safety.

Individually and collectively we embrace these principles and in order to ensure the optimum achievements of these performance indicators we constantly engage in close communication, collaboration and cooperation with the leadership of the boards of these enterprises as well as management and labour.

Madam President, where the provision of electricity service is concerned, the provision of safe, adequate, reliable and affordable electricity services is one of the pillars to socio economic development. In this regard the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission (T&TEC) continues to make a significant impact on Trinidad and Tobago's socio economic development by ensuring the electricity supply carries those characteristics. They carry those characteristics at tariffs that are substantially lower than any in the Caribbean or Latin American region and for most other countries of the world.

I am proud to report that major projects completed in 2002/2003 included: the provision of a 33 kv substation facilities for Nicholas Towers, Port of Spain; the upgrading of the San Raphael to Pinto Road 66 kv line; the implementation of Phase I of Government's LSDP programme. Ongoing projects include: construction of the Water and Sewerage Authority's 33 kv substation on Beetham Highway to provide a supply for the new WASA waste water project; introduction of a 12 kv distribution capacity at Brechin Castle substation to cater for new industrial loads—

Madam President: Hon. Senator's, the speaking time of the hon. Senator has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Sen. The hon. Dr. L. Saith*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas: Thank you, Madam President and hon. Senators.

Madam President, the establishment of a central warehouse facility at Dow Village, California and extending the 132 kv transmission system into the city of Port of Spain; this project is estimated to cost \$150 million. It is noteworthy that during the past year T&TEC's customer base has increased by 8,000 and is now approximately 344,000. Additionally, sales were up by 4 per cent over the previous year. There have been further improvements in T&TEC which include the following: 96 per cent of new connections were completed in less than two days and 83 per cent on the same day; the average response time to attend to customers' trouble reports was 2.4 hours in 2003. All of T&TEC's customers would have benefited from these improvements but particularly, industrial customers for whom reliability and quality of supply are of paramount importance.

Madam President, the projects the commission proposes to complete in 2003/2004 include: replacement of handheld terminals for meter reading;

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construction of a new substation at Longdenville to provide for anticipated load growth in Longdenville and Chaguanas; construction of a new Champs Fleurs substation; instituting a pilot project for renewable energy resources in selected rural communities; installation of a new fibre-optic communication link to Tobago; construction of a 626 kv substation to provide a supply to nitrogen 2000 compliant which is under construction; construction of a new Cascade/Santa Cruz 33 kv overhead line, as well as the upgrading of the existing Santa Cruz substation to provide for higher reliability and to cater for load growth in the Santa Cruz area; upgrading various substations with new transformers and switch gear; undertaking the city's 33 kv underground development; provision of substation facilities for the new methanol plant, Methanol 5000; continuing the nationwide accelerated pole replacement programme under which 2,720 poles have been replaced up to August of this year and an additional 3,000 are to be replaced by September 2004, of course, Phase II of the national social development programme.

Madam President, the demand for electricity in Tobago continues to grow and we have recorded a maximum demand of 29.3 megawatts to date. The increased capacity to meet this demand has been settled and one approach that is actively being pursued is to provide baseload generation in Tobago utilizing natural gas. At present, power is imported from Trinidad with the power station in Scarborough being operated in stand-by mode utilizing expensive diesel fuel.

Feasibility studies on delivery of offshore natural gas to Tobago are currently under way with the expected advantages of Tobago being self-sufficient with excess power being exported to Trinidad via the two 33 kv submarine cables now in place. This will reduce the additional capacity required in Trinidad and at the same time raise natural gas utilization in Tobago to an economically viable level, there being no need to provide additional submarine cables and to enhance the transmission infrastructure to Toco to support export of additional power to Tobago from Trinidad. That is an anticipated savings of significant cost.

5.55 p.m.

The availability of natural gas in Tobago will also spur development of the light manufacturing industry and assist the tourism sector by reducing energy cost for heating, et cetera.

Finally, the use of natural gas, being more environmentally friendly than the diesel fuel now used for generations, will impact positively on the tourism sector.

The Electrical Inspectorate Division is an institution that is required to be strengthened. The anticipated cost is provided for in the budget. It is noteworthy

that for the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago we now have a fully local code for high voltage installations as developed between this division and the Bureau of Standards.

The provision of water and sewerage services: The Government is committed to the provision of adequate, reliable and affordable water and sewerage services to the citizens of the country. A major challenge in the water and wastewater sector has been the financial issue of the operating deficit gap carried by WASA. Since 1965, the authority has not been able to close the gap between operating expenses and operating revenue. Further, that gap has constantly widened, each year being bigger than the last.

We are happy to report that this fiscal year WASA has been able to reduce its budgeted operating deficit by approximately 20 per cent or by \$49,589,000 as at the end of the third quarter and this is expected to increase at year end. This is noteworthy since the operating deficit is normally financed by the State via transfers and if this trend continues to the end of the fiscal year, as WASA has been mandated to improve its cash flow situation, WASA would have saved approximately \$65 million for the Treasury of Trinidad and Tobago. *[Interruption]* It has never been done; certainly not in the last seven years.

It is to be noted that WASA has approximately \$500 million in outstanding receivables. The instructions are to seek aggressively to collect that outstanding amount. Consequently, some of the projects completed under the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) and related project activities were:

- the development of major water sources which focused on upgrading the water distribution systems;
- rehabilitation works at the Caroni Raw Water Station;
- refurbishment of the chemical systems, installation of pressure control valves; all to reduce the loss of water;
- the continuation of local water supply projects with the drilling and equipment of wells at Santa Cruz and Arouca—the programme for the transmission and distribution of mains has continued with success;
- rehabilitation of wells at Carlsen Field and Arima;
- improvements to sewerage systems as part of the development works for wastewater with works at Trincity and Mount Hope.

With respect to the short-term investment programme—the projects to show part of a strategy to improve the water supply to areas of inadequate levels of

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service—the works that are being undertaken comprise the laying of more than 100 kilometres of pipes in various parts of the country. In Tobago, where the impact of water is critical during the tourism season, there has been improvement in terms of the distribution as well as bringing wells into operation. Overall, the works carried out under the PSIP is expected to benefit 59,600 persons within Trinidad and Tobago.

There have also been improvements in customer service initiatives. It is noteworthy also that we have some movement in the Tobago Wastewater Programme that has been laying around for some years and Cabinet has taken a decision to proceed with the work required to bring it to the next stage of design.

Sen. Mark: Can the Minister explain the situation involving WASA and the desalination plant—whether WASA has been making a profit out of the operation?

Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas: The Senator asked the question before and the time lapsed, so he is asking it again.

When I heard that question I was happy for one thing—that the Senator was at least honest enough to admit that he did not understand. I can therefore understand what happened with the decision-making process of the management within the last administration that has put us in so much trouble.

The Water and Sewerage Authority has not enjoyed any material additional revenues with the commission of the desalination plant at Point Lisas, although the plant has contributed to more water being available in the system. [*Desk thumping*] But decision-making is based on more than that. When they come to make a decision they are making a decision at the margins. WASA had always supplied its key customers at the Point Lisas Industrial Estate with a 24-hour supply of water from the Caroni Water Treatment Plant. These customers are now being served from the desalination plant. Their water consumption pattern has not changed; therefore the revenue received from these customers has also remained unchanged. WASA now has to incur the additional cost of \$180 million per year or \$15 million per month as a result of the take-or-buy agreement. The desalination plant has contributed to the improvement of water service levels in some areas outside of the Point Lisas Industrial Estate.

Madam President: Hon. Minister, you have two minutes.

Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas: Thank you.

While these customers now have increased water consumption levels, there is no additional revenue to WASA because the rating system depends on the value of the house. There has been no additional income to WASA.

Finally, the programme for the postal sector improvement continues and the programme of improvement for the meteorological services continues with the building of the radar station, et cetera. At another time we will also explain the marginal decision-making in the postal sector, what are some of the problems caused by the decision made by the last administration.

I thank you.

The Minister of Social Development (Sen. The Hon. Mustapha Abdul-Hamid): Madam President, I thank you very much for this opportunity to make my small contribution to this debate on the 2003/2004 budget.

May I take the opportunity to congratulate the hon. Prime Minister and the Ministers in the Ministry of Finance for the work they have done in producing this document, which we are debating today.

I did not walk with any novels from which to quote; nor did I compose any poems, so forgive me if my contribution is not as colourful as some of those that may have gone before.

I begin by reminding this Senate of the establishment of a particular subcommittee of the Cabinet. I offer this reminder because, in my opinion, the establishment of this subcommittee represents a clear and profound compliment to the philosophy of this Government in its commitment to the social sector.

The committee of which I speak is the Coordinating Committee on the Social Sector, chaired by the hon. Prime Minister and includes a number of Cabinet Ministers, permanent secretaries and other persons involved in social work, representatives from various social sector organizations as well as senior technocrats from various ministries.

This is important because, for the first time in the history of the governance of Trinidad and Tobago, we have a situation where a social sector committee as large as this one and as senior as this one, is being chaired by the Prime Minister and is responsible for coordinating all government activities in the social sector.

Traditionally, that kind of prestige and attention has been reserved for areas such as energy—because energy has traditionally been very important to our country, and there is a standing committee on energy. We also have the National Security Council, which is chaired by the hon. Prime Minister. Now we have a similar committee, a social sector committee, being chaired likewise, which really demonstrates the Government and the Prime Minister's clear interest in the development of the social sector. That is a major departure point.

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I would like to identify some of the things the committee has managed to achieve, but before I do that I want to articulate some of the benefits that we have derived as a result of the existence of this committee. To start with, it improves the communication among a number of ministries. We all sit around the same table and, as a result of that, we find that the coordination among the various ministries is far more easily achieved. We find as well that redundancy and overlap is significantly diminished because each ministry is immediately aware of all the things that other ministries are doing because a number of projects from various ministries are debated around a single table.

There is great benefit in that. In addition to the fact that redundancy is reduced, we also have a situation where a number of minor problems are quickly solved because we are present and able to identify them and we have the intellectual contributions and experience of various persons who would have pursued similar projects at a particular time. The existence of the coordinating committee on the social sector represents a major leap forward in the development of the Government's participation and intervention in the social sector.

We have managed over the last two years, and more particularly over the last year, through the Co-ordinating Committee on the Social Sector, CCSS as I would call it, to achieve a number of significant milestones. For example, it was that committee which was responsible for the commissioning of an audit and assessment of the Social Health and Rehabilitation Efforts Programme (SHARE). I am happy to say that that particular audit will begin at the end of this month. We recently got final Cabinet approval for that particular evaluation and it is a very important evaluation, simply because we find that a number of deficiencies may exist in various programmes and whenever we have an opportunity to perform an evaluation, we are in a better position to identify whether or not our programmes are clientele targeted and whether or not we are doing so efficiently and effectively.

The CCSS was also responsible for the commissioning of a review of the Civilian Conservation Corps programme, which led to the expansion of the programme. The CCSS was also responsible for the commissioning of a review of the On-the-Job Training and Retraining Programme; a situation analysis of the diagnostic testing in schools, which resulted, I am happy to report, in a decision to introduce a universal hearing and visual testing programme at the primary school level.

CCSS also facilitated the completion of a review of the Public Assistance Programme with consequent increases in grants. We have facilitated the design of

a structure for more effective delivery of social services in the community and we have also recommended the appointment of a committee to examine the role and function of the Youth Training Employment and Partnership Programme (YTEPP) resulting in restructuring of the programme for fiscal year 2004.

