

*Papers Laid**Thursday, October 23, 2003***SENATE***Thursday, October 23, 2003*

The Senate met at 1.30 p.m.

**PRAYERS**[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]**PAPERS LAID**

1. The Value Added Tax (No.2) Order, 2003. [*The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill)*]
2. The Excise Duty (Petroleum Products) Order, 2003. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Enill*]
3. Environmental Commission of Trinidad and Tobago—Report on Performance and Activities 2000—2003. [*The Minister of Public Administration and Information (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith)*]

**APPROPRIATION BILL****(BUDGET)**

[Third Day]

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question* [October 21, 2003]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

*Question again proposed.*

**Sen. Parvatee Anmolsingh-Mahabir:** Madam President, before I begin my contribution, I, too, would like to extend congratulations to Sen. The Hon. Christine Sahadeo, Sen. Rawle Titus and Sen. Joan Hackshaw Marslin on their maiden speeches delivered yesterday.

I recall that in his budget contribution Sen. Wade Mark made some reference to the National Insurance Scheme (NIS), but I propose to treat with it in some detail. I am convinced that all issues presented in the current budget are of widespread significance, but I propose to limit my contribution to only two issues, the National Insurance Scheme and health.

In his 2003/2004 budget presentation, the Minister of Finance declared on page 25:

“To further the reform process and make the National Insurance System more relevant to the needs of the population, the Government took the

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decision to increase the NIS retirement pension to a minimum of \$1,000 per month per person with effect from October 01, 2003. The increase in contribution rates to fund this guaranteed minimum retirement income will be spread over a three-year period commencing January 05, 2004. In addition, the level of insured earnings will also strengthen the financial integrity and relevance of the National Insurance System.”

The National Insurance Board can be described as the largest insurance company in Trinidad and Tobago. It has the largest pension worth billions of dollars. On page 25 of *The Probe* newspaper dated Sunday October 19, 2003, I read: The NIB’s total assets to date are estimated at more than \$10 billion or about half the current national budget.

There is much concern today about the quantum of NIB pension benefits being paid to a generation of retirees who toiled and sacrificed in the vineyards, to build up Trinidad and Tobago before the first oil boom of 1973. Yet today, they are rewarded with an NIB pension which cannot provide them with a requisite standard of living and quality of life for which they worked so hard to achieve during the past 40 to 50 years. This is most unfortunate and untenable. This situation must be corrected.

The Minister of Finance referred to pension reform, but no reform of the prevailing NIB pension system should be undertaken, without a comprehensive overhaul of the existing National Insurance retirement pension. It is a well-known fact that the record keeping of the National Insurance Scheme contributions at the NIB is nothing short of scandalous. The stress, trauma and agony that retirees undergo to ascertain their total payments and to verify their true pension entitlements is a miscarriage of justice being meted out by a state enterprise in whose custody lies more than \$10 billion of taxpayers’ moneys.

Accordingly, I call for an immediate investigation to be instituted into the operations of the National Insurance Board, including the operations of its commercial property development, the NIPDEC arm. The time has come to demand from the NIB, accountability of all the contributions it received from its inception in 1972 to the present date, including the returns from investments, loans and consultancies undertaken by NIPDEC. The burning questions that must be addressed are: What is the quantum of NIS contributions received every month beginning from 1972? What is the administration cost of managing the NIB as a percentage to be deducted every month? What is the balance to be invested every month by the investment committee of the NIB? What is the monthly return on investment of moneys invested by the NIB?

Pension plans are long-term investment systems in which funds are saved to be invested to create future prosperity. It is the obligation of every major bank and public financial institution to publish a summary or detailed balance sheet of its accounts for public scrutiny by its customers, investors and shareholders. All major insurance companies do the same in the daily newspapers every year. But where are the 31 years of financial records of the NIB published on an annual basis for every member of the public to see? These reports should be accessible to the public annually, in the interest of transparency and accountability as well, so that the public can monitor the value of its long-term savings and investment.

There is a nagging suspicion and a general perception by the majority of recipients of NIS pension benefits that they have not received value for their investments or contributions when compared with their savings and investments made in the banking sector, annuities or other private pension plans or the Unit Trust. It is a great relief for all pensioners of fixed incomes to have this increase in NIS pension to the level of a minimum of \$1,000 per month with effect from October 01, 2003. I congratulate the Minister of Finance on this move. This payment is across the board for all persons who made NIS contributions that satisfied the requirements for such minimum payment. Many people at the lower end of the scale from Classes 1—8 will benefit from this increase, in relation to the amount of money they paid since 1972. Those who received a monthly pension between \$216.67 to \$591.09 are now receiving \$1,000.

Madam President, here is the sting. An in-depth analysis of a university graduate or a Class 12 contributor who paid the maximum rate of NIS contributions over the past 31 years reveals a loss of income, when the calculations are based on interest levels earned by similar types of long-term investments in other pension plans. The principles of equity and administrative justice demand that contributors who have exceeded the minimum number of 750 payments should be additionally compensated, in accordance with the established criteria for determining these incremental pension benefits.

With your permission, I would like to elaborate further. Let us take for example a university graduate who represents the top 10 per cent and would have paid the highest contribution. His NIS account would reflect the following: Payments from April 10 1972—September 30 2003, total moneys paid at the highest level to NIS pension account would be \$106,746.26. The interest earned by investing payment and interest would be \$123,582.40. The total value of the account on September 30, 2003 would be \$225,184.84. The monthly pension due from age 60—80 years would be \$2,454.21. Monthly pension as per the new

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budget is \$1,000. The loss of income per month for 20 years would be \$1,454.21. Loss of income for 240 months would be \$349,010.40.

This \$1,000 grant is made to appear magnanimous, but the top end contributors are being short changed by at least \$1,400 per month. How can a university professor, a magistrate or principal get the same NIS as the person who paid much less every month from 1972 to 2003? Thousands of qualified teachers, public servants, bank workers and private sector workers fall into this top bracket. Is this equity and fairness?

It seems that the National Insurance Scheme is in truth and fact really a scheme or scam designed to deny the beneficiaries their true entitlement. One wonders where is the rest of the money going? The problem that many NIS pensioners face is that the NIB does not provide each person with the complete financial computation of the total payments made and all interest earned over the 31 years because of poor record keeping. How can we have confidence in the NIS?

It is important that every NIS contributor fill out a form called NI 183 to ensure that his contributions are actually paid into the account and to receive an official print out of the status of his account at least once per year of his working life. It is like going for an annual medical check up, only this time, it is to check up on your financial health. There are now monetary experts available in Trinidad and Tobago who can do an independent audit to verify the accuracy of the NIS calculations so they can get a second opinion.

The NIS has been a chain in the pocket of every taxpayer for the past 30 years. There are questions that need to be answered before the harmonization of the NIS retirement pension and the Old Age Pension is implemented. All taxpayers and their spouses must act now to put their finances in order with the NIS rather than wait until retirement. Failure to do so now will result in much weeping and gnashing of teeth and later on, those without teeth will be gnashing their gums in despair. Because today, hundreds of people are discovering that moneys they paid to NIS were never entered into their accounts and no one is held accountable. This can add up to hundreds of millions of unaccountable dollars.

If the contributors to the NIS do not ascertain their financial position now, how will they be able to assess whether they will gain or lose by the proposed merger? I urge all NIS contributors to fill out the available NIS form NI 183 to secure their financial future. Our unsuspecting public must be made aware of their financial rights. I repeat my call for an investigation of the operations of the NIS, now!

From financial help, I turn to medical health. It is well known among those in the medical fraternity that the leading causes of death in Trinidad and Tobago are due to heart disease, cancer, diabetes and stroke. This is clearly depicted in the graph on page 16 of the Social and Economic Policy Framework—2004. I must admit, however, that not enough attention is reflected in the area of health promotion to prevent or delay the onset of these diseases, as can be seen with the fight against HIV/AIDS. While it is commendable that some regard has been paid to the treatment in the area of diabetes and heart, more money must be allocated in the sphere of prevention and health promotion.

I must point out that if the emphasis is mainly focused on the area of health care alone, the cost on human life through disability, loss of limb and stroke and the economy through the increasing demand for health services will be great; a cost that this country cannot afford. This strategy has not shown to be cost effective. As a medical practitioner yourself, Madam President, you will appreciate the time honoured adage, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

Concerted health promotion and health prevention action will not only reduce the morbidity and mortality rates of these diseases, but also improve the quality and length of life. International evidence has shown that these diseases can be substantially prevented if more attention is placed on issues such as reducing the prevalence of tobacco use in the population. Smoking is the major cause of premature coronary heart disease, peripheral vascular disease as seen in diabetes and stroke. The association of smoking with cancer has been established.

There is insufficient human resource who can significantly impact behaviour change in the community. There are only three health education officers to cover the entire island of Trinidad and one officer assigned to Tobago. There are insufficient community dieticians, pharmacists, nurses and other categories of community health staff that can work in a meaningful way in the promoting of good health. This area therefore, must be addressed to improve health care in Trinidad and Tobago. Resources must also be committed for specific health promotion activities that will address the four leading causes of death supported by the appropriate research and collaboration with other government and non-governmental organizations.

While I congratulate the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for being part of the World Health Assembly, in May 2003, that unanimously approved the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) and taking the bold step in signing the FCTC on August 27, 2003, the challenge must be taken a stage further

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to ratify the FCTC. Ratification of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control will prove that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago genuinely cares about the health of our citizens. By ratifying this convention the population of Trinidad and Tobago will benefit in many ways from a healthy, non-smoking environment; enhanced control of the rise in chronic disease cases with a reduction in morbidity and mortality rate and a decrease in health care cost to treat tobacco related diseases. Trinidad and Tobago would be ensuring the health and well-being of future generations.