The appointment of a task force to revisit the national youth policy was also commissioned by this committee and will be finalized by November 2003. We have also facilitated the finalization of the national sport policy and its acceptance by Cabinet. We are also in the process of working on a national school health policy, which has been completed in draft form and will soon be released for public comment.

This committee has become necessary because there are at least 12 ministries of government, which are involved in its social sector efforts this particular term. There is a reason I make mention of this. I want to identify the specific responsibilities of the Ministry of Social Development and it has to be put in the context of what other ministries are doing. The Office of the Prime Minister—Social Services Delivery—Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs, Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment, Ministry of National Security, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Housing, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Public Administration and Information, Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education and the Ministry of Social Development are all represented on this particular committee. These are all ministries involved in the Government's social sector programme in one way or another.

I come to the Ministry of Social Development specifically. Our schedule is listed as being responsible for social research, social sector planning development, monitoring and evaluation, social impact and review. You will note that our Ministry has been relieved of the function of delivering or implementing Government's social sector programme. That is not without reason and it is not without wisdom.

Very often we find that whenever delivery functions are tied to research and development functions, they tend to be at the expense of research and development, an aspect of a ministry's mandate. We find that senior public servants and public servants generally tend to focus on the delivery aspects and something is lost at the planning stage, the research stage and the monitoring and evaluation stage because there is so much emphasis on getting the programme out to various communities.

The wisdom in separating those functions is that you have a group of officers and a minister dedicated to performing those functions, so that there is less room for compromise of those functions.

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It is also necessary that the officers responsible for administering programmes not undertake the monitoring and evaluation function. So, if you house it in a ministry, as in the Ministry of Social Development, then you find we can develop a monitoring and evaluation capacity and perform that function in favour of other ministries.

Madam President, as we plan, research and develop, our business is the design of programmes. So you are going to find that as I continue, I am speaking about committees being set up and work in the design of programmes. One of our primary responsibilities is to design and perfect programmes so that we ensure that the programmes are structured to reach the targeted group and that even in the selection of a group we have a proper and scientific basis upon which to identify a group to be beneficiaries of a programme, which we will design. That is the primary role of our ministry.

As we go along, having established that framework, I will be in a position to explain what we are doing in that context. Permit me to say a bit about developments; some has been said about it today. I recognize from the contribution of Sen. Prof. Ramchand that we, the nation, run the risk of interpreting development to be purely infrastructural, physical and technological development. But even when we identify human development, in that, too, sometimes we sell the definition short. Very often we say human development when we mean professional development. We mean training to perform certain kinds of professional functions—training to be teachers and lawyers—and that is what we classify as human development. That is not the end of it. That cannot be the end of it in terms of what development means.

I ask the question: Of what use is development if a father can see it fit to take a metal rod and strike his 17-month-old child? Of what use is development if a mother can fling her daughter down a flight of stairs? Of what use is development if we live in the best homes on the highest mountains and we abuse our children and our spouses? Of what use is development if we have the most sophisticated offices and we savage our co-workers and subordinates with harsh words? Those are all important aspects of development and the root of our problems in that area is not political. They are national issues, which, as a nation, we must recognize exist because of particular historical and sociological factors which may date back 100 or 500 years. We must understand where these things have come from and embark on a programme to ensure that our definition of development takes into account the content of the character of citizens and the quality of relationships that citizens are able to enjoy. I am speaking about the

quality of the fathers, mothers, sons, daughters and neighbours we are able to produce. These are the quality of relationships that we human beings are able to enjoy.

I put it to you and this Senate, Madam President, that we can have the best and tallest buildings, the best water supplies, the most sophisticated computers but if we are uncivil to each other, where would development be? It is the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Development—and we understand our responsibility in that particular way—to take steps to ensure that we contribute to the development of the content of the character such that we are more civil to each other and that our relationships are more fruitful and beneficial and that all the people of Trinidad and Tobago would so understand development and appreciate that as an important aspect.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Public Administration and Information (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith): Madam President, with the agreement of Senators, we will have two more speakers after Sen. The Hon. Abdul-Hamid—Sen. Dr. McKenzie and Sen. The Hon. Gift.

I, therefore, beg to move that the sitting continue until the contributions of Sen. The Hon. Gift and Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie are completed.

Question put and agreed to.

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Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Madam President, I also make reference to the 2020 developed-country status and to the fact that we are trying to approach our development in a planned way. I think that provides us with a certain distinct advantage. Sen. Prof. Ramchand is right. Do we want necessarily to replicate societies that exist in Europe or in any part of the world? Those societies have developed along a certain path and we are in a position to benefit from their experience. Given we are moving forward in a planned way, we can design our development programme to avoid some of the ills that exist in some of those societies. To the extent that we are able to do so, we certainly will benefit from their experiences, but to the extent that we simply become replicas of their societies, we would have wasted an opportunity.

I am also convinced, given what is happening within my own ministry and what I see happening in other ministries, that we intend to make full use of the benefit of their experiences as we move forward and have all these consultations.

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There is a particular reason for that. We need to access the thoughts and ideas that exist in the minds of our citizens. Having done that—and we continue to do that—it tells me that we are in a good position to ensure that we negotiate a lot of those ills and diseases that exist in some of our society. Many of our citizens are fully aware of what we want and what we do not want to be part of our culture and civilization in future.

These things have been coming up even in our own consultations at our ministry. We need to give credit to our citizens as they generally recognize what a social ill is. In spite of the fact that we may be very, very guilty of practising the same thing, we recognize it as something that is not necessarily beneficial to the society and we are at least able to articulate our vision and now we must implement a plan to achieve that vision. We do not transform human beings nor do we transform cultures overnight, but we must at least have a concept with which we can work.

At the Ministry of Social Development, we embarked on one such consultation—a National Consultation on Social Development. It was a major project of ours during the last year and the objective was to develop a national policy on social development. We did not identify a single day, neither did we have a one-day consultation. We extended it over a long period, perhaps four to six months, during which time we had consultations at various levels. In fact, it was taken in four phases. One of the first things we did was to develop and publish a newspaper supplement to promote the public awareness of some of the issues we hope to consider and to promote the national consultation and the form it would take.

We followed it up with ten focus group meetings. Focus group meetings allowed us a greater degree of intimacy because they were much smaller groups. We invited key players in various areas who would be in a position to address various teams. We had facilitators, which we sourced from expertise that exists in the communities.

6.25 p.m.

I remember former Minister of Health, Dr. Emmanuel Hosein participated as a facilitator when we discussed disability. We sourced personnel from the university and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs). They were involved in facilitating and coordinating the exercise and presenting papers at a community level. There were 10, which allowed us to visit 10 different communities. Because of the intimacy, we found that we were able to achieve greater in-depth and

detailed discussions which would provide us with the kind of quality which contributed to the document we later had. I want to identify briefly some of the themes that we addressed at some of the focus group meetings. It is important because all of these themes would have fed into what will come later.

We addressed issues of social integration and ethnic relations; societal norms and values; the integrity of the institution of the family; discipline and sexual responsibility; the effects of gambling and alcohol on the society; adolescent development; issues involving the youth, elderly, disability, crime and safety; and poverty alleviation. Had the hon. Senator spoken to me before, we may have changed it to poverty eradication. Perhaps, in our own limited way we only reach as far as alleviation. I am going to see to what extent we can apply the ideas we learnt from alleviation to the eradication of poverty. We had those 10 focus group meetings dealing with these themes and more.

Out of the discussions we had, we moved to something which we called mini consultations. These mini consultations allowed us to expand the breadth of wisdom so that more people would participate. Again, there was the balance between the expansion of the participation, in terms of numbers, and the depth of the interaction. Those were done in three parts of Trinidad: north, south and central and one in Tobago. All the ideas that we accumulated were put into a draft policy document, which was distributed among a number of players in the social sector. They were given ample time to study the document, at the end of which we held a one-day national consultation on social development. I am going through this in such detail because I want to make this honourable Senate and the wider society aware of the extent to which we go to ensure that the ideas of our citizens—we actually go out and meet the people—impact on whatever document comes out in the Ministry of Social Development. We ensure that we have the best possible document. We find a similar kind of approach being taken by the Government in its Vision 2020 policy development.

At our national consultation which I considered to be a success, over 300 persons participated. What was noteworthy was that some of those phrases such as “poverty alleviation” never came up. What was most important to many people who were present and participated was the question that I raised earlier: the issue of the content of the character of the citizens. People want to know that they can relate to their fellow citizens in a civil way.

I want to speak about what we have been doing in respect of the older persons in our society. It is noteworthy that the demographics in our country are such that in 2002, there were 130,000 persons aged 60 years and over or 10 per cent of the

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population. By 2010, we expect that number to increase to 159,000 or 12 per cent of the total population. By 2020, that number would increase to 230,000 or 17.5 per cent of the population. By 2025, that number would be 260,000 or 20 per cent of the population. Madam President, I hope to be a proud member of that category at the time. These statistics are very important because a number of the plans that we put in place from now will provide the foundations upon which future plans are based. By 2050, 33 per cent of the population would be over the age of 60, comprising 459,000 persons. That is extremely important because it forces us to place greater emphasis on addressing the needs of persons 60 years and over.

In that regard, at the Ministry, we are in the process of establishing—we are not fully established—a division of aging. Very recently we employed a director of aging, who is in the process of participating in the exercise of bringing new staff on board and completing the establishment of that division. That division would be responsible for, among other things, the receipt of applications for licensing of homes for older persons and conducting investigations for the grant and renewal of licences and the development of standards for the care of older persons. Madam President, I am sure that you would be happy to note that this is taking place because we do have issues with the quality of care that our older persons receive at various institutions. This is the case largely because there are no standards established or where there is consensus as to what the standards are, we do not have an agency that is strictly and legally responsible for ensuring that those standards are kept.

The division would also conduct annual inspections of homes for older persons; monitor the operations of homes for older persons; monitor and coordinate the implementation of the national policy on aging—which I will come to shortly—organize and conduct training programmes, seminar and workshops for care providers; develop and implement programmes and projects for the benefit of senior citizens; conduct and research matters pertaining to aging and the elderly; and conduct public sensitization programmes and issues regarding aging and the elderly. Those are, among others, the main responsibilities of the division of aging.

I spoke about a national policy on aging. Madam President, I am happy to note that we have in fact worked diligently over the last year on the drafting and consulting exercise to ensure that we have a proper draft of a national policy on aging. In that regard, we conducted a number of consultations; some of which I attended. I must report that the participation was extraordinary. Many of the persons who are involved in care for the elderly have a lot of information and they

can make meaningful contributions to the way in which Government designs its programmes. The consultations were conducted in Westmoorings; Port of Spain; Naparima Bowl in San Fernando; Macoya and Tobago. The position with regard to the national policy on aging is that we are now in the process of compiling with a view to finalizing that particular document which will guide the operations of the division of aging. We are hopeful that everything would come together and be fully functional in the not too distant future during this particular fiscal year.

When I attended the consultation at the Naparima Bowl in San Fernando, a lady came to the microphone and described an idea that she had for a national day of recreation and sports for the elderly. Immediately, it seemed to be a good idea. When we discussed it in the forum many persons who were present, including a large number of persons who were over 55 years, considered it to be an excellent idea and something in which they would like to participate. The idea was that we are actually trying to change a mindset which is that many people think when one reaches age 60, one sits and waits until one dies. We would like to change that mindset by demonstrating that a lot of activities can take place beyond 60, so that those who are already 60 can make some adjustments in the way that they conduct themselves and persons who are approaching 60 can start to invest in their physical health. One of the ways we decided we could in fact do that is to have a national showpiece of persons over 55—which was the age we agreed to at that time—who would participate in a number of physical activities and, in so doing, demonstrate their own abilities, promote their own personal health and at the same time, demonstrate to the wider community this is something that is quite possible beyond the age of 55 or 60.

As fate would have it, we do celebrate, in this country, an International Day for Older Persons which is normally held on October 1st. This year we moved the date of the celebration because we needed enough time to coordinate this particular activity. What we decided to do was—instead of celebrating the international day for older persons in the sombre and conservative way in which it would have been celebrated in the past—have a national day of recreation and sports for the elderly. Madam President, I am very happy to report that on Saturday last, the Ministry of Social Development hosted a national day of sport and recreation for the elderly at the President's ground and it was, in my view and the view of some of our senior public officials, for a first time effort, a great success. [*Desk thumping*] Madam President, an invitation was not extended to you because I know of your youthfulness. [*Laughter*] I attended the function and interacted with a number of older persons. They were very enthusiastic about the exercise. Hopefully, by next year, God's will, we would be able to do it again.

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Perhaps, with all the right approvals we would be able to make it an even greater success. We would also do a better job at advertising so that more persons would be able to attend. We were severely cramped for time and that is why the advertising was not as well done as it could have been.

I now turn to children and what we have been doing in the Ministry with respect to promoting the interest of children. I would speak very briefly on something that is called the National Plan of Action for Children and offer some background information. In 1990, the World Summit for Children was held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. Trinidad and Tobago became signatory to the 1990 World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children. This committed Trinidad and Tobago to the development and implementation of a plan of action to protect the rights and improve the well-being of children during the next decade, 1990—2000.

In 1991, a National Plan of Action Committee was established to formulate a plan of action for children. In 1993, an Inter-ministerial Committee was established under the aegis of the Ministry of Social Development—I am sure you would remember that Madam President—to facilitate the implementation of the NPA for children, to coordinate governmental and nongovernmental activities in this area and to monitor the progress achieved.

In 2002, the UN General Assembly Special Session was held to review the progress achieved since the 1990 World Summit and to formulate new goals—because we recognized that the decade has passed—in keeping with emerging challenges. The deliberations of the UN General Assembly Special Session resulted in an outcome document entitled: *A World Fit for Children* which set a new agenda for the period 2001—2010 and identified four major priority areas of action, (i) promoting healthy lives; (ii) promoting quality education; (iii) protecting against abuse, exploitation and violence; and (iv) combating HIV/AIDS. This session also produced 21 goals, a plan of action and strategies devoted to ensuring the best possible start in life for children, a good quality basic education for all children; and opportunities for all children, especially the adolescent, for meaningful participation in their community.

As a result of all these international efforts, we have embarked on our exercise of consultation. We have put together a committee involving a number of governmental and non-governmental interests. We are at the final stages of completing our National Plan of Action. We have held a number of consultations throughout the country. We are happy to report that too has been going very well

and we expect it to continue to go well. We are in our very last stages of the completion of that particular policy document.

In terms of the research agenda of the Ministry, those consultations constitute an important part of research, but they are also tied to the planning and development exercise.

I would like to report on a multi-sectoral committee, which was established with Cabinet's approval, to examine the status of the institution of the family and to make recommendations as to what the role of the State can be in promoting and developing the institution of the family. It is my view that our family institution as it exists must be understood in its proper sociological and historical context as I mentioned earlier in my contribution. Why do I say sociological and historical? It is my view that during the period of colonialism, and more particularly during the period of slavery and to a lesser extent, the period of indentureship, we found that the institution of the family was subjected to severe pressure on the part of the State.

[MR. VICE-PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

It has been recorded in history books—I do not want to identify any specific book—and it can be safely said—the historians in our midst can correct me if I am wrong—that during the period of colonialism, the State deliberately and systematically undermined and denigrated the institution of the family because it was not consistent with the policy towards slaves in particular.

We must also recognize that the State was the most powerful institution with large amounts of resources, tremendous authority and power. When you have a situation where the most powerful, most authoritative and most resourceful institution is deliberately and systematically destroying another institution, you cannot have a situation where it is left to other weaker institutions to repair the damage that powerful institution is doing.

Beyond emancipation, the State took a hands-off approach on rehabilitating the institution of the family. It was left up to the churches and other institutions, which may not necessarily have had the same kind of power and resources. There are a number of other factors that would have contributed to the decimation of the institution of the family such as poverty, unemployment and drugs, which includes alcohol.

We now have a situation in Trinidad where dysfunction is not confined to any particular sector or group. It is not confined to people without money. Family dysfunction exists throughout the nation. We find as well, in Trinidad

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and Tobago, that wherever we have functional families, by and large, we can expect that the children who are born in those circumstances—of course this is not the case 100 per cent—find that they have a better chance at success. They can take advantage of educational opportunities. I always make the point that a single child does not take advantage of an opportunity for education, it is a family that prepares this child to benefit from that opportunity. When you see a child walking to school a number of activities would have taken place behind the scenes to allow this child to depart for school and for the day to be meaningful. If a child has no one to make those preparations on his or her behalf, that child would find that the day at school would not be of any significance whatsoever. Where there are functional families, those communities tend to be very successful. Where there are dysfunctional families, we find that those are the areas of our community where we tend to have some of our more serious problems.

Mr. Vice-President, with regard to all that I have just said, we at the Ministry of Social Development put together a multi-disciplinary committee to examine the status of the family, review all the literature and to engage in new discussions with a fresh perspective as to recommendations for the period 2003—2004 for rehabilitating the institution of the family. That is ongoing. We expect a report in a few months' time. As is the norm with our ministry, we did not confine ourselves to officers of our own ministry. We have expanded it to a number of persons from the University of the West Indies, Department of Behavioural Sciences and others representing business.

With respect to the changing of the society, we are looking at a 10—15 year programme of evolving change. Some might refer to it as social engineering. I say so carefully, because I do not want it to be misunderstood. There are values that we all share and about which there is consensus. No one can argue with us that situations are encouraged where children are born due to unreasonable circumstances. If we set the standard for the society we can ask parents or would-be-parents to ensure that children are born into reasonable circumstances. If we achieve a level of discipline within society and the adults recognize their circumstances do not allow them to provide a reasonable start for their child—were they to become pregnant or impregnate someone—and take that into account, that would guide some of their sexual behaviour and we would find that fewer children would be born in aggressive and traumatic circumstances. Hopefully, over a period of time, through education, of course, we will be able to improve the quality of the society in that way.

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, the speaking time of the hon. Senator has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. L. Saith*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: My inexperience would show because I had absolutely no idea that 45 minutes had gone and I have the bulk of my speaking to do. I would have to delete some.

I would speak briefly on a programme which we have been supporting at the Ministry which is called the Adolescent Mothers Programme. We do have some of our young women who have children and find themselves in difficulty. At the same time, while we recognize that there are levels of responsibility and discipline that we must encourage, we also recognize that we have an immediate situation to deal with. In so doing, we have been contributing significant sums of money to the promotion and expansion of the CHOICES Programme which is conducted by the Child Welfare League. Funds in the amount of \$4,168,000 were provided to meet the initial capital expenditure and the recurrent expenditure in the first year of the programme. An initial instalment of \$134,000 was released to the league on August 05, 2003. A cheque in the amount of \$300,000 representing the second instalment was issued to the Child Welfare League on October 15, 2003.

Permit me to say a little on measures taken to address the socio-economic impact on deported persons to Trinidad and Tobago. I was present here when it was raised, perhaps informally. The Government has recognized that the issue regarding deportees is one that is important and is one worthy of a response from the Government. We acknowledge that there are 236 deportees coming into Trinidad, on average, per year. While there has been no formal study as to what the precise impact of the deportees has been, there is general consensus that the presence of the deportees poses a threat to the security of the nation. There is the perspective that deportees are trained and/or seasoned in criminal activities. We recognize that they usually come out of a prison sentence. The presence of the deportees exacerbate the problem of social displacement due to the lack of family support, social programme support, unemployment and other problems of social integration faced by deportees.

We have been working on a programme to address the situation of deportees and we are treating it as a social issue rather than a criminal one. These persons

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would have served their time. We are hopeful that this programme would be implemented in the next fiscal year. We are looking at achieving the outcome of facilitating the reintegration and monitoring of deportees, of addressing resettlement issues, skills training, rehabilitation and counselling, employment issues, prevention of social displacement, recidivism and an increase in criminal behaviour in the society. We also want to facilitate the implementation.

6.55 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, it will please you and, certainly, it will please Sen. Prof. Ramesh Deosaran to know that we have recognized that recidivism is, in fact, a problem in the society. I think Sen. Prof. Deosaran's Report entitled: *Prison Recidivism Towards Reduction, Rehabilitation and Reform* identified that 56 per cent of prison inmates are recidivists. As a result of these statistics, we have recognized that there is need to establish a comprehensive programme for ex-prisoners in order to address this situation, because they constitute a very specific group that we should target, if we intend to attack criminal activity from a social perspective.

Basically, what we would like to achieve with this programme is to assist ex-prisoners to reintegrate within the society and also with their families. Part of the problem is that they have been alienated and they have very little support or help, so it is very easy for them to be reabsorbed, as it were, into the criminal community. We are hoping that we will be able to assist them in order to be reintegrated and accepted by society and, perhaps, accepted by their families.

We are also hoping to assist ex-prisoners to become self-reliant. This would require, of course, skills training and other kinds of human development exercises. We are also hoping to provide rehabilitation services for ex-prisoners who will be returning to the society. We would like to foster greater willingness to accept and assist ex-prisoners towards reform by members of the society. The focus cannot only be on ex-prisoners themselves, but there must be some focus on the wider society, because we are the ones who are going to have to accept them back into our various communities.

This programme will establish mechanisms for the provision of counselling and rehabilitation services such as job skills training and life-skills training to ex-prisoner. Of course, we have recognized that life-skills training really has to do with the character content, and the human relationships that I spoke about earlier. We are hoping to provide job placement services for ex-prisoners.

Mr. Vice-President, there is always need for immediate remedy, and we have found that there is the likelihood that we would have to provide temporary

accommodation through the establishment of, perhaps, half-way houses for ex-prisoners requiring such assistance, or graduation centres in various communities where ex-prisoners could reside for a period of time.

There is need generally to ensure that persons are monitored, because they need assistance in surviving. It is for that reason that we see the need to establish a comprehensive proposal. The representatives on this committee would come from the Centre for Criminology; the Chamber of Commerce; the Prison Fellowship International which is an expert organization in restorative justice; the Government has also invited a group called Vision on the Mission; the Ministry of Social Development; the Ministry of Social Services Delivery and the Ministry of National Security and Rehabilitation.

Mr. Vice-President, there are a number of projects which we conceptualized over the last year and I would like to mention these projects. Our society is multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural. Citizens of this country are of varying degrees of wealth and so forth. All of these factors, in many countries, conspire to divide societies. Multi-ethnicity, as you know, throughout the world, could be a problem if it is not managed properly. I am happy that as a society, we have not had some of the negative experiences of other countries and, certainly, not the intensity where relationships in other countries have been characterized amongst various groups. So it is safe to say that we, in fact, have much to celebrate because in my mind, as a people, we are to some degree, a model for other countries that find themselves in the depths of physical and other kinds of antagonistic behaviour.

At the same time, we still have a long way to go and my Ministry—being involved as it is—is attempting to change attitudes and direct the country towards fostering more and more harmony. When I say more and more harmony, I mean more and more harmony not only across racial, religious and ethnic lines, but also across class barriers and this also includes certain kinds of attitudes towards the environment, our neighbours and so forth.