There are those who are limited to see only with their eyes and those who in the words of Lord Bertrand Russel, "can see with their minds". Such persons use their intellectual resources to make their vision a reality. While Trinidad and Tobago move towards the goal of transforming the society into developed nation status by 2020, I call on the Government to help this nation. I am calling on the Minister of Health to lead the nation along the right path for sustained good health and longevity. If that is done, this generation and future generations will be ensured years of productive activity.

In this auspicious season it will be the triumph of good health over the dark and evil forces of ill-health, suffering, destruction of the family unit and ultimately, the destructive forces in our society. Let us therefore on this eve of Divali give this nation the gift of good health. As we move to celebrate Divali tomorrow, may I wish you, Madam President, and all my senatorial colleagues irrespective of which side of this august Chamber they occupy, Shubh Divali.

Thank you.

**The Minister of Public Administration and Information (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith):** Madam President, I welcome this opportunity to join the debate on the budget 2003/2004. Although the debate is not complete, I must say that I am very heartened by the level, tone and tenor of the debate. With a few exceptions, I think we have had a useful exchange of views. We have curbed our enthusiasm to disrupt and we have learnt a lot, especially from some of our Independent Senators who have given us on this side, some food for thought, both in the implementation of the budget and future policies which we may adopt. I must say that even the Opposition has contributed. I know that Sen. Mark is repeating the same speech for the sixth year, but even so, I sensed that he was not believing much of what he said. Be that as it may, I think that he has earned his supper and appropriate action would be taken by his party to retain him as chairman in the elections.

This budget places the empowerment of people at the centre of our developmental efforts. Judging from the response, I think that at the end of the day, it will find support from all sectors of this Senate and the entire community. There are some critical issues in the country and this budget seeks to identify and provide funding for them. They are in the areas of education, health, national security and housing. You will see from the budget documents increased allocations in all these areas. We are a caring government and the social sector and assistance to depressed communities or communities that do not have the benefit of some of the services that others have and disadvantaged individuals remain the core of our philosophy. We have to do that if we are to put this country on a path of sustainable growth and development.

Too often, it is argued that development without jobs; raising the standard of living of our people and making every citizen better off in the future than he is today is not really development. Sen. Prof. Ramchand is not with us, but I think that this is my definition of development and developed nation status. Each succeeding year the people of the country must feel themselves better off than they were the year before.

If we are to achieve this as a government, the Ministry of Public Administration and Information has a critical role to play. It is recognized that the public service would have to bear the brunt of developing and delivering these services to the population, in a manner in which they require it as distinct from a manner in which we feel they should get it. The focus of the ministry on its public administration side has been to develop the building blocks which would convert the public service as it is today, into an efficient, productive and competitive entity. That transformation has to be an iterative process. It never ends. You study, implement, analyse and then on the basis of that you study, implement and analyse. It is a living organism that you are dealing with and there is no solution in year one that fixes it. It is a continuous process.

### **2.00 p.m.**

Madam President, the ministry also, in its information side, has recognized that the development of an Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector is important. If we get that right we would accelerate the public service and could stimulate business in terms of how it can transform our economy, and our people. In effect, the Information and Communication Technology initiatives we are taking within Government represent the first major plank of implementation of Vision 2020.

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Madam President, I will take the opportunity to briefly go over some of what we have been doing in the ministry and identify to the Senators what we intend to do in the coming year. Transformation of the public service requires a number of things to be done. The first thing we must do is set up a group with the responsibility for that in the ministry so that it could focus on what has to be done to make it happen, and to monitor it as it goes along. In 2003, we were able to set up a division, and I am happy to report that it is now fully staffed and working along with the rest of the members of staff to implement public service transformation.

In parallel with this, we have been in discussions with the IDB for funding requirements to augment the work of that division through consultancies and other means, so that we can develop a full road map of how we are going to move, and a time frame in which to move. Those discussions are going very well, Madam President, and it is my hope that by the end of this year we would have gotten additional funding from the IDB to work on that road map.

One of the things we also recognized is that we cannot do this in isolation. We cannot just sit in the ministry and think we know how people view us and how they would like to see us provide services. As I have indicated before, we have set up working with MORI, a UK firm, an Opinion Leaders Panel—[*Interruption*]*—*which we have been testing over the last two years—through a panel of about 2,700 people, I think it is—responses to our questions on how they view the public service; what they would like to see and what are their concerns. That information is constantly being updated. I think we have two waves to be done this year, that is providing feedback to us, first of all, as to whether there is any improvement and if there is, where it is and what has caused it.

Secondly, if there is no improvement, why? The idea being that we are trying to make ourselves very responsive to the population we serve and this is one way of doing it. I am afraid that if we just listen to the comments of the Members of the Opposition, we will never be satisfying the population—[*Interruption*]*—*so we have to find an independent way of doing it. We cannot listen and have letters written all over the world talking about the country. [*Laughter*] I know Sen. Smith does not agree that it has come from his party, but so be it.

Madam President, a significant factor must be—even as you are spending money now in the public service—how you contain those costs, because you cannot just increase the expenditure each year without any increase in productivity and in delivery of services. Where can you reduce the cost of what you are doing now so that you free up more resources to do additional things? Finally, are people getting value for their money?



We must constantly review the way we are offering services. We must constantly review to determine whether what we are offering is really needed. If it is not, what should replace it? If it is needed, can we find a better way of doing it? We must, at all times, try to bring the technology that is available to us—the improved human resource that we can train to deliver those services. This value for money concept is one in which we will seek to focus our people on results rather than on process.

Madam President, too often, I think we get caught up in the process without trying to analyse whether we are achieving the results, and that is part of what we have to do in public service transformation. I had hoped by now, Madam President, since we started this since 1992 that we would have been further along in the process—[*Interruption*]

**Sen. Mark:** You interrupted my schedule.

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. L. Saith:** We did not interrupt it. [*Interruption*] Before we interrupted it, of course, his Prime Minister removed him. [*Laughter*]

We must also, in the process, strengthen our system of accountability—not only financial accountability but also performance accountability. Too often we are happy simply if the numbers add up; if the budget is not exceeded, if the money is spent in accordance with the vote. Rarely do we say let us also see whether you have achieved the desired results.

In a nutshell, that is what public service transformation will seek to do. The public service is also the purveyor of information within themselves and to the public. Anybody who has dealt with the public—including Sen. Seetahal who often buttonholes me and says: “I have not got a reply to my letter.”—knows that our system is manually driven and clearly obsolete. The way we manage information in the public service needs to be improved as well. To that end we have begun a study of records information management. What are the techniques and systems that would be available to us to improve in the shortest possible time, and how we could improve the way we transmit information in the public service.

I think it has been mentioned before that we have Project IHRIS, which was started, conceptually, under the hon. Minister—I trust he understood what he was doing—where we are seeking to build a database of the employees in the public service; their job positions and so on. This is very important because unless you know what you have, in terms of human resources, you are in no position to do succession planning; you are in no position to do proper training; you are in no position to review whether you need all these people in the positions where they

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now exist. Project IHRIS is on stream and we hope that within the next year we would have gotten to a point to have a better handle on our public service and its capability.

Management Systems Transformation and human resource—The public service is made up of people like you and me and we have to address these matters if we want to change it. How do we address the human resources? The last compensation and classification exercise in the public service was done in 1966 when I was in the public service. What we have is a job classification that relates to 1966. You have a clerk typist. You have a clerk stenographer. You do not have a computer literate person. You have a cashier I in the days when you wrote receipts and handed them out. Today a cashier should really be operating a machine. So that structure that you had in terms of the classification, and which we keep filling on the basis of that classification, bears no relationship to today's world. You would then run into the problem of having people pigeonholed into a job and a job classification in this day and age when you should be multitasking. So that if there is a clerk who can operate a computer and a cashier did not turn out to work, there is no reason why that person cannot go and take the cash. The skills that are required are the same, but that cannot happen now. What happens now, as has happened to me once this year when I went to pay for the renewal of my driving permit—unfortunately I have to do it every year—and the cashier did not turn out to work so therefore I could not get my business done on that day.

We have started a job evaluation exercise, where we hope that as a result of that we will begin to develop a new classification for public service positions. Madam President, with that would have to come a new compensation policy. If you are now tasking your people in the context of modern public service, then you are tasking them in the context of a compensation package that reflects the requirements that you now have.

We all have our own views about the system of the Public Service Commission and the Police Service Commission, but even within the context of how we operate today, I think we have to move away from how we are traditionally appointing and promoting people. This question of seniority as the guiding philosophy for promotion cannot continue. It does the country no good. Therefore, we have to find a way of working as a ministry with the Public Service Commission to develop tools that we can put at their disposal so that they can add to their seniority criterion, an evaluation process by which other things are taken into account.

We have been working with the Public Service Commission of Canada, that, through its Personnel Psychology Centre, has developed a series of approaches towards determining the way and the ability of people to perform, even in jobs to which they are going to be promoted. We have had very fruitful discussions with the Public Service Commission on this, and we have started discussing what the Canadians call assessment centres. We have agreed that we would try to use this system, as a first step, to assist us with respect to all appointments to deputy permanent secretaries, where, through objective measurements, we can determine whether people have the competency for the job to which they are being promoted. I think that is the first step and if it works I think we can widen it.

I was in Canada two weeks ago and I visited the Public Service Commission, and they have delegated a fair amount of authority down the line to what they call deputy ministers, which are permanent secretaries in our system. More than that, however, they are using this tool for a wide range of promotional appointments not only permanent secretaries but also heads of departments and going further and further down the line. They have developed criteria for each job so that they can do this assessment process.