We have designed a week called: The National Week of Social Harmony. We have set aside seven days and each day is dedicated towards promoting harmony across some barrier. As a nation, we have recognized the need for spirituality, and we have decided to call the first day—and this was done in consultation with religious organizations and inter-religious organizations—a Day of Devotion to God. We would like the entire population to come to terms with citizens and their own spirituality.

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We intend to host a major activity at the Queen's Park Savannah where we have various religious leaders coming and speaking to one congregation in Trinidad and Tobago. This will comprise of a representative from the various religious groups and the theme will be: Building this Nation. What we have envisaged that we are going to get is a Muslim Imam will come and talk about developing and building this nation from a Muslim perspective, also we will have a Hindu, Catholic, Anglican, Baptist and other religions doing likewise, so people will be in a position to recognize and identify that we all have the same agenda, in spite of our various and differing religious affinities.

There will be a Day of the Environment, where we will conduct activities in the promotion of harmonization in respect of the environment. There will also be a Day of Peace and Security, a Day of Unity and a Day of Caring, where we are going to ask persons who are wealthy to give on that day. The Government will also be involved in that activity. We are asking corporate citizens and a number of private citizens to give something, so that we will develop within ourselves, this capacity to be charitable. There is also a Day of Patriotism and, on the last day, there will be a Day of Cultural Harmony, which would be the showpiece of all our various rich cultures.

Mr. Vice-President, I know that I have one minute, but I want to devote that minute and talk about an Anger Management Programme we had in the Laventille area. We invited an expert psychiatrist to go into the Laventille area to conduct a 15-hour workshop. We invited 100 persons to participate in this exercise. For those Senators who might be cynical about it, I had the opportunity to attend the graduation, and a mother came to me and she cried and gave me a testimony. She said that what she had learnt has caused her to treat her sons differently. These are skills that may exist amongst some of us, but there are skills such as relating and managing your own anger and emotions, which do not exist amongst everyone. That is something very proactive that we have done, and this programme was directed specifically to the Laventille community. We also recognized that there are other communities in which there may be anger, so we intend to expand that programme to other communities, and that will guide the shape of our mediation programme.

Mr. Vice-President, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. Eastlyn McKenzie: Thank you, very much, Mr. Vice-President. I am happy that I am not in Sen. Conrad Enill's shoes, because after someone has delivered a budget, for him to come back and say what people would have heard before, is not an easy task. I sympathize with him—having to deliver a budget address, the gist of which we have had some weeks before.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to recognize the statement by the Government that they had consultations with interest groups in the country. When I read the budget statement, I could have seen in the document where attention was paid to some of these suggestions, and also to recommendations made by other groups.

I will like to take this opportunity to recognize the hard work of the public servants who have helped to put these documents together. I wonder how did they do it? I think it is really a labour that the Government cannot pay for, especially, when one looks at the fine prints. I have heard that people had to work late hours in the night; hats off to them.

Mr. Vice-President, when I come to this Senate, I come here not only to share my experiences and knowledge, but also to learn from other Senators. Today, I have learnt so much from Senators who have spoken before me, but I will not single out any one of them. I was really impressed with the contribution made by my colleagues on this side, Sen. Mary King, and the down-to-earth contribution of my very good friend—who does not recognize me as his friend and always runs away from me—Sen. Arnim Smith. [*Desk thumping*]

More than that, this budget has given me hope, and I will tell you why. [*Desk thumping*] It has given me hope because when I heard the hon. Minister of Finance, in the other place, recognizing the contributions made by Members of Parliament namely: Mr. Dookeran and Mr. Yetming, I said: “My gosh, it is so nice to know that people on the opposite side could impress people on the Government side.” So I have some hope there.

I had some hope also when I heard Sen. the hon. Abdul-Hamid recognizing that—probably if he had heard Sen. Prof. Ramchand before, he would have changed the word “alleviation” to “eradication”. It means that someone is listening and that gives me hope.

More than that, I have been in this Senate since 1995. I know that Sen. Mark, Sen. Baksh and Sen. Danny Montano would bear me out. Former, Sen. Julian Kenny has trumpeted the cause of some of the reflections that I have seen in this budget. We sat next to each other in the Senate. I always told him that he was using a cobweb to tie his interest into the debate, because the flimsiest excuse that Sen. Julian Kenny found he used it to talk about leaded gas. I say today that it is a tribute to him that he has lived to see that a government is doing something about removing leaded gas from the market. [*Desk thumping*]

I listened to Sen. Abdul-Hamid and, again, former Sen. Mahabir-Wyatt would have danced if she had heard when the hon. Senator made mention about the

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homes for older persons. Earlier this year, she called me and said, “Eastlyn, are you going to do something about getting the Government’s attention to do something about the homes for older persons? This was a Bill that was brought here in 2000. I am pleased that these people are around to hear that the Government is listening and action would be taken.

With respect to the Breathalyzer, Prof. Julian Kenny talked about it until he turned blue. Again, I am happy to see that this is in the budget.

The textbook loans that are ongoing, Prof. Spence talked about it from his experience in Barbados. Madam Minister, I am pleased to see this, and these are the things that give me hope—someone is listening, and probably it is saying to us, to have a little patience and things will work out.

Mr. Vice-President, let me just move on briefly to some other points that I have noted. I am not going to go over points that were made before, but maybe some action plans that Ministers have spoken about like the reforestation project et cetera. I want to talk about the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP).

Mr. Vice-President, my problem with CEPEP is the fear that when Sen. Sadiq Baksh had a programme of training in skills for women, I remember saying to him that these women must be taught marketable skills, otherwise the programme will be a revolving door, where the same persons will go back within the next six months, and they will have the same problem, because they were not getting skills that will sustain them.

We have to ensure that in CEPEP and other programmes—I agree that they must be paid—the people must earn, but they must learn. They must earn and learn and they must be told that they are not going to be there permanently, and that they will be going to serve for a time. Now, after a period of time they must be able to come out of the programme and be able to sustain themselves through whatever they have learnt—whether they are self-employed or whether they have become employable. I would like to see this slant taken. People must be taught skills that are marketable; skills that they can earn from, and not just labouring skills. There are persons who would not be able to do anything else but labouring skills, because they do not have the mental capacity for anything else. We have to be very careful with that.

Mr. Vice-President, I am hoping that a part of this CEPEP budget would go towards planting back trees; doing agriculture. In fact, if I were in a position to influence the project, I would say that when people plant these crops, in addition

to paying them, they must sell the produce and they should be given the money. When they see that they are being paid for something and they could earn, they should then be weaned from the project later on. They should be made to understand that after six months, a year or 18 months they would have to stand on their own two feet. I want to suggest that, because we have CEPEP, URP and so forth and we must try to avoid duplication and wastage.

Mr. Vice-President, let me just briefly go through some little points I made in the budget statement as given by the hon. Minister. I did read through the book and made some comments and the theme, as I recall it is: Empowering People. I am on page 8, and I would like to make some comments. I hope that I would be satisfied after probably another year—I do not expect that these things would be implemented immediately because they need to be planned and organized—that someone was listening.

On page 8 of the budget statement it says:

“Government will embark on a programme of Public Education...”

I say full stop. The Government could use the Ministry of Information to do public education in different forms whether it is in the form of skits, videos, posters or whatever. I think this is one way the Government could do its public education programme.

Another aspect to this is that the Government should recognize and realize that it does not have all the resources within a particular Ministry. The Government must not be scared to “farm out” programmes to special groups who have the expertise to do the job. When one looks at the Girl Guides and Boy Scouts movements—in schools some teachers have never done anything else but teach. They do not know anything about Guides, Brownies, and Red Cross. When we were young teachers we were involved in these things and, therefore, schools must not be denied the privilege to have this type of movement in which young people could participate, because the schools do not have the resources. It should be given to the Girl Guides movement and say, “Look, we want a Girl Guide movement in every school. Give us a proposal and how much will it cost.” This is the same CEPEP, URP and so forth, as far as I am concerned. The Government could call it by whatever name it wants to call it, but the Government should ensure these types of co-curricula groups—that discipline our young people—are involved.

I have heard people from the Cadet group saying that very rare would one find an ex-cadet in trouble. The discipline is so great that it carries them throughout.

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The Government should try and see whether it could farm this out to groups that have the resources.

Another point that I would like to make is where the Government talks about the Unemployment Relief Programme and short-term employment and so forth. We must follow up and monitor these programmes and have support systems in place. We wean these people from projects, and we do not follow up to see what is happening, for example, to see whether these people are in trouble. If someone learns hairdressing, the person could braid hair nicely, but how is that person making out? That person may not have a simple thing like a hairdryer or a place where she could set up her business. Are you going to say, let them use the community centres where they could do it? They need the support system. Some of the people who have learnt to make sugar cakes and so forth do not even have a stove at home, but they are removed from where they were preparing these things, and they were sent back home and they cannot do it anymore, because they do not have the facilities or the resources. The Government must follow it up. Some of these people are bashful and shy and they do not want to say, “Well, we do not have a proper stove at home”.

Again, the Government must provide jobs for some people. In some instances, there are people who were taught how to make sandwiches—I am just using this as an illustration—why the Government cannot arrange with the school feeding programme and let them supply the sandwiches—whether it is peanut butter sandwiches or whatever—and give them the job and keep them in the same groups where they were functioning. We need to look at these areas. Let them form themselves into little units and do the supplying.

I want to suggest to the hon. Minister of Education—I am happy that the breakfast programme is going to be expanded. Madam Minister, through the Vice-President, the breakfast programme is more important than the lunch. That first meal—I can tell you because I go to schools every day in Tobago—does not only sustain these children early in the morning when they need to have something on their stomachs so that they could concentrate, but it makes them go to school early, because they are going to get something to eat. So late coming is being stamped out and you are getting the children to go to school early, because they know that they are going to get a meal, and they are going to be fed something nutritious. I would suggest that the breakfast programme be expanded fast and furious—according to the people—to ensure that our children get a very good meal.

It is not only poor children who do not have breakfast. There are many rich people who cannot get their children to eat, because they rush out of the house

with a little teacup of cornflakes and a small cup of coffee because they are late. They do not eat properly. I am sure, if we feed these children properly in the morning, they will concentrate up to lunchtime so that after lunch, if they eat and their belly is full and they want to sleep they could be given activities to draw, sing and dance and so forth, but we know that for the first four hours they would have eaten something substantial and they would have concentrated well.

The next point is, I would like to ask the hon. Minister—I know that this has been said but I will just briefly say it—to put 90 per cent of the emphasis on the pre-schools and the primary schools. You cannot feed the secondary schools with good students if the pre-schools and, especially, the primary schools are weak. I could tell you from our research that the problem is in our primary schools. In our primary schools we need as much input such as experience, resource and teacher upgrading—everything that you could possibly find. I will suggest that the Minister really put as much concentration as is humanly possible on primary schools.

I now turn to page 31. I am heartened by local government reform. I am sure that the nine Senators on the Independent Benches would be extremely happy, because this was one of our strong points when we met the people. The people wanted to see local government bodies empowered so that Government would start right down below and come up.

I think that if we concentrate on primary schools, not only will we have better students whose performance will improve, but we could also teach loyalty and patriotism to country starting from there. Those of us who are 60 years and over will know that is not anything new. When we hear the song God Bless Our Nation we could sing the words, but our children do not know the song, because in our primary schools, we have stopped this civic-minded type of assembly where we had the pledge, the National Anthem and, at least, one of the national songs. The Minister of Education should make sure that we have these things back in schools.