As part of human resource development we have to continue to train and we shall be placing every emphasis on that. We have asked all ministries and departments to prepare training plans, which would then come to this ministry for review. In our training plan we want to take into account our national priorities so that given the limited resources we have, we could focus, not on training for training sake, but on training geared towards producing the people that we want in the priority areas.

We have reintroduced the Trinidad and Tobago Development Scholarship Programme. I do not know how much of you know that I was a recipient of such a scholarship in 1959. Those scholarships target areas in the public service where skills are required and give people scholarships in those particular areas. We have the National Scholarships, the Island Scholarships and there are others but this focuses ministry by ministry on the skills that are required mainly within the public service, but also outside, and then we award scholarships geared towards a particular need.

We have continued to upgrade the Public Service Academy, which is located at Chaguaramas so that we can begin to do a fair amount of in-house training, training that is also complemented by outsourcing—either through the Institute of Business (IOB) or through lecturers—the people who are required to do the training. We are not trying to build a big university. We are saying you develop

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the courses; you develop the facilities and then go and outsource, whether it is the UWI or IOB, the resources that are required to do the training.

All this also requires good relationships with our public sector unions. I am pleased to announce that I believe we now have a relationship and a dialogue going with our public service unions, which has enabled us to solve and satisfy a lot of the long outstanding issues which had bedeviled our relationship. We are trying to solve, one by one, all issues that have been there for some time. I think we have done very well with that. We have been able to get ourselves in a position where we are talking to unions about three-year agreements within the three years and not after the three years. [*Interruption*] You tried that? Well, perhaps I am getting better support now than you did, Sir. [*Laughter*] For instance, we are very close in our negotiations with the public service unions and the daily-paid unions, and a genuine effort is being made to open that kind of dialogue. Let me pay tribute to the office of the Chief Personnel Officer (CPO) and her staff who have done yeoman service in the kind of short deadlines that I have set them to. [*Desk thumping*]

We also have to look at the physical environment in which we ask our public servants to operate. We cannot say we want you to operate in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and house them in 19<sup>th</sup> Century facilities. Therefore the Government, through the Property and Real Estate Division, which forms part of this ministry, is on a proactive role to create these facilities. We are constantly working to upgrade facilities in new rentals. We are seeking to ensure that, for the moment—as I have indicated before, rentals are only an interim measure while Government gets its own buildings which will have user-friendly environments, proper layouts and to use work space properly.

The way we lay out offices has to change—not only in the public service. The way we need to communicate among ourselves when we are working has changed and therefore we must reflect this. Through working with UDeCOTT, various ministries are now working on plans for new buildings, for example, the Ministry of Education, Immigration Department; we have Administrative Complexes in Rio Claro; we are working with the Ministry of Legal Affairs for new offices, office of the DPP, Land Registry; and in our ministry, as I have indicated, we are building a new building which is scheduled to commence in January 2004 for the Government Information Service in St Clair. We must make that an equal partner in the way we transform the public service.

Let me talk a bit about the other side of the ministry, which is Information and Communication Technology. The ministry has grown over the last year.

Telecommunications has been added to the ministry, e-government, and e-business. That has been so because we have recognized the need to have a holistic approach to information and communication technology. Information, therefore, in the ministry is not only GIS and TTT; it is now how you move the country forward in the information age.

In 2003, we worked on a sector plan for ICT. We started the plan in March and we set ourselves a target of six months to develop an ICT plan for the country. We have done it and as at the end of September a draft plan was produced, which is now before the Cabinet. We know that ICT is critical for modernization, competitiveness and for the creation of a knowledge-based society.

The next quantum leap in our development process has to be a knowledge-based society. Madam President that is where we will create jobs and where we are going to use the brainpower of our people to move us beyond oil, gas and energy.

Madam President, in order to create this plan we have set up with the assistance of consultants, through the government of Canada, private and public sector groups to deal with the development of the plan. We have set up five areas. One on the infrastructure, what would be the infrastructure required for the development of this plan, there is a private sector/public sector group of people working on that. One on human resource, what do we need to do in the education system and our training system to train the people who can take advantage of an IT sector. This involved UWI private sector/Government. How do we translate the economy and finance into economic growth and economic development, again, a combination. What would be the legal framework? What laws do we need to have? What laws do we need to modify to be able to do this? The fifth group was the government group looking at where government is.

We did two studies as part of the plan; one was to assess where we are and how ready we are. The second—what is the status of the Government's IT situation. The studies found that our telephone infrastructure was relatively advanced, but that is landline. There is a strong use in the country of both landline and cellular telephone service—when it works. Home computer ownership is only 16 per cent and Internet usage on a regular basis is only 9 per cent. Most companies—87 per cent—have computers but very few use them to exploit the Internet; it is basically at the moment a tool for word processing, Power Point presentations and that kind of analysis.

There is limited amount of government information available online and very little government service is offered online. That is a chicken and egg situation

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because if people do not have access you are not offering it, and if you do not offer it people have no incentive to go online. There is limited use in schools. Although we are putting computers in schools, it has not been used effectively as a teaching tool. The ICT Plan has to take that into account. We have said that this plan must have as its chief focus connecting people to make this a connected society.

How will we achieve this, Madam President? We are saying that at the end of this plan, which is basically over the next 10 years—but sets out targets for each—that we want all schools and libraries connected. They must have Internet access. There must be improved access to computers by finding a way to encourage people to own one but if they do not or cannot own one, then we must have access centres in every community; locate them in schools, libraries; community centres, so that people could have access to them even if they do not have one in their homes.

We must, at the end of this plan, know the number of jobs that are available in the sector, whether it is programming, learning how to repair computers, teaching, writing programmes, whatever it is; we must have a plan to create jobs in the centre. We must accelerate the use of technology by businesses, including small businesses. We must have increased activity in e-commerce. We must encourage investments in the sector, both foreign and domestic, and foster the development of an IT industrial sector in the country and that is going to be tied into the development of Wallerfield. That is why the university is being put there. It is not only a university, it is the university and the development of a whole industrial park—if you want, a technology park—that feeds on each other, business and university.

We must put Government information and services online, and we must have the correct strong legislation for this kind of world: electronic transactions, security issues, privacy and confidentiality; our laws must begin to address that. We must be able to protect the rights of our consumers who, if they go onto this electronic marketplace are protected.

**2.30 p.m.**

Madam President, one of the by-products of all this is that one has to recognize that with the ICT there are no more boundaries. Here we talk about brain drain, people living in Trinidad and Tobago training and migrating to Canada or to the United States. This allows somebody in his or her home in Toronto or in New York to work in Trinidad and Tobago. We can use the

resources of our people abroad if this is done. So you have removed this physical boundary that exists and which constrains you to your boundaries. The world is now your marketplace; you draw from the world. We have set some targets out of this plan. The first one is that we would fully promulgate the Telecommunications Act in January 2004. It is partially promulgated now. We would fully proclaim it and we would have the regulations which would enable us to fully operate under that Act, we would then create an effective regulatory framework to facilitate the liberalization of the sector and its operations, and introduce competition in the mobile sector by the end of next year.

We would study tax and other fiscal incentives to encourage the industry, to encourage businesses and individuals to move to this. We would develop a broadband strategy because the key to bringing down the cost of transmission of oil, data and TV images has to be by bringing down the cost of teleconferencing which would save us having to jump on a plane to go to New York for a day to talk and bring back people. So long as we do not bring down the cost we cannot do it. So we have to develop a broadband policy and a strategy that would enable us to bring the cost down, and when we bring the cost down we can make it available to schools, businesses and the community.

We want to establish a communication infrastructure that would allow for email messaging and Internet access and that would start in 2004. We want to create a government portal which would allow both citizens and visitors to easily access information and government services in the first instance to enable them to sit in their homes in Cedros, Icacos, Tobago, Toronto and go onto the government portal and get information on what government services there are. This would help tremendously because what happens now is that people come to Port of Spain, they go to the wrong ministry and the staff of the ministry either—if they are in a good mood tell them go to another ministry; if they are in a bad mood, they then tell them this is not their business so they go to the other ministry and all over, simply to get information. So if the information is available and if community access centres are set up and where, even if you cannot use the computers, there would be somebody there who can use it for you; you can go and get the information on it. That is the first stage to providing the services that would come. It is to get the information first and later on you should be able to download an application form; you should be able to fill it out and make your transaction.

We want to get the small business sector into this, and the way to do it, of course, is not to require each small business sector to spend the resources that

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may be required but to develop incubators where this service can be provided on their behalf in the first instance, and when they grow they would be able to take it over. So that is what we want to do. And as I said, side-by-side, we need to do the legislative framework that will allow us to do it. The plan is before the Cabinet and when it is approved I propose to lay it in the Parliament for the benefit of hon. Senators.

Madam President, that is the future but, we have also been providing information and the National Library and Information System is charged with some of that responsibility. We have opened the National Library and despite some of the teething problems I think it is working well. It has made a tremendous difference in the lives of young persons especially to come in and use the facilities, and there is Internet access.

I prefer to dwell on the 98 per cent of the persons who are using it well rather than the 2 or 3 per cent who are having problems. Having done that, our next shift in 2004 would be to go out to the branches, improving and connecting them all and modernizing them to have the same capacity to serve the population as the one in Port of Spain has, to serve the environment of Port of Spain. And we are not forgetting in all that we are doing in respect of facilities, whether it is in government offices or at the libraries, to make them accessible to those who are physically challenged. That has to be part of our planning and of any facility that we are doing for the public.

Another important information resource is our national archives. We are looking at rebuilding the facilities that exist now. We are drafting a national archives and records management legislation, and there is need to create new institutional arrangements for archives and records. I do not think one understands how important archives are to us as a nation. We want to transform it where it is not seen as a place where you store records in dusty rooms but as an attractive place of interest for our citizens, for research and even for our young persons who want, hopefully, because they are stimulated in the schools through their teaching, to know more about the country's heritage and its history. One of the projects in the ITC plan, in fact, is to use students to help digitize archival material and to work with senior citizens to capture our oral traditions. One of the projects we are thinking of is funding young persons going out to the older persons especially in the rural areas and collecting the information and making it available to the population. We run the risk of losing a lot. We may even go to some older politicians. That is part of our plan for our 2004 programme for the archives.