Mr. Vice-President, our Ministry of Information and so forth could do a lot about the support for local products. Sometimes, as college students, we would go with our friends from the other islands, and one would be in company with a friend from Jamaica—they will go to the bar or restaurant and they will look through and say, “What happen, you cannot call for what you want, that one make in Barbados, that one make in Jamaica and give me the one make in Jamaica.” In Trinidad, we do not have that patriotism to say, “No matter what you do, give me a Carib instead of a Heineken Beer.” But we would say, “A beer is a beer.” I do not drink beer, but I am just saying how our people have not learnt that sense of

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patriotism and loyalty. Mr. Vice-President, do you know what the Jamaicans will tell you? The Jamaicans will say, “ When, meh buy Jamaican rum, meh give fellow home a Jamaican job.”

7.25 p.m.

We talk about tourism and we only concentrate on probably just the marketing; but we should not only stress the marketing, the exposure, the exchange and that type of thing, but we should get rid of things like people putting their luggage on the plane and when it gets there, your laptop computer is missing from your luggage. Because there are people in the airport, when you check in your cargo, would steal from your suitcase, and when you get home your goods are missing. Do you want those people to come back? I would suggest that we do things of the sort.

About the performing arts, on page 45, I would say as I have said before, let Pan Trinbago handle anything to do with pan. We do not have any pan resources in our Ministry of Culture and Tourism. So please!

Mr. Vice-President, one of the readings I have done as to how some countries are trying to cope, or to get over the problem of illiteracy and innumeracy, is that they have developed in their curriculum a strategy where they link maths and English to every subject. So it is not maths in a compartment or English in a compartment; maths and English are linked to all the subjects that are taught, and I think it is something that the ministry could look into.

While we try to solve the problem in the primary schools, I want to suggest to the hon. Minister that we have to take care of those children who are already in secondary schools and are deficient, otherwise we are going to feed the cancer where those children, who have gone into secondary schools unprepared, cannot read or write. If a remedial programme is not put in place, specially tailored with teachers who are sensitive, who have a type of empathy, who will not curse the children and so on, those children are going to drop out. Or, they are going to leave school worse than when they went into the secondary schools. I know that Tobago has begun to do that. From our report, I know that the secretary for education, who is the Chief Secretary, has put specially trained teachers in the secondary schools for those children who would have scored—you know what I mean—under a certain percentage. For those who were already in the secondary schools they have begun to do remedial work in maths and English with them because at that stage they cannot handle the secondary school curriculum. I am saying this must continue.

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

While I am on that—we are talking about quota for the university—I want to tell the hon. Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, through you, Madam President, that one of the reasons many Tobagonians are shy, has nothing to do with acceptance, it has to do with accommodation. Because I can tell you Sen. Mark, Sen. Baksh, and you, Sen. D. Montano, could bear me out how many times I have talked about our people in this honourable Senate when they had to come to the John S. Donaldson Technical Institute, the San Fernando Technical Institute, the nursing school and so on, with having no place to stay. When they stayed at a particular place everybody ransacked their things, stole all their food and all sorts of things, and I actually had to go back to Tobago to the then Chief Secretary to pay for accommodation for those students in Trinidad.

Last two weeks, a mother whose child got a scholarship from Tobago, came down to enrol that child and was in tears because she thought that after she had made arrangements for accommodation on the campus it would have been okay. When she came they said, “Oh, we are sorry, the accommodation is for foreign students. You are not part of foreign students; you are from Tobago; you are from part of the country.” Madam President, What part of the country are we from to go to campus in St. Augustine? Should we walk from Tobago to go to St. Augustine? Tobago, Toco and those places should be treated as if they are coming to a foreign country. Why do you think some of us had left Tobago and came to Mausica; gave up five years of teaching and the service did not count? Because we did not have any place to stay. They say, “everybody in Tobago have family”; so if I have a family in Toco I must go and stay there to go to St. Augustine? Mr. Minister, please rectify that if you want more Tobagonians to come here to access tertiary education.

Madam President, I want to appeal that you put on the agenda, lunchrooms, for the next three or four years in the primary schools. As the hon. Abdul-Hamid said, “It is not only about material and physical things, it is the little graces too.” If we put lunchrooms—I did not say now, I said three to four years down the road—our children would learn to sit, eat and dine, and the little graces that they probably would never get anywhere else. There are children who do not know how to talk to one another and they are supervised. This is not asking too much.

Madam President, I would ask again—I see where they have the school transport system—to look at after school hours’ transportation for our children who want to participate in co-curricula activities. All the buses go at 3 o’clock and 3.15 p.m, so some schools took the lunch hour as the co-curricula period. We

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have to cater for what we want. So if the child wants to go—it is the secondary schools I am talking about—to football, dance, drama or what have you, some of them cannot go because there is no transport after that; stagger the hours that some buses will go at 3 o'clock whereas some will stay back. Have it well regulated and planned by the school principals, so that people do not become delinquent and stay back just because—I think it is something that you can look at for the future. I am not saying it is something that could be instituted right now.

I say again that you should look at on-site day-care centres for some of these things. There are young people; adolescent mothers—community centres—they have a baby—nobody is holding his or her baby. Look at what is happening to persons when babies are left without proper supervision. If they know the same person you are paying, you can pay a URP or a CEPEP supervisor and some young ladies to take care of children. That could be their job. So many people want good trained young people to take care of three or four children; some people want them to work in a day-care home; some people want them to leave them in their own homes; train them and let the mothers feel that their children are right there; they could nurse their children and so on.

I also want to suggest that one of the greatest influences there could be on adults is children. Listen, if you carry them to the supermarket, there is cornflakes—while you are looking at the cheapest box of cornflakes per price; 16 ounces in Sunshine, Universal and so on, they would say, “Oh no.” They would take down the one with the advertisement that has caught them; they could not care less about that being \$3.00 more expensive than the next one. I am saying let us use our school children to get at the adult population.

I do not know if you all remember the cholera outbreak and the cholera education. They went to schools and educated the children about cholera. Nurses went into the schools with posters, videos and so on to show the students. Listen, no mother or father in the home could have walked in and out there and did not wash their hands about 15 times. Those children were like ticks; they stick on to you. I am saying target the children in the schools. Let the district nurses go back to the schools. We used to have mobile health officials going to the schools to show the children videos on this. When they went home they used to pester their parents. Use our schools for more than just the talk and chalk.

Well, I have heard from Sen. Abdul-Hamid about training young persons to work in the homes for the elderly and expanding the CEPEP philosophy. I would like to say again, with respect to health, let us look at our heart diseases, the lifestyle diseases and again target the children. While I look at the relief for

persons over 60 years of age who suffer from hypertension, diabetes, glaucoma, cardiac heart diseases, I would suggest from the prevalence in Tobago, to please make prostate medication available because I have seen where this is a problem from the research. Madam President, I am actually winding up.

With respect to the allowance for sport, art and culture, let us not confine our concept of culture only to the performing arts. That is a mistake we make. We confine our concept of culture just to the performing arts, but I would like us to look at even our heritage buildings; our Nelson Island history and so forth. If we widen this, probably an organization, firm or a company might say, "I do not want to sponsor Carnival; I do not want to sponsor a video; I do not want to sponsor this, but I do not mind helping to restore Nelson Island." So I want to ask that we expand this sport, art and culture to include our built heritage and give the same type of incentive as given to the other groups.

I would like to make some other points, Madam President. Think again of some of the things we had before that I think we can reintroduce some time in the future. We had mobile dentistry vans that went around to schools and children used to visit the dentist right there. Could we think of that? Even if we have, is that it? Schools with examination rooms for the doctors; I remember as a little child, I was put in a little room and the doctor came to feel up my tummy to see if I had worms and what have you. I do not know how they did it, but they detected that. Probably Dr. Quamina would be able to say how you could feel a tummy and know if the child has worms.

We could probably reintroduce the school visit by the nurses; nurses used to go into the schools. Some of them still go and vaccinate the children. There are two things that I would like the hon. Minister of Education to look at: one, we found that after SEA exams children just relax. Most of them do nothing until the end of the term and then they are on eight weeks' holiday. When they go into secondary school they are as rusty as old nails. I think we need to do something, even if it is getting the division of information to prepare educational videos to look at during their eight weeks of vacation. We have to use the division more than just to go around and look at a bridge being opened. We have to use the thing beneficially. So let us look at it because we have too much idle time between an examination and entering into something.

Finally, I should like to ask the Government to ensure that the implementation of the various aspects of activity in the budget be done. I would not like to see later in the financial year we come with a Variation of Appropriation Bill where only 40 per cent of the planned budget has been utilized. In other words, our

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implementation process is very low. I remember when I came in 1995 it was so low, all sorts of fancy things were being put in the budget and when the time came to implement those things the implementation rate was very, very low. I must confess that I have seen a marked improvement; not only now but even before this administration came in. When it was brought up in 1996/1997, the then Minister of Finance, the former Sen. Brian Kuei Tung, did agree that something would be done, and after him Mr. Yetming and now I have again seen an improvement. We want maximum implementation. That it is not possible but if you aim there and you drop a little we would understand. But let us ensure, Madam President, that we have better implementation year after year until we do not allocate sums to projects that we know cannot be done.

Madam President, this is the final point I am going to make. Sen. Arnim Smith talked about the young boy who was in the club at the time when he was shot, and we wondered where the mother was. In addition to that question, if I were the club owner he would not have been in my club. We have to start looking out for one another. I am saying as the owner of the club, if I find an under-aged child there I would have had the privilege to do something about it. I would have asked: “Young man, why are you here at this time? Who is your mother? Where do you live?” Okay. Therefore, there must be some sort of link where the public would know—a club owner, a restaurant owner, whoever—if I find a child under age in a wrong place, who must I call? This is where probably the Ministry of Social Development, the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation or whoever must draw up some published—I do not know what you would call it—hotline or whatever, that this club owner could have said, “Come here, we have a child who is under age lurking around in my club and who should be at home.” Probably we do not have a set up like this. Madam President, I have hope.

I have remained in this honourable Senate to see some proposals of years ago come to fruition. I want to say how heartened I feel, and because of that I am hopeful that many of the things that we have seen in the budget now would come to pass, and that the hon. Minister would take back to the hon. Minister of Finance and the Cabinet some of the types of analyses and suggestions that he would have heard today for improving this country. It belongs to all of us and we feel that we have a contribution to make, and everyone who has spoken today has given some idea—if not a suggestion for improvement—of how discontented people are because of certain things. Even that is a suggestion for improvement, because we know what people accept and what they do not accept.

Madam President, I want to thank you for the opportunity and I hope that together we can make this country better by the types of recommendations,

suggestions, criticisms and challenges that we would give to each other as we sit in this Parliament.

Thank you very much.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Knowlson Gift): Madam President, as it did in the case of 2002/2003 budget cycle and the execution of its mandate for that period, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs continues to stand at the forefront of Trinidad and Tobago's relationship with and its participation in the relevant deliberations, debate and decisions which engage the attention of wider international community. This is a unique position which places a great deal of responsibility on the ministry, to ensure that the country keeps abreast of constantly changing developments in the global economy and politics.

The ministry is fully cognisant of the Government's objective to have Trinidad and Tobago achieve developed country status by the year 2020. As stated by the hon. Prime Minister in his presentation of the budget for the fiscal year 2004 entitled: Charting the course to 2020 Empowering People; the aim is to provide our citizens with a high quality of life, particularly in the critical areas of education, health, social services and security.

In the strengthening of our bilateral relations our foreign policy posture continues to ensure that such relations should be "people centred"—a theme which is reflected in the 2004 budget. In keeping with this perspective, therefore, cultural and sporting activities continue to be an important component. Indeed, the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs formed part of the Trinidad and Tobago delegation to the ongoing 58th Session of the United Nations General Assembly and participated actively in many of the debates. Furthermore, another dimension is the participation of another colleague, Sen. C. Kangaloo, who is running the third leg of the representational relay at the United Nations General Assembly Sessions which is currently underway.