The freedom of information unit continues its work. We are on the Web. We want to improve our website and our database and continue to make that available.

**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. M. Joseph*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. L. Saith:** My colleague whispered to me "time" already, and I whispered to her time flies when you are having fun.

Madam President, we are committed as we have always been to improving access to the freedom of information site so that people can get the information when required. On the question of broadcasting, work has been completed on a broadcast policy. It has been taken to the Cabinet and approved and pretty soon it would be made available to the public. That would all guide us on how we proceed with the broadcasting industry, television industry, radio and cable. We want to create and develop a fully modernized and dynamic broadcasting sector to ensure that it contributes to the nation. I am not talking about developmental journalism. I am talking about putting the systems that would allow it to be a vibrant sector, not only in the commercial environment, but a sector that does contribute to our knowledge and our ability to live in this country. Having done the policy as I have indicated, we can now address our attention to all the applications we have had for radio licences, television licences and cable. We are working on a Note to Cabinet in the first instance dealing with the applications for radio licences. I think the number is over 25, and we would see how within the policy we can deal with that.

The traditional Government Information Service, (GIS), which whenever you are in Opposition, is called the propaganda of Government, has to be changed. That concept has to be changed. Government information has to go beyond that. Government information in my view, is unbiased, straight information on what the government is doing and you would do it in a way that does not seek to spin or exaggerate it and let the population decide. If the government has built a road then you say the government has built a road. People need to know what is happening. Government information also has to address what it seems to want the commercial stations to do but which it knows they cannot and will not do because they are not commercially viable, and that is, development of local programming, our art and culture.

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Distance education has to be the means by which you educate your people. We have to convert GIS into that kind of entity, and we are going to bring some consultants to consider and recommend working with our people on what should be the institutional arrangement for that. Whether it should be a company à la BBC, à la PBS in the United States, à la CBS in Canada. What should it be? How do you create that artistic freedom and creative ability in that institution which a traditional government division does not allow? We want to create that kind of institution and give it the technology that is required to do that job and as part of that new building which is being constructed, we would have in it studio and transmitting facilities which are required to enable it and we may in the end dedicate either by purchase or by otherwise, lease blocks of time on the television and radio for government information so when you put it on you would know it is government information. It is not masquerading as a commercial activity and people would go and accept it and if they go it is because they want the information. They are not getting it surreptitiously through wanting to look at a commercial television programme. That is the kind of vision that we have in the Government Information Service. The other aspects of the Ministry I do not wish to touch at this stage.

The Government Printery, again, the same concept. Do we need to have a government printery that operates as it did 40 years ago with the advent of desk top publishing, with the ability of individual ministries to do most of their printing through desk top publishing? Do you need to have a massive centralized government printery? We would look at that as well.

Madam President, I have tried in this short contribution to highlight what the Government has been doing and what it intends to do in the next year.

**Sen. Prof. Deosaran:** Madam President, can I with your permission? I think the establishment of a new GIS would be a significant contribution to further democracy as the hon. Senator explained. I take the opportunity to enquire whether with the enlargement, both in terms of technology and scope, you would want to consider incorporating broadcasting parliamentary procedures in the fuller way we have spoken about through that same agency?

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. L. Saith:** Madam President, so long as it falls under either public education or government information, the answer is yes. If you begin to do that, it is how you present information and as I said, one is not tied to the commercial side of it, because I am pretty sure that with few exceptions if we open it up now to live broadcasting, there are very few commercial stations that

would want to carry it. The answer is yes, that has to be part of how you make government information and in this case it would have the nation's information available and I consider that public education.

Madam President, I have tried to give you what we have done and what we intend to do. We are driven by the objective to provide better service to our population. That has to be the bottom line. I learnt a new buzz word in Canada two weeks ago "clientcentric". But basically what it means is think always about what you are doing in terms of who you are trying to serve. You are not doing it because you are creating nice processes for yourself. If one keeps that to the back of one's mind, I think this Ministry would be making its own contribution to Vision 2020.

Madam President, I wish in closing to thank and to pay special tribute to those members of the public and private sector institutions and individuals who contributed to the plan. As I said we did it in six months. I gave my staff some heartaches and headaches, but we did it. I thank my staff in the Ministry. I am blessed, my competent, hardworking and enthusiastic staff led by my permanent secretaries and I pay tribute to them and I wish to say it has been a pleasure to address this honourable House. Thank you.

**Sen. Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan:** Let me first of all say that I join this debate on the budget for the year 2003/2004 with some reservation.

Madam President, it is said leadership is the art of mobilizing and maximizing the creative and intellectual abilities of the people in an organization. It is also said that leaders must define vision for where they want to go. Many factors distinguished the world's failed nations from its successful nations. One of the critical elements to this success is vision. In this regard the Manning administration has conceptualized Vision 2020. What is Vision 2020? Firstly, let me say that this is an idea from the Malaysians. In this regard the PNM may want to hire the outstanding Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dr. Mahathir Mohammed, since there seems to be gross intellectual inertia in the cabinet room. The administration is sorely lacking the creative and intellectual capacity to drive this nation forward. How can we talk of an intelligent nation when the Cabinet is lacking?

The budget is really a bloated, idea-less, PR job that reads more like form five SBA projects rather than a sound economic document. It is a con job written to cover up the failures of the last 22 months.

Back to the issue. What is Vision 2020? Apart from a sprinkling of information on the Government website and a speech here and there, we have

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heard little of what Vision 2020 really is. This is the year 2003, and soon we would be in 2004, which means that there are sixteen more years to achieve developed nation status.

Madam President, we must first assess where we are at this time economically and socially. Having done that, we must then determine in a quantitative way what we want by 2020.

Steven Covey says that we must execute projects by beginning with the end in mind, but it seems that the PNM has this in reverse. That is end with the beginning in mind. I say that because after 22 months of their visionless rule it is evident that they want to take us back to square one.

Madam President, you understand my hesitance because to discuss this budget statement in this context it is a difficult task. The Malaysians, from whom this idea was plagiarized, have defined targets for GDP. They see that for their Vision 2020 to be realized it must double GDP every ten years. For Malaysia this would require a growth rate of 7 per cent per annum. Dr. Terrence Farrell puts the figure for this country at somewhere in the region of 10 per cent. This means that if we want to be classified as developed nation by 2020, the average economic growth rate for the next 16 years must be 10 per cent.

Madam President, what is the reality? The budget tells us for fiscal year 2002/2003 the economy grew by 3.2 per cent. If Dr. Farrell were to give that a grade as regards Vision 2020, that would be a fail or an 'F'.

As a former university lecturer I too think that this budget should get an 'F'. 'F' for fooling, 'F' for physically unsound, 'F' for failure to prepare for FTAA, 'F' for failure to prepare sound programmes for stimulating economic activity.

When one examines the budget as presented by the Minister of Finance, one sees little or no mention of a comprehensive and well-thought-out plan to take us to 2020. There is an absence of a comprehensive economic strategy, no road map. In fact, if we look at page 10 of the *Socio & Economic Policy Framework* and it is clearly stated:

“The intention is to fashion a comprehensive and integrated Multi-Sectoral Development Plan (MDP) which will provide the roadmap to 2020. This Plan, will guide the budgetary and planning process to ensure that investment is directed towards those specific areas necessary for building on the Vision 2020 framework. From this perspective therefore, and using the MDP as a road-map, Government will identify and itemize the total package of necessary actions in each sector of the public domain including those required to facilitate the private sector.”

Therefore, this plan, which is still being conceptualized, we now have a budget statement that is really not based on a plan or a road map for 2020. My colleague, Sen. Mark told us that this was a cut and paste budget. In that regard he is literally right. With all the resources available to this Government, the speech writers, the spin doctors, the think tanks, PR consultants, the part of the budget that deals with Vision 2020 was taken wholesale from the government's website. No further articulation in this budget. One would have thought that being in 2003 that this budget would have laid the foundation or at least present a framework for Vision 2020. Instead, the Minister of Finance spoke of beefing up the riot squad. Is this part of Vision 2020? Is the fact that we have had 185 murders, or 45 kidnappings for ransom part of Vision 2020?

What I heard so far from the other side have been speeches that lack conviction. I heard empty speeches because it is clear that most of the items carried in those speeches had no basis, it could not be anchored and this is why I empathize with the other side because without that plan how else can one give life and feeling to those ideas that one may have? This is so important. It is so crucial.

I must commend, however, the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, who spoke yesterday because he was the only one who actually had passion and knew what he was about. I understand that because with sports he can articulate and he has fit into what he wants, but I empathize with the rest of the hon. Senators on the other side.

The Leader of the Opposition has told us that the philosophy of comparative advantage has given way to that of competitive advantage; the cornerstone of this new philosophy, the ability of the private sector to compete globally. In this regard the private sector should work in tandem with the University of the West Indies and other research organizations locally and internationally. Government also has a critical role to play in ensuring that the private sector, in particular the manufacturing sector, is ready for CSME and the FTAA. I will expand as I go on in my contribution.

Madam President, as you know our energy sector is driven mainly by transnational corporations. There is growing concern as regards local content in large energy projects. There is also growing concern which was mentioned in the budget presentation here even last year about the involvement and the participation of local investors and entrepreneurs in the energy sector and that too, I need to address in this contribution. I feel that this Vision 2020 is really a ploy by the PNM to buy more time. They know that in 2007 they would have a fight on

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their hands, they must also know that the entire population, barring of course the kidnappers, murderers and terrorists, are fed up of their management of this country. In fact, under the PNM the only people who can say that they are better off today than they were 21 months ago are the kidnappers.

Let me just bring to the attention of this honourable Senate that in 1958 Fidel Castro asked the Cuban people for two years to create Utopia, 20 years later in 1978 he asked for another 20 years. Is this the thinking that informs Vision 2020? Is it the same political scheme to buy time? Any plan for reaching developed nation status must take into account the effective and efficient redistribution of wealth, and I draw from an IMF report on Mexico. It is known that in Mexico 90 per cent of the country's wealth is in the hands of 10 per cent of the people, and that 90 per cent of the people struggle and compete for 10 per cent of the resources.

**3.00 p.m.**

This sets the stage for social instability and anarchy, which has crippled Mexico for almost a century. This is also the case in many other petroleum-based economies of the world such as Nigeria, Venezuela, Indonesia, Iran and Iraq. I say this because the only information we have had so far, for any of the benchmarks for Vision 2020, has been the per capita income and the GDP.

When we listen to Trevor Farrell, he has indicated that an increase of US \$7,000 to \$20,000 per capita is defined as developed nation status. We have also looked at the GDP growth, but that defines economic growth. It does not tell us about economic development. If we want to talk about economic development and developed nation status, we have to look at improving the quality of life of all citizens of this country. That is where we must focus. We must focus on the effective and efficient redistribution of wealth across the board. That is the only way we would be able to measure economic development through the improved quality of life of citizens.

Therefore, Madam President, today I throw onto the Government two other ideas that I think they must articulate in that Vision 2020: the concepts of economic development through the improvement of the quality of lives of all citizens of this nation and the effective and efficient redistribution of wealth—what we refer to as the balanced economic growth. I also want to go back to the competitive versus the comparative advantage. As a nation we can talk about our comparative advantage. We have a comparative advantage given the resources that we have, but in this global village what are we doing to ensure that we create that competitive advantage? These are some of the issues I want to touch on as I go through my contribution.

Madam President, clearly, the total wealth of a nation and the per capita income, are not sufficient indicators of the well-being of the people. In this regard, we cannot boast of becoming a developed nation by 2020 unless we immediately address income and opportunity inequality in Trinidad and Tobago. The Government would do well to provide us with a list of other indicators and benchmarks to which they are aspiring as regards Vision 2020.

I also want to bring attention to, what I think, is the end in mind. That end in mind is where each citizen of this country can rise every morning and perform a day's duty without resorting to ill-gotten gains and where every citizen feels that there is value added in the paying of taxes and do not attempt to avoid and evade taxes. The paying of taxes, Minister of Finance, should actually translate into improving the quality of life. I draw the example of the McCain Foods in Canada. Do you know what they said? They love paying taxes because they see their taxes at work. This is what we speak of when we talk about improving the quality of life of our citizens.

I also want to remind this honourable House that last year one of the issues that we looked at, to which I referred, was the whole issue of timing. As we develop a detailed 2020 plan—probably this is where the error is—we must understand that it should be a flexible plan because that plan will be in action until the year 2020. This plan should be flexible enough to take in the dynamics of our global environment—we would have a plan that has been worked out with the amount of energy and resources placed into that plan—yet still we need to have a plan that can change as the conditions change.

So, possibly we have to look at the implications of the 20 years in this global economy, the dynamics of that; the possibility of emerging markets and economies; the increasing competitiveness and the highly integrated global economy.

Madam President, I now turn to the energy sector. I know that many of the members on this side, and in the other place, have dealt with several of the economic fundamentals that drive this budget. They have spoken to the issue of deficits and spending, but I want to focus here on the energy sector because I think we have a responsibility, as a nation, this time around, to maximize the realizable potential of this boom in the interest of Trinidad and Tobago. This is why I like to refer to it as a boon and not a boom, because the boom of the 1970s was created for us, the money was there for us because we were dealing with oil. Our boom this time around is in gas. How you monetize, optimize or maximize that gas takes a certain amount of intellectual input. This is probably what has been given to us as a test of time.

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Madam President, I just want to go back to what the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries mentioned in the budget about the energy sector. To summarize, very quickly, they mentioned that there was a \$1 billion aluminum smelter Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that has been signed to the natural gas sector. The budget spoke to the regional gas pipeline feasibility study which has been commissioned; a US \$850 million gas to liquid plant—a feasibility has also been commissioned; a US \$1.2 billion ethylene complex; new ammonia and methanol plants; the construction of a gas refinery aimed at optimizing the production of downstream petrochemicals based on syngas—that is the carbon oxides and hydrogens and so forth; implementation of a cross border development plan between Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela—the MOU being signed, sometime, I think, in August, the way for processing of Venezuela gas in Trinidad and Tobago; the phasing out of unleaded gasoline; upgrading of the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery to improve its competitiveness and profitability; removal of the production levy from small producers and a new fiscal regime.

When I read through the *Hansard*, the contribution of the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, I noted this quotation of the former prime minister of this country, the late Eric Williams:

“Blessed as we are with hydrocarbon resources, we have a choice to make. There have been attempts to persuade us that the simplest and easiest thing to do would be to sit back, export our oil, export our gas, do nothing else and just receive revenues derived from such exports and, as it were, lead a life of luxury; at least, for some limited period. This the Government...amounts to putting the entire nation on the dole. Instead, we have taken what may be the more difficult role, and that is, accepting the challenge of entering the world of steel, aluminium, methanol, fertilizer and petrochemicals, in spite of our smallness and in spite of our existing level of technology”

He concluded his contribution by saying:

“In essence, when Dr. Williams enunciated his vision back in 1977, he asked, and we ourselves asked the question: What are we doing as a nation to enhance our productive capacity? We have achieved almost everything...”

This is what concerned me:

“We have achieved almost everything that he had set out in that vision in the industrial sector, save and except for aluminium and we are now working on it.”



When we hear statements like this I wonder. This is why we end up with budget statements like the one we have today.

Madam President, being a university lecturer and as a student, for years we were criticized as a nation for not contributing more into the downstream development of the gas-based sector. Imagine we are patting ourselves on the back and yet the greatest criticism of the natural gas sector has been that we have continued to export our primary natural resource with no attempt to move up the value chain. That is the PNM's vision and that is the problem. Imagine they are patting themselves on the back for this. With no attempt to move up the value chain we will make the same mistakes. History would repeat itself.

This is similar to the sugar industry when we exported raw sugar to developed countries for use in value added industry such as the production of chocolate. We exported cocoa as well. We are no different in the energy sector right now as we continue to export methanol and ammonia to developed countries for use in value added industries. The anguish that is invoked when I hear leaders of this Government highly lauding the selling of primary raw materials to value added industries in developed countries—How can we attain developed nation status on this basis? How long are we going to continue to be hewers of wood and drawers of water? The detrimental effects on the development of skills and on the human capital of this nation must be underscored.

The opportunities for spin-off industries and a vibrant service sector that is knowledge based and technology based is increased exponentially as we approach the end of that value chain. This is why there is no meaningful linkage between the energy sector and the non-energy sector at this point in time. This is how the energy sector will fuel the development of the non-energy sector at this point in time; it is by forming that meaningful linkage; it is by going up that value chain.

For years at the university this has been articulated. You would have heard Sen. King refer to this, that we have entered into mainly turnkey operations at the Point Lisas Industrial Estate. No opportunities have ever presented themselves for the adaptation of technology; technology transfer remains just another issue. The skills development and the intellectual capital that can be used to stimulate other sectors of the economy including the export of such services is phenomenal. The level of innovation required to reinvent what we call the onshore economy.

Madam President, this is why in the latter years of the UNC administration there was a commitment to determine the optimum utilization and pricing of

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natural gas, with this end in mind, that is, the objective of deepening the sector to facilitate this meaningful linkage.

Optimization models were built to quantify the benefits of the spin-off industries. This is why the study was commissioned—I have referred to this several times before—in which the gas master plan was derived—I mentioned this last year—that somewhere within the budget statement the findings of that gas master plan would have been articulated. Similarly, I looked forward in the budget for this year, for some of the findings of that gas master plan and how are these driving or informing the deliberations of Government's leaders in the energy sector.

Last year the fiscal plan 2002/2003 did not espouse the findings of the gas master plan, including the pricing policy and the utilization policy and this year is no different. Given this eminent boom—this supply boom—this study was commissioned with the view to mapping the strategy for the development of our gas-based sector; the optimal mix of downstream industries in order to deepen the diversification process and provide increased resilience to the vagaries of commodity pricing such as methanol, ammonia and LNG; gas-pricing policy in order to maximize the revenue earning potential of this sector. I hope the Minister would be able to address some of these issues when he winds up in this debate and inform the Senate as to whether such a study has, in fact, informed the decisions for the projects taken for the energy sector. The gas master plan was also to address the security of supply, environmental policies and the institutional and regulatory requirements, including the role of the National Gas Company.

This is why I am so curious and interested to know if the signing of the LNG Train 4, the terms and conditions agreed to by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the investors in this project are consistent with the findings of this study. The proposed projects as enunciated by the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, again, I would be very interested in knowing if these projects were informed by the findings of that gas master plan.

Madam President, I want to turn to the natural gas utilization because a lot has been said over the past couple of months about natural gas utilization. With 60 per cent of our reserves now allocated to LNG—by the time Train 4 comes around, we will have something like 80 per cent—given the netback pricing arrangement this means that the revenue from the energy sector would be highly dependent on the international market conditions and pricing of LNG. It was a policy position of the last UNC administration to maximize attempts to diversify and deepen the gas-based sector of the economy before committing to Train 4.