The ministry, in the context of its strategic position, continues, not only to facilitate the exploration of new markets for the country's goods and services, but also to protect those markets in which our producers have already achieved considerable success. In this context an extensive work programme has been undertaken to ensure that the ministry is at the forefront of Government's efforts to achieve its goal. For many years some of our Overseas Missions were without duly appointed heads. In the last year that situation has been addressed with the appointment of Ambassador of Missions in Brussels, Brasilia, Geneva, Ottawa and Washington DC. The filling of other vacant posts of heads of mission is being addressed and soon London, Delhi in India and Ajuba in Nigeria will be filled.

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The ministry is also undertaking recruitment of officers to strengthen its cadre of diplomatic staff to address the decline in staffing levels over the years. In tandem with the recruitment exercise will be the training of staff and the upgrading of facilities to ensure that the ministry is equipped to manage the multi-disciplinary nature of its work. These measures are meant to facilitate the Government's new thrust for trade and enhanced diplomatic relations both bilaterally and multilaterally and call for greater interaction between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the wider public/private sector.

At the regional level, the importance of our Caricom involvement cannot be overstressed. The commitment of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to Caricom and to the provision of assistance and support to member states, both at the regional and bilateral levels, remains unparalleled. Over the last year, for instance, Trinidad and Tobago has provided financial and technical assistance, supported the Regional Stabilization Fund and has introduced a Caricom Trade Support Programme for which this country has pledged the sum of TT \$100 million.

With respect to Dominica's stabilization programme and the financial and technical assistance being provided by Caricom member states, Trinidad and Tobago also gave EC \$10 million to that country in November 2002.

In response to training from the Grenada Fire Service, assistance was rendered from May 19 to May 28, 2003 with the visit of top officials from the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service. They assisted in the assessment of the training needs of the Grenada Fire Service, as well as in the planning of relevant training programmes for the fire personnel.

With regard to Haiti, our Government supports the strengthening of democracy in that country. Trinidad and Tobago, in the context of traditional Caricom solidarity, supported the Inter-American Development Bank's Aid programme towards Haiti and, to that end, made a pledge of US \$500,000 in response to the IDB's request to Caricom member states. It should be noted that the current intraregional trade balance weighs heavily in Trinidad and Tobago's favour and an adverse economic situation in Caricom countries would impact negatively on Trinidad and Tobago's export earnings.

Trinidad and Tobago hosted the 14th Inter-Sessional meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community last February at which some very important decisions aimed at institutional strengthening of the regional integration movement were taken. The critical need to implement the

Caricom Single Market and Economy (CSME) was emphasized. Member states were urged to do so not later than 2005. This, in part, is a measure to prepare for the Free Trade Area of the Americas and the increasing liberalization of the international trade environment. Trinidad and Tobago has committed itself to be CSME ready in one year and several administrative and institutional arrangements have already been adopted to realize this objective. Madam President, I shall deal a little later with the question of the FTAA.

To effect the transition in the region from the common market to the CSME, nine protocols amending the Treaty of Chaguaramas were drafted to provide the legal basis for establishment and operation. These protocols have been incorporated into the revised Treaty of Chaguaramas. Trinidad and Tobago ratified the revised treaty and intends to implement the provisions and adhere to the regional time frame and agenda. This includes removing restrictions to facilitate the free movement of goods, services, persons and capital in the region.

The Government views the successful implementation of the CSME as critical to the deepening and broadening of the integration process. To this end, a national consultation mechanism has been established on the implementation of the CSME at the inter-ministerial level and with various stakeholder groups. Regular meetings are being held to facilitate an exchange of views and inputs into the process. An intense public education programme on the CSME at the national level will be implemented soon.

At the initiative of the Prime Minister, a consultation on options of governance for Caribbean regional integration was convened in Port of Spain on February 13, 2003. An expert group comprising five Prime Ministers and their technical staff was established with specific terms of reference and reported to the 24th Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of Caricom in Montego Bay last July. Discussions are still in progress on this important subject and specific recommendations will soon be submitted to Heads of Government.

Earlier this month, Trinidad and Tobago acceded to the chair of one of the four Councils of the Caribbean Community; the Council of Human and Social Development called by its acronym (COHSOD). This appointment is for one year in the COHSOD and promotes the development and improvement of health, education, conditions of workers and a healthy human environment in the community. It also establishes policies and programmes to enhance the development of youth and women. A coordinated approach to develop culture and sports in the region is another responsibility of the council; labour and health have been identified by the council to be given particular attention during Trinidad and Tobago's tenure.

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The Government of Trinidad and Tobago considers regionalism to be a priority particularly in light of globalization and the emergence of mega-trading blocs. The Caribbean Community has demonstrated the unique dynamism and resilience of its people and needs to continue to move forward with determination. In this regard, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago remains committed to effective participation in matters of regional importance and continues to be considered as a beacon in the Caribbean Community.

The Government is also continuing to deepen and broaden its involvement in initiatives at the hemispheric level by taking steps to forge closer relationships with hemispheric countries and increase its participation in hemispheric organizations. The ministry is therefore examining the establishment of diplomatic missions in new strategic areas. The countries of the hemisphere have already drawn closer through trade and political alliances forged by the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) with its headquarters in Port of Spain. Such co-operation is expected to increase substantially when the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) is established.

7.55 p.m.

Within the scope of our Latin American relations, we have signed agreements with many of our Latin American neighbours in the sphere of the abolition of double taxation, trade, globalization, intellectual property rights, bilateral investment, mutual legal assistance with criminal matters, extradition, agreement on investment promotion and protection and technical and scientific cooperation. Venezuela, Madam President, is our closest neighbour and we supported the legally constituted elected government and observed the rights of that sovereign state by adhering to the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of that country. We continue and sustain our cooperation in energy and energy-related matters, which are kept at the forefront of our bilateral relations.

President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela visited Trinidad and Tobago on August 08 and 09, 2003 and discussions were held on a range of bilateral issues with the Venezuelan delegation. On August 09, 2003, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago hosted a breakfast meeting where President Chavez outlined his vision of bilateral cooperation to members of the Trinidad and Tobago business community. The President also extended an invitation to Prime Minister Patrick Manning to visit Venezuela at a mutually convenient time. A memorandum of understanding on the unitization of cross-border hydrocarbon reserves was negotiated in Port of Spain and signed in Venezuela by my colleague, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, the hon. Eric Williams, in August of this year.

In spite of the challenges to the airline industry, our Government has facilitated direct flights between this country, Costa Rica and Cuba on the national airline, BWIA. These flights will provide additional market access for this country's business community and will serve as a new conduit for tourists of these two countries. Furthermore, in the case of the Dominican Republic, a number of trade and economic missions have successfully penetrated this lucrative market.

On the issue of terrorism, Madam President, Trinidad and Tobago has joined other hemispheric countries in their fight against terrorism in all its manifestations. The country became a signatory to the Inter-American Democratic Charter Against Terrorism of June 2002 and one of our nationals is being proposed for secondment to the Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism.

We now turn to the OAS. Through participation in the Organization of American States and its related agencies, we continue to seek opportunities for our nationals to serve in these organizations. Under the special Multilateral Fund of the Inter-American Council for Integral Development (FEMCIDI), this country is the recipient of development funding for projects in the area of teacher training, in education, information technology, Spanish language, training and curriculum development.

At the recent Organization of American States (OAS) General Assembly in Santiago, Chile in June of this year, the country reiterated its commitment to good governance as enshrined in the Declaration of Santiago. The declaration recognized the basic principles guiding governments in the hemisphere such as the commitment to democracy and development, the rule of law, rejection of the use of violence as a political tool and the participation of civil society in consensus building.

I now turn to the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), Madam President. In November 2001, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago agreed to submit a bid for Port of Spain to become the site of the headquarters of the permanent secretariat of the Free Trade Area of the Americas. The bid was launched on October 31, 2002 during the 7th meeting of the FTAA Ministers of trade in Quito, Ecuador. Cabinet has agreed to the establishment of a temporary secretariat in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs dedicated exclusively to pursuing the Trinidad and Tobago bid. It should be noted that the local private sector has been highly supportive of the bid and would also be involved in lobbying efforts. Promotional presentations have been made by Trinidad and Tobago during recent high-level meetings of the FTAA, and the FTAA member states have received the promotional

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CD-ROM which provides an overview of the business and investment climate, infrastructure and social and cultural aspects of Trinidad and Tobago.

Stretching from Alaska in the north to Tierra del Fuego at the southern tip of South America, the Free Trade Area of the Americas will consist of a combined population of over 750 million persons with a combined GDP of US \$12 trillion which is twice the size of the European Union. Hosting the secretariat of such a major hemispheric organization, Madam President, would greatly enhance Trinidad and Tobago's international profile and its long-standing commitment to the integration process in the hemisphere. Trinidad and Tobago would enjoy significant economic benefits such as employment generation, revenue from increased visitor arrivals and substantial opportunities for the provision of related goods and services. In addition, hosting the FTAA secretariat would encourage greater exposure to and learning of the Spanish and Portuguese language in Trinidad and Tobago, which is consistent with our thrust into Latin America.

Madam President, this morning we heard weeping and wailing on the other side questioning the FTAA. We on this side were not surprised at these weepings and wailings. In fact, when the question was put to this side, and the suggestion was made by Sen. Mark, who advised that people should be pulling in one direction, I asked the question—since the responsibility for the marketing and promotion of the FTAA bid lies with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “In which direction?” Which direction, Madam President? I believe that the direction that my colleague is talking about is spelt with the letters “Miami, Miami, Miami”.

Why do I say this, Madam President? In an article dated October 13, Monday, page 9, from the *Express*, there is a headline “T&T ‘too dangerous’ for FTAA...” and it had an even bolder print below that says “Don’t come here, UNC activist warns”. However, even though personally, I received a copy of the correspondence, I believe it should be read and heard in the context of the article itself—because the writer, one Irene Medina, gives some interpretations as the article is developed. Madam President, for the record, we on this side are of the view that the FTAA bid ought to be a national effort, not a party effort, [*Desk thumping*] and when you read this—we are seeing the other side who like to describe themselves as patriots, for what they really are. But their patriotism only bubbles over when they are in office. When they sit on the other side they find every excuse to reverse themselves and repudiate agreements in which they entered when they sat on this side. [*Interruption*]

Sen. Mark: On a point of order; on a point of order. Madam President, the hon. Minister is misleading this Senate. I just want to indicate to you that the United National Congress, as the alternative government of this country, has not sat and taken a decision to boycott or to seek any boycotting. *[Interruption]* There is a position which has been advanced by the public relations officer from the National Food Crop Farmers Association but the United National Congress, *[Interruption]* I want to repeat, has not taken a position on this matter, or made any statement, so I think it is misleading to associate the UNC with that arrangement. So let him withdraw that statement and not pursue that line, please. *[Interruption]*

Madam President: Continue, Senator. I do not think you really need—

Sen. The Hon. K. Gift: Madam President, it was precisely in anticipation of that kind of rebuttal that I thought I would read the article in its entirety so that it would not be taken out of context and I so proceed. *[Desk thumping]* The article says:

“A UNC activist who works closely with MP for Barataria Dr. Fuad Khan is behind a concerted move to stop Trinidad and Tobago from being the headquarters of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

Anderson Morris, public relations officer *[Interruption]* of Khan’s anti-crime group, has been writing to the Heads of Foreign Missions denouncing the Government’s efforts to hold the headquarters of the FTAA, saying that ‘Port of Spain is unsuitable’ to do so, and warning that the Government’s close relationship with President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela was cause for concern.