Madam President, since 2001 there has been very little exploration activity as I have informed this Senate before. Our deep-water exploration programmes have not been successful and there has been no proving up of reserves, we continue to remain at 20-odd trillion cubic feet. Natural gas production is estimated to over two billion cubic feet per day with LNG Train 4 because LNG Train 4 would bring in about 850 million to 950 million cubic feet per day. That will take us up to about three billion cubic feet per day.

What are the country's prospects for other projects in the gas-based sector with this current reserve position? If this reserve production ratio continues to fall dangerously it will continue to impact negatively on future prospective projects. Based on the figures that have been presented—including by the IMF and other experts—this country may have as many as 15 years before we start looking at gas being depleted.

This means that if there are no gas finds, our natural gas industry shuts down in 15 years. But then the Government tell us that they are bringing gas from Venezuela. As I mentioned before in this honourable Senate, it would be foolhardy for anyone to base the future economic growth of this country on Venezuelan gas. Discussions in 1996 culminated in the signing of these several agreements including between the two ministries of energies, Petrotrin and Pedavista and NPMC and Delta Ven. Centre stage was the monetizing of this cross border field and to date, nothing has been accomplished.

We must remember that if we go to utilize or process natural gas from Venezuela in Trinidad and Tobago, the most that will happen is that we will be passing that gas through the tolling facility. That tolling facility will only generate an 8 to 12 per cent rate of return when the real value that we can derive is at the wellhead. There is no way that any Venezuelan government is going to allow this country to derive any value at the wellhead of their gas.

Reserve to production ratio, again. We know several people have sounded their alarm bells, including the experts at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, the IMF and others, but I remind this House that most bankers require a minimum of 15 to 20 years reserve to production ratio before they can even begin considering advising prospective investors in most gas-based projects. For an aluminium smelter—this is why I was very curious, surprised and perplexed when the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries came to this House to answer that question and indicated that he did not know what was the required reserve to production ratio for an investment in aluminium smelter. Any minister of energy would know that the minimum reserve to production ratio is 30 years for an

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aluminium smelter given the size of the investment and the payback period for that investment.

Therefore, it brings me now to talk about the projects that have been enunciated in this current budget and the dream of Dr. Eric Williams, Father of the Nation. The Government signed an MOU for an aluminium smelter. There was an MOU already signed between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and Norsk Hydro, I would like the Government to indicate what has happened to that particular MOU. I am also interested in knowing what are the terms and conditions of this agreement.

It is interesting to know that Sen. Sahadeo, yesterday, spoke of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) and that we signed an agreement. We committed to the principles of this EITI, but yet still we had the signing of this agreement which we know involves an extractive industry—the natural gas industry—and here it is the people of Trinidad and Tobago have no information in that regard. Is that not a violation of the same principles that you are now party to?

Madam President, it is also interesting that in her speech at the United Kingdom that she made mention of the Government's commitment to transparency. Several of the issues mentioned were, for example, the Freedom of Information Act and the Constitutional (Amdt.) Bill for which there are joint select committees. It is good to know that the PNM has come around, after how many years, and has decided to support the joint select committee because this was one of the things they did not support in this House when they were in Opposition.

The Freedom of Information Act, they would remember, they did not support either. The Integrity in Public Life Act—I wonder if Sen. Sahadeo mentioned that there had to be a public outcry with respect to the appointment of the commission and the laying of the forms in Parliament for positive resolution. What has happened to the prevention of corruption legislation which lapsed under the United National Congress? I have seen no reason why the Attorney General has not been able to bring this piece of legislation back to the House. It was fully vetted by the Law Review Commission.

**Sen. Morean:** Madam President, may I provide some clarification on this for the Senator? I think I did, at length, disclose what the position is with respect to the Prevention of Corruption Act and the fact that a consultant is even now working on devising the best mechanism which is necessary to deal with

corruption in a holistic manner and not in a way where there is legislation and people can still do whatever they want and the sanction really is ineffective. There was a bill that was drafted which has been found not to be adequate for the purpose. So, this is not something that is being sat on, it is being actively pursued.

**Sen. C. Seepersad-Bachan:** Madam President, I think we would have an opportunity because I do have a Private Member's Motion on this where we will have an opportunity to debate it. This is my problem with this administration. How long will it take? In the interim, could this piece of legislation not be brought to the House and be allowed to be pursued until you get your holistic approach? You have brought so many other pieces of legislation to this House and you said, when we asked why not a holistic approach, "No, because we need this little piece now and this little amendment now", and so on.

I think that one of the things that has to be expedited is the prevention of corruption legislation. I think it was properly reviewed at the time and I would love to know what are the deficiencies and ineffective aspects of this piece of legislation and the difficulties in bringing it to the House. It was fully reviewed by the Law Review Commission and it was based on the model of several other countries if I remember correctly.

Madam President, to return to the natural gas utilization, if it is one point I hope I have been able to make in this House, before I leave here today, is the importance of deepening that gas-based sector. This is why I asked the question about the regional gas pipeline. In that context in which I have described in terms of deepening the gas-based sector, and not becoming an exporter of primary resource, do you think, given our current reserve position that this is the best way to utilize our natural gas by exporting it through a pipeline up the region? Or, could we have utilized that natural gas downstream to move further down the value chain?

Madam President, I also want to make the point about the ammonia and methanol plants because I see the Government again mentioning ammonia and methanol. That does not fit in to the whole process of diversification in the natural gas processing sector. Because of the petro chemical sector, when we find that the majority—this was an issue—when we have about 80 per cent going into LNG and then we take the rest of the 20 per cent and we take a 90 per cent out of that 20 per cent and devote it to ammonia and methanol we are again subjecting our revenue streams to the vagaries of the commodity markets of ammonia and methanol.

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I remember about two or three years ago—the exact timing slips me—when there was a failure by WASA—or probably a pipe line into the Point Lisas Industrial Estate—it brought the industrial estate to a halt for about three to four days. Do you know what was the impact of the shut down of the Point Lisas Industrial Estate by the end of the second day? The actual world ammonia prices actually went up. World methanol prices also went up. Because we know we are the largest exporter, the impact that we have on commodity pricing must be understood. If we go further into ammonia and methanol plants, I hope that we understand the impact it would have on us gaining. One must remember that our natural gas price is tied to that commodity price. Again, I would love to know what the gas master plan would have said about investments in ammonia and methanol plants.

In the budget the ethylene plant was also mentioned which will be configured to allow 80 per cent extraction of ethane for processing into ethylene. Trains 1, 2, 3 and 4 total extraction of ethane would be about 52,000 barrels per day to support world scale ethylene plants. This is the critical volume required, but to this day we have heard nothing else with respect to this ethylene plant. One would recall that when we had proceeded with the negotiations for Trains 2 and 3 it was clearly stated that the intention of going to Train 4 would have been able to derive this critical volume of ethane to supply a world scale ethylene complex. So the real objective of going to Train 4 was not for the export of LNG but for the construction of that world scale ethylene complex.

At the time it was envisaged, and probably the Government needs to share this with us, whether or not there will be equity participation in this ethylene complex by the Government through its state enterprise, the National Gas Company. I would repeat, that the only objective of going to Train 4—there would have been no Train 4 agreement unless there was that ironclad agreement or ironclad guarantee for an ethylene plant with possible participation by Trinidad and Tobago. At the time the Government recognized the opportunities available from the spin-off industries and, in fact, moving up the value chain. This was one way of deepening the gas-based sector and it would have contributed significantly to the diversification of this sector.

Another issue that I hope the Minister would shed some light on is the whole issue of local content. The South Chamber has raised this issue on several occasions.

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

In Train 1, I remember that we got a commitment for 40 per cent of local content and in Trains 2 and 3 we had a commitment for 60 per cent. There has

been no statement with respect to local content in the signing of Train 4, yet a substantial portion of structural steelworks and piping fabrication is being done abroad. Only 40 per cent of the structural steel is being fabricated here in Trinidad and Tobago. There are still questions about whether or not the carbon steel piping—greater than 16 inches, would be fabricated here or procured locally; the stainless steel piping and the alloy piping. This is another example of the meaningful linkage I am talking about with the non-energy sector for the development of entrepreneurship skills and human capital.

On Trains 1, 2, and 3, one would recall that several contractors have been able to build the expertise, which they have now been able to export up the Caribbean islands. This is what we talk about when we talk about the meaningful linkage between the energy sector and the non-energy sector, fuelling the growth and driving the non-energy sectors.

I suggest that the Government develop a proper policy and strategy for local content because it can become a very complex topic. The investors will always try to find ways out of local content. They will try to find excuses and the Government will have to find ways to make sure that these things become concrete.

For years, when I served at the University of the West Indies, we heard about technology transfers and we saw what technology transfer was all about. There is really no technology transfer. The objective of technology transfer is one where we must be able to adapt that technology, not just be able to operate it; not be able to do a turnkey operation. The UNC had such a policy. I hope that the Government would take the time to revisit that policy and probably add its own to it.

In terms of natural gas pricing in Train 4, I still ask whether the Government has been able to negotiate successfully a floor price. Yesterday, the hon. Independent Senator asked the same question. Without the floor price, there is no guarantee of your revenue stream from Train 4 operations. If the price of liquefied natural gas drops dangerously low, given the high volatility of international gas pricing, as alluded to by the same Minister in this budget presentation, the entire revenue base would be seriously impacted. What protects and secures the future revenue streams of the Government, given that they are spending and making plans based on these revenue streams and given the net back pricing arrangements without a suitable floor price? The Government could end up with almost zero cents at that well-head.

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Sen. C. Seepersad-Bachan:** Madam President, thank you. I did not realize that the time passed so quickly.

There was some talk that the Henry Hub price of \$5.50 was used in these negotiations to calculate the revenue stream. I see the Minister nodding his head. If that price drops to \$3.50—which has happened—then their revenue stream will be under threat. This is why there have been several calls for transparency in natural gas pricing.

I heard the Independent Senator say just yesterday—and I wanted for the record to state—that, at least, all the projects at the Point Lisas Industrial Estate have a floor price—at least the projects that I know of under the UNC.

Sen. Ali, one would recall when the methanol company called for the removal of the floor price, including the ammonia companies, because they were claiming they were selling at a loss based on the floor price of gas. That floor price is the minimum revenue stream. It sets the price and says that at any point in time, regardless of the commodity price, the minimum price would guarantee the income stream. I am saying this for the information of the Senate. Yesterday we were having a discussion on this. When the commodity prices move, they will get above the floor price, hence the country benefits when there are high commodity prices. However, when the price is low, the revenue stream is protected by that floor price.

I want to deal very quickly with the phasing out of leaded gasoline. As usual, I looked at the budget statement, but I could not understand the linkage between the phasing out of leaded gasoline, the replacement of the Ron 92, the increase in the prices of gasoline and the increase in the cap of the production levy.

The issue of the use of Ron 92 started as far back as 1998 because the then UNC government had made a commitment to the phasing out of leaded gasoline by 2000 at an OLADE conference. It was an OLADE Agreement. A plan was articulated for the use of the Ron 92 without any additive. This is what is being talked about right now. Basically, Ron 92 is Ron 92 without lead. You are not putting any lead in it to enhance the octane rating.

Right now, what we know unleaded to be is the Ron 95, which is really the equivalent of Ron 92, plus MTBE. At the time—and this is what I want to bring to



this Senate—it was recognized, based on a study, that several of the cars on the market would have had to utilize that Ron 95, especially the European cars. The reason for that was that not many of the cars could not have utilized that Ron 92 without impacting on their performance and efficiency. Today I know that there has been an improvement in that situation in that a lot of the Japanese cars now are being designed for Ron 91, which allows you to use the Ron 92 without impacting negatively on the performance of the vehicle and several of the European cars are now requiring that you use the Ron 95, which is the 92 plus the MTBE.

When we started it as a pilot project, using the Ron 92, we were still treating it as leaded gasoline because you put it in a tank that was contaminated with lead, it would take you some substantial period of time—like a year—to flush that tank system out. So, although you were actually putting in unleaded, there would be traces of lead, so it had to be treated as though it was leaded fuel.

Having recognized that a large percentage of the car population would have had to use that Ron 95, the following environmental issues were raised by the Environmental Management Agency and the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries and we had to stop the project. These are the issues I hope have been addressed today. One is: Has there been any implementation for enhanced vapour recovery systems within the service station? Even as we move to that Ron 92 today, there will be those who are using leaded gasoline that will not be able to use the Ron 92 and will have to use Ron 95. As a result of that, the attendants at the service station are at risk because of the increased amount of benzene. This is a very, very volatile substance and the aromatics and so on increases the chances of a carcinogenic effect.

In addition, there was also the concern that these cars would be able to completely combust the high percentage of reformates and platformates. These emissions are also very volatile. In fact, there was a debate between the Environmental Management Authority (EMA), the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries and the National Marketing Petroleum Company (NPMC) that these older vehicles would not be able to combust those aromatics completely. This is why we would end up with a situation where we can be dealing with a more serious pollutant, which is carcinogenic. This is something I pray that the National Petroleum Company and the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries have been able to address. This is why the modern cars are also equipped with the catalytic converters to prevent the oxides, for example, the carbon monoxides, the nitrous oxides—the ozone typical smog type of thing.

The issue of cumulative carcinogenic; I am raising these as questions because I hope that the Minister would take this back. At the same time, there is also an operational issue that you must address. There were many lobbyists who were against the use of MTBE, that would have been the Ron 95. The reason for that was that MTBE, because of its highly volatile nature, ends up in your aquifers faster than any of the other hydrocarbons. That MTBE is very costly to remove, if not impossible. You may have to condemn those watercourses. As a result, before you move to the Ron 95, there must be an aggressive tank replacement programme of double-walled underground storage tanks, fibre wall tanks that will ensure that you have, first of all, the leak detection mechanisms and the leak monitoring mechanisms.

The programme was placed on hold while we tried to acquire more data to show that the percentage of the number of cars required to move from leaded to Ron 95 would have been small. That would mean that there would have been a less carcinogenic effect; a lower risk if there is a lower percentage of cars moving from leaded to Ron 95.

Before I left I knew that there was another study and the results were coming in. I can only assume that the results have shown up well now and this is why the decision is taken to move to the Ron 92 right now because the percentage of cars requiring moving from leaded to Ron 95 is very small. Probably the Minister can shed some light on that.

There is also another issue. If you want to phase out leaded gasoline next April, then you have to ensure that Ron 92 is being used now. I am almost certain that NP cannot replace all its underground storage tanks in all its service stations by April next year. That is impossible. It is not to say that I feel that they should. They must. In the interim, what you will use the Ron 92 to do is flush systems and tanks out. Once you place those tanks, there is a costly exercise for remediation for the soil contamination and the containment of lead which requires that you have to export that soil; in our case we did it to La Brea Industrial Company (LABIDCO) and actually removed the lead into water areas having it absorbed by plants. Then I see that you have built and refurbished the Circular Road service station and no remediation was done. So, I wonder what is happening with the whole service station upgrade.

This is another example when we talk about the price increase as an example of the Government looking for a means to an end. They decided we needed an additional \$250 million to fund the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP) and other social programmes. In fact, it is

cheaper to produce Ron 92 than Ron 92 with lead, therefore, I do not understand why they needed a price increase. There should probably be a price reduction.

Be that as it may, I also want to point the Minister to a recent OLADE study which indicated why it is bad practice to load taxes on the price of fuel as a source of income for government. The abolishment of that practice has been advocated several times by the OLADE. Throughout OLADE we have been seeing the gradual removal of taxes from fuel for the following reasons. Based on the premise that the rich were paying for the poor, that was really just a myth. It significantly impacted on the cost of living for the poor, which was considered to be harsh and oppressive when we impose taxes on these fuels. It is the poor man who feels it.

The Minister can probably shed some light on this issue because I understand that all that has happened is that there is an increase in margins for the leaded 95, which went from \$2.45 to \$2.70. Of that 25 cents increase NPMC margin increased by 12 cents. I must say that we were able to build service stations without any increases in margins. *[Interruption]* We never borrowed any money, Dr. Saith. Never!

Private owned companies, for example UNIPET, the second wholesaler was given 7 cents. This I find unacceptable. How can that fit in when you are talking about fair trading? Why was NPMC given 12 cents and the other wholesaler given 7 cents? Is that not a favourable treatment by the Government for its state enterprise? We need a fair playing field. *[Interruption]* No, Dr. Saith, never once did we have an increase in the price of gas other than when they increased it by 10 cents to defray the cost of licensing fee. There was no increase to support our social programmes, et cetera.

This is why the IMF called for the continued divestment of state enterprises. It is as relevant as it was then. We need a cost-efficient NPMC with value added services, that will not have to depend on fuel, which is supposed to become the lost leader in the industry. Most service station networks and most retailers throughout the world depend on that value added operation, the C/Store operation, to bring in the revenue and the fuel itself becomes the lost leader.

What is also very interesting is how it fits in with the whole programme for liberalization and their programme for modernization. It always amazes me why the PNM administration felt that the people of this country deserve nothing better in service stations. They felt that the people of this nation deserve the dirty looking, run-down old stations with contaminated soil. It is important to note that we would be able as a state enterprise to show that you can come up to being a

global player; that you can meet the standards. I hope it fits in to their Vision 2020 because the multinationals that were looking at becoming prospective players looked at the standard NPMC was setting and recognized that it would have been difficult for them to surpass it. This is why I would always advocate that we need to continue to divest state enterprises.

It brings me to the issue that Sen. The Hon. Sahadeo was making yesterday. I heard several contradictory statements in that the Government would utilize state enterprises to further its economic policies and social programmes. Boards of directors have a fiduciary responsibility to act in their companies' interest, for example, the Unit Trust Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago. A chairman of a board cannot be asked to do the bidding of a political party or of government. The chairmen of these boards must operate within the law. The chairman of the UTC has a right, under the Act, to ensure that he acts in the best interest of the UTC and of the investors in the UTC. That same issue will arise when we talk about other state enterprises.

Furthermore, when we talk about state enterprises becoming efficient; when we talk about the Government taking on second-generation reform and strengthening its role in a regulatory framework, then they cannot be participators in the industry itself. They have to take on the role of monitoring, regulating because there will forever be conflict between the state enterprise and that role.

Madam President, there is so much I wanted to say in this budget debate about the subsidiary legislation, the Petrotrin refinery. I want to caution the Government, with excess low-cost refining capacity all over the world, especially in the east, about putting more money in a refinery upgrade. How will they be able to maintain that, because the CET will disappear. Madam President, do I have 60 seconds.

**Madam President:** Your time is up. Just wind up.

**Sen. C. Seepersad-Bachan:** I hope some time down the road I will get an opportunity to revisit some of the other issues, especially what Sen. Dr. Saith spoke about. There is need for a vision and that vision has to be articulated because all their plans, whether budget statement or not, will be unfounded.

On that basis, I wish all Senators a Happy Divali and thank you.

**The Minister of Community Development and Gender Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Joan Yuille-Williams):** Madam President, tomorrow is Divali and in the spirit of it, I am hoping to be quite calm and sober and hope to enlighten hon.

Senators here about the things that we do at the Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs.

Just last week a department of the Ministry celebrated Divali and when I spoke to them, the theme of my presentation was “Enlightened Leadership”. I want to do the same here this afternoon. Here we have the leaders and if at the end of this Divali we can find a new breed of “Enlightened Leaders”, then we would have succeeded in what this festival is supposed to do. This is my Divali wish to all of us. That we would be enlightened leaders. The country needs such leaders.