In his four-page letter...”

Of course I got a copy of that letter, Madam President:

“Anderson, writing in his capacity as PRO of the National Food Crop Farmers Association of Trinidad and Tobago (NFFA), *[Interruption]* said while the Government has been lobbying several countries to win approval for Port of Spain to host the Secretariat ‘the city has fallen short’ to host such a major hemispheric body.

Both he and Khan, however, denied yesterday that the move was UNC-backed. *[Interruption]*

Morris said he was working on the NFFA’s behalf and had sent the document to diplomatic missions and trade ministers in respective capitals abroad.

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‘We did not want to go this route but Government left us no choice,’ he said.

He pointed to the NFFA’s battle with Government over the use of prime agricultural lands in Garden Village, Arouca as one of the reasons behind the move. [*Interruption*]

In his statement to the foreign heads, Morris slammed inadequate road infrastructure and parking facilities as well as the increasing crime situation as major deterrents to setting up the FTAA headquarters.

‘The road network which links the international airport to the capital city is often congested to the point where several productive hours are lost each day [*Interruption*] while motorists wait in traffic,’ he warned.

Pointing to the crime situation, [*Interruption*] Morris claimed that over the last two years, the country had deteriorated into a ‘state of lawlessness’ and predicted that the law enforcement agencies will not...”

Madam President: Hon. Senators, just one moment. During this debate here today I gave everybody full opportunity to say what they had to say and I think it is only right to let the Minister continue with his contribution. Please continue.

Sen. The Hon. K. Gift: Thank you, Madam President. It is clear again that the truth really offends in some instances. He goes on:

“‘Our capital city is a hotbed for criminal activity,’ he advised, adding that this was supported by the recent advisories issued by the United Kingdom and United States officials here.”

I will deal with that later on, Madam President.

“Morris said that as of September 2003 there were 177 kidnappings, and was on par with countries like Colombia, the Philippines and Malaysia, and that the murder rate here was higher than that of Jamaica. He added that his association was of the view that the safety of the diplomats and their children could not be guaranteed.

According to Morris, the economy has been on a downslide because of crime, citing too an exodus by the business sector. He warned that Piarco International Airport has been downgraded and several airlines such as British Airways have pulled out of the country.

Morris also warned about a language barrier, inadequate hotel accommodation and political instability. He accused the Government of

practising 'victimization' and discrimination in its employment practices in the areas of health care and education, and alleged a cosiness between Government and criminal elements in the country.

According to him, the CIA was also monitoring a certain religious fundamentalist group in the country. He accused the Government of embarking on a campaign to destroy agriculture in the country and was openly 'hostile' to farmers.

The group is lobbying for Miami, Florida, to be the preferred location for the FTAA Secretariat."

Madam President, you see, their enthusiasm bubbles over, their patriotism bubbles over, when they sit on this side. Do you know why? It is because when they sit on this side they see zeros and digits in various forms. We do not see that. We do not operate on the basis of what the country can do for us, but of what we can do for the country. [*Desk thumping*] This is the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, I now continue on Europe. During the 2002/2003 fiscal year, the Government succeeded in advancing Trinidad and Tobago's interest in the bilateral and multilateral fora in Europe. In the bilateral arena, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago continues to extend its relationship with major Eastern European countries. On September 27, 2003, Trinidad and Tobago and the Ukraine entered into a protocol on consultation to facilitate exchanges between the two countries in the area of international relations. This protocol is of importance in the context of developing our relations with Eastern Europe, which is recognized as the future growth market of the continent. In addition, diplomatic relations were formally established with the Republic of Latvia with which our sister isle, Tobago, has had long historical ties and which should lead to more significant exchanges between our two countries. The government of Croatia, Madam President, has also approached this country to establish formal diplomatic relations.

Diplomatic ties with the Republic of France were strengthened by the appointment of an honorary consul, in Paris, who has been mandated to enhance Trinidad and Tobago's bilateral agenda with France. On the invitation of the Regional Council of Martinique, the Ministry facilitated the launch of a major trade initiative to Martinique where Trinidad and Tobago was the main exhibitor at the annual agricultural fair of Martinique. We are especially proud of this initiative as this event succeeded in highlighting this country's agricultural and

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food manufacturing sectors, a niche market which we are trying to develop. In addition, France has shown considerable interest in the construction and development of the natural gas pipeline from Trinidad and Tobago up the Northern Caribbean to include Martinique and Guadeloupe as potential end users of our natural gas.

With regard to our multilateral relations, the Ministry, through its Europe-based missions, succeeded in advancing Trinidad and Tobago's interest in regular meetings of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group (ACP), the Caribbean Group of the ACP, which is called the CARIFORUM, the European Union-ACP forum and the Latin American and Caribbean-European Union (EU) consultative process. The most significant development was the launch of the Economic Partnership Agreements by the European Union, which are now entering the second phase of negotiation. In addition, the Latin American and the Caribbean-EU bilateral consultative process is working towards an increase in technical assistance projects which would translate into concrete programmes for the region. Already, this process, which in itself is of strategic importance to this country in the context of increasing external trade, has facilitated greater ties with our Latin American neighbours.

I now turn to Africa, Madam President. Trinidad and Tobago and Nigeria entered into negotiations and initialled a bilateral air services agreement in September 2003. Such agreement would pave the way for the establishment of an air corridor between the two countries. It would provide an opportunity to enhance economic, commercial and cultural ties between Trinidad and Tobago, West Africa and the rest of the Caribbean. Trinidad and Tobago would now become the hub between Africa and North, Central and South America. It is an historic agreement since it is the first country with which Nigeria has a bilateral air services agreement in the Caribbean.

Madam President, the groundwork has been laid to strengthen ties with the African continent, particularly with West Africa. In this regard, there is the Trinidad and Tobago/Nigeria Mixed Commission through which educational, cultural, economic, scientific and technical cooperation agreements with Nigeria have been executed. The first meeting of the mixed commission took place in 2001 and the second meeting, which was carded to take place this year in Abuja, would likely be held next year. A Trinidad and Tobago/Nigeria Business Association has been formed to deepen and broaden economic and commercial ties between both countries. We have had numerous visits over the last two years from the Nigerian public and private sectors, including a visit by Nigerian schoolchildren.

Madam President, we also have excellent relations with Ghana. This is a country with which we have had long and historic ties. In February and March of this year, we welcomed the Trinidad and Tobago Ghana Business Chamber when they led a team of businessmen to Trinidad and Tobago. The Ghana/Trinidad and Tobago agreements in the sphere of culture and economic and scientific cooperation were signed during the visit of former President Rawlins and reactivated with the visit of the Trade Mission. Since then, efforts are being made to strengthen ties with the region. The impending visit of the Prime Minister to Nigeria in 2003 for the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting and visits to other countries in Africa next year are demonstrative of this country's positive and meaningful engagement with Africa.

Madam President, we propose to diversify and update our overseas representation in this area of the world, making it more relevant to the changing dynamics in the African continent. To this end, a team led by the Inspector of Missions, Ambassador John Donaldson, is preparing to visit South Africa to oversee the establishment of the High Commission in that country. It is being proposed that this High Commission will be simultaneously accredited to Namibia, Botswana, Swaziland, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Zambia, Mauritius and Angola. Since the political changes in South Africa, the new administration is not only reaching out and forging new alliances, but has, over the last eight years, become a leading and respected voice in Africa.

In acknowledgement of these changes, the international community has responded by scheduling several major global conferences in South Africa on major issues of international importance such as sustainable development, HIV/AIDS and racism. In addition, South Africa has intensified its political relationship with the wider Caribbean region, establishing embassies in Kingston and Caracas, thereby facilitating opportunities for greater cooperation at the bilateral and multilateral levels. South Africa also offers opportunities for developing cultural exchanges and sporting links.

Madam President, I turn to India. Trinidad and Tobago and India signed an agreement for the establishment of an inter-governmental commission on political, economic, scientific, technological and cultural cooperation in February 2003 when the Minister of State of External Affairs of India visited Trinidad and Tobago. This is an umbrella agreement which would allow both countries to monitor the progress made in various fields of cooperation. Our country will be in a much better position to acquire expertise in areas such as information technology and pharmaceutical development, to name a few. Bilateral relations

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between the two countries continue to grow and are characterized by cooperation in such areas as culture, low-cost housing, information technology, agriculture, training in the Hindi language and military and diplomatic training. The Vice-President of India, Madam President, is scheduled to visit Trinidad and Tobago in the first quarter of 2004 and Prime Minister Manning also intends to visit that country next year.

I now turn to Japan, Madam President. With regard to Japan, another of our Asian friends, relations with Trinidad and Tobago are characterized by technical assistance and cooperation activities in areas such as education, vocational training, health, small and microenterprise development, trade, telecommunications, environmental protection, disaster management and mitigation, to name a few areas. In the field of fisheries development, the Japanese government continues to provide expert assistance for ongoing activities at the Caribbean Fisheries Training and Development Institute. This regional project has expanded to a number of Caricom countries and focuses on training in areas such as fishing technology, marine engineering, fish processing and resource management. In the field of culture in August this year, the Exodus Steel Orchestra visited Japan in what was regarded as a very successful tour.

My next item, Madam President, is China. High-level visits from China have accompanied the growth of bilateral relations between the two countries. In January 2003, Vice Premier Madam Wu Yi visited and a number of initiatives were pursued. For example, in the sphere of cultural cooperation, Madam Wu Yi showed high interest in the steel pan and indicated that the Chinese government was interested in purchasing steel pans from Trinidad and Tobago. China also proposed to invite two steel pan experts to teach students to play the instruments and all costs in China in connection therewith would be met by that government.

In September 2003 His Excellency Li Zhaoxing, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, visited Trinidad and Tobago to hold official talks with the hon. Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. These talks have served to strengthen relations between Trinidad and Tobago and China and have contributed to the expansion of trade and cultural cooperation. In this regard, both foreign ministers signed an agreement on the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income. In addition, letters were exchanged accepting a gift from the Government of the People's Republic of China to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the value of approximately \$740,000.

Additionally, a grant of Chinese currency equivalent to TT \$1.5 million was offered during the visit of Madam Wu Yi for a project in the fields of agriculture,

handicraft and tourism with the aim of enhancing local capacity. Also, in furtherance of the existing cordial relationships, Cabinet recently agreed in principle to support the Small Business Development Company Leasing Limited in accessing financial assistance from China by way of a concessional loan of approximately US \$25 million for the establishment of a special facility for the supply of equipment and machinery.

Over the years, the Ministry of Education has also received computer equipment for the computerization of the primary school system. A further batch of computers is expected in the future. The National Library and Information Systems Authority is also expected to receive computer equipment from China. China has also extended a long-term, interest-free loan of approximately TT \$16 million to this country, which is to be used in the implementation of economic and technical cooperation projects or the provision of general goods to be discussed and agreed upon by both governments.

Cooperation in the military field continues, and recently Cabinet agreed in principle to the establishment of a military hospital in Trinidad and Tobago with assistance from China. Military logistic supplies are to be delivered by the Chinese government pursuant to an agreement signed in 2002. Since 1999, five officers from the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force have received military training in China. Other training opportunities, from which nationals of Trinidad and Tobago have benefited, are in diplomacy and computer maintenance. Nationals have also visited China to attend seminars on trade and investment, and, in November, three senior public servants will be visiting China to attend the first China/Caribbean Countries Seminar for Public Servants.

Madam President, the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs have also received invitations to visit China. The hon. Prime Minister has accepted the invitation. In this regard, the Government would consider combining visits to both China and India at a mutually convenient time for both governments. Such visits would promote Trinidad and Tobago's interest in the Far East and would further solidify the good relations which exist between Trinidad and Tobago and those countries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in that connection, has already co-opted a Cabinet-appointed team from a number of other ministries to coordinate the implementation of the above-mentioned initiatives.

I now turn to Korea, Madam President. Trinidad and Tobago and South Korea continue to enjoy close and friendly relations. In July 2003, South Korea offered to donate vehicles and computer equipment to Trinidad and Tobago to the value

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of US \$450,000. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has responded to the request. The equipment and materials are expected to arrive shortly in Trinidad and Tobago. On October 02, 2003 Cabinet agreed to the entry into force of the agreement between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the government of the Republic of Korea on the reciprocal promotion and protection of investments.

We now turn to the United Nations, Madam President. A few weeks ago, in addressing the 58th session of the United Nations General Assembly at its headquarters in New York, I took the opportunity to brief fellow member states on the Government's intent to achieve developed country status by 2020. I emphasized that domestic efforts must be complemented by efforts at the international level to achieve greater international economic stability and a more equitable distribution of resources among states. The Minister also outlined the position of the Government with respect to the central role of the United Nations in international affairs and its importance to small states such as Trinidad and Tobago.

Trinidad and Tobago welcomed the call by the United Nations Secretary General in his statement to the General Assembly for a thorough restructuring of the United Nations system, through the reform and strengthening of its major organs, to make it a more effective instrument in the service of all the peoples of the world. The Secretary General's plan to establish a panel of eminent persons to address this issue enjoys the full support of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Without prejudging the outcome of the deliberations of the eminent panel, the Minister expressed the hope that recognition will be given to the role which small states, such as Trinidad and Tobago, can play in international affairs.

Apart from the United Nations and its specialized agencies, Madam President, the Government actively participates in other international fora due to its membership in organizations such as the Commonwealth. Trinidad and Tobago also maintains contacts at the highest levels with like-minded states in groupings such as the Non-Aligned Movement. In this connection the 13th conference of Heads of State or Government and related meetings of the Non-Aligned Movement were held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from February 20 to 25, 2003. One of the main areas of focus of the meeting was the revitalization of the movement in the Kuala Lumpur declaration which resulted from the meeting. The heads noted that the end of the Cold War resulted in the emergence of a unipolar world, a movement towards unilateralism and the rise of new challenges such as globalization which made it imperative for the movement to promote multilateralism in order to better defend the interests of developing countries.

8.25 p.m.

Prior to the meeting, the prevailing point of view in many quarters was that the Non-Aligned Movement had become irrelevant with the end of the Cold War. This point of view found no favour at the meeting and in the end, the Declaration called for the:

- enhancement of the unity of the Movement;
- promotion of democratization in the system of international governance;
- increased South-South cooperation; and
- strengthening of the multilateral process, with the view to integrating developing countries into a new political, economic and humane global order.

Madam President, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago also participates and will continue to do so, in High-Level Inter-governmental Conferences that address major global issues such as HIV/AIDS, sustainable development, terrorism, the illicit traffic in narcotic drugs and racism.

Trinidad and Tobago participated in the United Nations International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, Mexico from the 18th to the 22nd of March, 2002. This meeting was held under the auspices of the United Nations to promote international cooperation in 60 areas, thereby fulfilling the needs of developing countries.

In addressing the conference, Trinidad and Tobago emphasized its commitment to public/private sector partnerships in meeting development goals and fostering a culture of sustainable development. A call was also made for multilateral development agencies and bilateral donors to intensify their efforts to assist developing countries in formulating the appropriate macro-economic frameworks to facilitate private sector led economic expansion. The meeting concluded with the adoption of the Monterrey Consensus to eradicate poverty, achieve sustainable economic growth and promote sustainable development.

Madam President, an integral aspect of the country's approach to its international commitment is the placing of nationals in strategic international organizations of importance to Trinidad and Tobago. This policy enhances the international profile of Trinidad and Tobago. In this regard, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been instrumental in the election of four prominent citizens to positions on prestigious international bodies. These are:

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- Dr. Luis Alberto Rodrigues as Executive Director for the Caribbean group at the Inter-American Development Bank in Washington DC.
- Mr. Karl Hudson-Phillips, QC to the position of Judge on the First Bench of the International Criminal Court.
- Justice Anthony Lucky to the position of Judge on the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea. Justice Lucky succeeded the late Lennox Ballah who was himself elected to that Tribunal in May 2002.

Madam President: Hon. Senators, the speaking time of the hon. Senator has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. L. Saith*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. K. Gift: Thank you, Madam President. I continue and pick up the last name of our four distinguished nationals who are placed severally in various international institutions. That last name is sitting on the other side, our colleague, Ambassador Christopher Thomas, as a member of the Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations for the period 2004—2008.

In addition, diplomats continue to hold senior positions in regional and international organizations. In conjunction with other ministries and in keeping with the national objectives, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will continue to pursue membership on the governing bodies of international organizations which will redound to the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Cabinet recently agreed that Trinidad and Tobago should seek membership on the Council of Administration of the Universal Postal Union. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is well poised and ready to assist in canvassing the necessary support for this candidature.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is positioning itself to take advantage of all the opportunities available at the regional, hemispheric and international levels to ensure that the Government is successful in achieving the goal of developed country status by 2020. The Ministry, Madam President, will continue to promote Trinidad and Tobago as a suitable location for the hosting of regional, hemispheric and international conferences. Central to this is the maintenance of the country's positive image abroad.

In this regard, it is worth noting that in July of this year, Mr. Doudou Diene, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Racism, Racial Discrimination,

Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, visited Trinidad and Tobago as part of a regional visit. The purpose of this visit was to examine all incidents which were the manifestation of contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, as well as governmental policies and measures aimed at ensuring the right to equality and nondiscrimination of all citizens. To this end, the Ministry organized meetings with a number of governmental and nongovernmental officials, including those on the other side.

At the conclusion of his visit, Mr. Diene stated that despite some polarization of political parties, it was clear that efforts had been made to achieve racial harmony in Trinidad and Tobago. He indicated that he would make a number of recommendations in his report to the United Nations including the need for political harmony and equality. At a press briefing at the conclusion of his visit, he stated that Trinidad and Tobago had achieved major progress but that there was still work to be done. Mr. Diene felt that tension was healthy, since it led to dynamism. He was of the view, however, that it was important to recognize the commonalities which existed beneath the differences. The report is expected to be finalized by November 2003.

Madam President, it would be recalled that on December 06, 2002, the British and Foreign Commonwealth Office issued a travel advisory which was inimical to the tourism and other sectors in Trinidad and Tobago. In response to this advisory, Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith, Ambassador John Donaldson and the Minister of Foreign Affairs journeyed to Washington DC, New York City and London respectively to counteract the effects of this advisory. The visits to these three capitals were highly successful and served to set the record straight in respect of this country's image. That was in 2002.

Madam President, I would like to update this honourable House of more recent developments on the same matter. Just a couple weeks ago, the shipping line that handles the cruise business out of London, Furness Shipping & Marketing Limited here in Port of Spain wrote as follows:

“The Honorable Senator Knowlson Gift

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Knowsley

Queen's Park West

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Dear Minister,

I am pleased to inform you that our Principals, P&O Cruises/Princess Cruises have decided to increase their calls to Trinidad and Tobago for the 2004—2005 season. We were already expecting fourteen (14) calls for the upcoming cruise season and this new decision to add more calls will bring the number of expected visits to thirty-six (36).”

That is an increase by 22.

“This decision is in our view a reflection of the confidence that P&O/ Princess Cruises have in the state of our country as far as tourist and passenger safety is concerned. We owe a great deal of gratitude to you for the efforts of your Ministry and in particular, your personal interest and involvement in resolving the turn of events following the adverse travel advisory issued by the United Kingdom home office some months ago. [*Desk thumping*]

Again many thanks for your assistance.

Yours faithfully,

FURNESS SHIPPING & MARKETING LIMITED”

It was signed by the Executive Chairman. This is important. I will tell you why. Just in today’s newspapers there was a report actually criticizing the efforts of the Government to have the British reverse the travel advisory, but it is clear that not even the Brits are listening to their own advisory. They love Trinidad and Tobago as a destination. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, I do not have too much more to say, but let me just say that participation of the Government at the highest level will continue to be the primary focus. An important aspect of the Ministry's strategy will be to continue its partnership with line ministries and other Government departments to ensure that priority is given to those areas outlined for immediate attention by the hon. Prime Minister in his budget.

The new thrust of the Government in its endeavor to have our country achieve developed country status by 2020 must be matched with the provision of the appropriate tool to get the job done. I have already mentioned the need to enhance staffing levels in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and this must be coupled with the provision of the appropriate tools to execute our mandate.

In this context, we recognize that the application of information and communication technologies to the Ministry’s work will enhance the efficient delivery of service and we are engaged in a strategy to have the Ministry and its

Missions operate at a heightened level of activity. In addition, we need to continue to present a professional face to the international community when they interface with us. We have already begun to upgrade the delivery of protocol and other professional services.

The national community would be cognizant of the recent increases in the visit of foreign dignitaries and the hosting of international conferences. This is testimony to our increased efforts to position Trinidad and Tobago as the diplomatic hub of the region. The acquisition of well appointed state vehicles is planned in the near future as we respond to the increased traffic of dignitaries and the requirement to engage with them in a manner that meets with internationally acceptable benchmarks. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also plans to restore Knowsley building to its former grandeur. This process will be accelerated in 2004. The Government of the People's Republic of China will donate \$774,000 to this effort.

I am happy to report to this Senate that this country's Overseas Missions continue to deliver service, albeit under circumstances that are far from optimal. A tremendous amount of hard work is done by the missions in support of our nationals abroad and in the representation of the country. This too, is testimony to the unstinting efforts of all staff who continue to place country before self. I think I need to repeat this. This too, is testimony to the unstinting efforts of all staff who continue to place country before self.

I am also pleased to report that the number of ambassadors that are accredited to the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has increased by one new accreditation with the recent presentation of credentials by the Ambassador of Honduras who is resident in Jamaica. Other recent new appointments include Brazil, Japan, Italy and Colombia. The Ambassador of Colombia indeed, who resides in Kingston, presented his credentials to His Excellency the President yesterday. It is also worth noting that the Government of Australia is relocating its Embassy from Barbados to Trinidad and Tobago.

In the tradition of good democratic governance, the foreign ministry will continue to explore ways and means of reassessing current structures to make them even more relevant to the changing global environment and its inherent challenges. Over the past year we have tried to put systems in place to enable the people of Trinidad and Tobago to continue to face the challenges posed by globalization and trade liberalization. This is necessary in order to achieve a quality of life that is comparable to that of the developed world and to promote the potential for the continuing development of our human resource capabilities.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. THE HON. K. GIFT]

Tuesday, October 21, 2003

Madam President, there is no doubt that Trinidad and Tobago is making enormous strides on the international plane. Our economy is buoyant, political stability is assured and is evident for all to see. Our external representation has never been better and is in the good, capable and competent hands of the dedicated staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They have given yeoman service to our country. In this regard, the allocations of resources in this year's budget will certainly contribute to sustaining the high level of productivity and service of which this Ministry is renowned and our country has grown to expect.

We in the Ministry intend to do no less, and, where possible, considerably more.

I thank you, Madam President.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Public Administration and Information (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith): Madam President, I beg to move that the Senate do now adjourn to Wednesday, October 22, 2003 at 10.00 a.m. when we will continue the debate on the budget.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 8.40 p.m.