I have just listened to my colleague, Sen. Seepersad-Bachan, and I know she prides herself as being one of the better economists in the Senate. She never said so, but I just feel so. I was a little disappointed, however, when she said she did not know what was Vision 2020. I think she made a mistake when she said so, because shortly after, she said it was taking this country to developed country status by the year 2020, and I said, “Thank God she remembered”. That is what it is all about. Therefore, whether she wants to be involved or not, we are moving to that position of developed-nation status by 2020 and we are taking the rest of Trinidad and Tobago with us and, Sen. Seepersad-Bachan, you will be caught up in it as we move on.

The Ministry, which I have the honour to lead, is one that will embrace all sectors of the country and the economy. When I listened to Sen. Mary King as she talked about sustainable development and economics—her economics is better than mine although we did some work together at university—she aligned with that the work that we have to do within the Ministry for sustaining lives. That is very important to us and I hope that Sen. Prof. Deosaran will agree with me. We can put all the dollars and cents and economics together but sustaining lives is very important and that is where sometimes people misunderstand the work that we do. Some of the work that is in this document for the budget, sometimes people do not understand.

I want to spend a little while just explaining the work that we do and see how it fits into the budget because it is important. It is a very complex and diverse ministry and we reach all communities, regardless of the economic circumstances. Some people feel that we only operate in the disadvantaged communities, but we operate in all communities. If Senators had looked at last week’s paper, they would have seen that a large number of persons in the Gulf City area came together with a member of the ministry to set up a safety group. At the same time, they would have seen us somewhere in the Laventille area or the East-West Corridor doing some work, or in Felicite doing some work. We work with all

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communities regardless of economic circumstances. I think that sometimes that is where the problem is.

As I listened to Sen. Dr. Jennifer Kernahan—I cannot remember where I wrote it yesterday—one of the things she talked about was the missing generation. The only thing she did not do was to sing it: “There is a missing generation...who cares?” I want to tell Sen. Dr. Kernahan that we care. But that missing generation must be found by someone and I cannot do it in the office at Jerningham Avenue. Sometimes we have to physically go out there and look for the generation. We have to go; we cannot stay there and look for it. When we have to get out there, we have to make the links that would take us to that generation and sometimes the links are very dangerous links. Sen. Seetahal, that is for you. Sometimes the links are very dangerous, but you have to take that chance if you are to discover that generation. We have to go there. There are lots of children—young ones. The school could cater for some, but outside of school, the rest belong to the Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs.

It is our responsibility to find that generation and sometimes, in order to find it, we have to link with people and sometimes the same people we link with are the ones holding on to that generation. They are not giving up and we have to move on them in several ways to ask them to release the generation.

Let me tell you something. I heard them talk about a lot of people within the society, which you put into categories. They come to you or they tell you there are 500 or 600 children and they want to do something for them. You talk to them; you use whatever devices you have to get to the young people.

Let us use Laventille as an example. We spent a lot of time in Laventille and I remember two Christmases ago that we had a number of Christmas parties because we felt we wanted to bring the kids together. The ministry officials went out there to work because I cannot send my soldiers out and stay behind. Sen. Smith remembers because I used the Carib Tokyo panyard for one of the parties. There were almost 600 kids—sometimes you do not even know that there are so many kids around. We went to Harpe Place where there were a little more.

All the kids came out and when you got there you realized that you had to do something more for these children. We had to put programmes there regardless of the community. I remember putting some at the youth centre and as soon as we put in the programme there was the little incident and we had to move them over to the Morris Marshall Foundation. You could not run away from it because that generation was out there.

My point is that we have to move into all the communities. We walk a very thin line. We are criticized right and left but we know that we have to walk that line. We have to make the decisions about what we do. We have to move in such a way that we have to cut down all the barriers—the ethnic barriers as well—to get the work done. Therefore, you will see that the work we have been doing, we have been doing in all the communities irrespective of ethnicity, because those are barriers which some people want to maintain, but thank goodness there are those who will come along with us even though some are pressing on us trying to maintain the barriers.

Let me just say this. When in Trinidad we do something, Guyana and Suriname and others tend to follow. Therefore, people should know the effect behaviours have on the countries around. We are not insulated. We have to do it irrespective of age and therefore we have programmes for young people, like GAPP. We have programmes for the older people because they are part of the community. We have to do it irrespective of gender. We have programmes for women. We have just sent some of our men to Jamaica to do work on a male support programme. People are talking about what is happening with young boys in the community. We have to address all of that. That is part of the work of the Ministry. Regardless of religion, if you look at the spread of how we spent moneys for different programmes, you will see that we have covered all the religions.

The physically challenged are also part of our responsibility in the communities. Social development tells us what they are doing. That does not mean that those of us in community development do not recognize that. Therefore when we have special training programmes we have to make sure that the physically challenged could be included in the programmes. It is a little costly to get the things done, but we have come face to face with that challenge and say we have to do it and we are doing it.

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

Therefore, when we talk about our vision and where we want to go, this ministry recognizes the challenges which we face. We have to be very flexible, innovative and responsive to some of the things that are happening out there. This is a testament of the dedication of the staff of the Ministry for whatever successes we have gained so far.

We cannot do it alone. We have to partner with other ministries—as we partnered with the Ministry of National Security and Rehabilitation and other

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non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—so that we can facilitate some of the work that they do; which is some of the work that we want to do. We have our officers working along with them. Sometimes we partner with them financially and several other ways.

We also have to develop a relationship with the stakeholders. You would recognize what is happening globally, regionally and nationally affect the ministry. For us transnational criminal activity is a big thing that affects our communities. The guns and drugs that come here from the different countries, please do not tell me that we do not have anything to do with it; that is part of the concern of this Ministry.

There are regional activities such as the regional network for deportees. We have deportees such as children who are sent to Trinidad by their parents. They are not criminals, but the parents cannot cope with them, so they are sent back in all the designers. They are in the communities and influence other children. We should take note of it because it is causing a problem for us. We have to look at all of that.

Globalization could destroy communities. That could also be a part of the destruction of communities. We have to be aware of some of those things. Information technology explosion and environmental issues will affect us. Therefore, as a ministry, we have to respond. We have to do things differently. We have to develop new skills and new competencies. A number of people do not recognize the importance of the work we do. We know what we have to do.

During the year, we have sent some of our officers for training abroad. AIDS is a problem within the communities. We sent some of our officers to Canada in a partnership with other officers in Canada. They studied the work they have been doing with AIDS in the communities. They have returned and have started working and the partners from Canada have come to see the kind of work that we are doing here. We have sent them to study in the field of domestic violence and halfway houses. We are into that partnership programme.

With respect to the gender issues and policies, we have also had officers working in a partnership programme. Maybe you do not know that they are here, but the partnership programme would direct us to send our officers. Programmes would be set up here. A lot of work is done via the Internet, letters and the telephone. The partners would then return to Trinidad, spend some time and monitor the programme. Those partners are people using best practices, successful things which they had done in their country. We are doing that because we



recognize that we have to strengthen the skills of the officers in the Ministry. The Senators opposite say that officers are only travelling and that they love to travel, but if we have to respond to the challenges of this century, we have to get our officers upgraded in that way.

At the regional level, I am quite sure you would recognize that the CSME would have some impact on our communities in terms of the free movement of labour. We need to respond to that. The Ministry needs to adjust to that change that is taking place. We do not have to respond physically, but we have programmes where we would educate the communities as to what is happening with the CSME and all the other things that are going to be attendant to it. People need to know. That is part of our community education programme. We train our officers to conduct meetings in the various communities because they are the ones who would reach the communities and inform others of exactly what is happening.

Therefore, at the national level, we have to refocus and get that new direction in order to keep in line with Vision 2020. That is a challenge for us. We have our stakeholder groups, the youths, the women and the religious groups. All of that is happening together with an increase in crime, which we need to admit. One thing that we do not have in the midst is the cooperation of the Opposition.

I heard Sen. Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan ask about the criteria or indicators that will tell us that we are getting there and how far we are. I want her to know that one of the indicators to the success of this vision is that the Opposition cooperates and comes on board. They must! That is a strong indicator. We cannot achieve it with one-half of the country being left behind. I am quite sure, regardless of how she feels about her politics, she wants to see this country a developed country. There is a lot of guilt when she stands and talks about everything and not about the cooperation. Hold it! One of the things that bothered me—I listened when Sen. Dr. Kernahan and most of the Senators opposite spoke—was that every time a crime initiative came forward, the first thing they would do is knock it down and find faults in every single one. I have never heard one alternative or suggestion from that Front Bench. That is the danger. It might hurt when I say so. Whenever they hear an initiative they would never say: "This is good but it should have been that way." You would not hear that. You would hear 100 per cent: "What is that?" They would try to find all the holes to knock down the initiatives. That is not the way a country moves forward. Regardless of what the Opposition does, we have to get there. The earlier the Opposition comes on board it would be better for them, their children and their grandchildren. [*Desk thumping*] We have a number—[*Interruption*]

**Sen. Seepersad-Bachan:** Based on the statement made with respect to us on this side, we have never been opposed to this country attaining developed-nation status. I think we on this side take our oath very seriously. Every time an initiative comes forward, it is because we want to be able to add value to that initiative.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams:** I do not want to respond to that too much. I remember those opposite said that we plagiarized Vision 2020. How could they want to help if we plagiarized Vision 2020 from the Malaysians? I have heard about Malaysia's Vision 2010. Why would we copy that? The Malaysians were here as our guests and they were excited when they came. They were pleased with everything we were doing for the school children. They felt we should have Vision 2020 on our pencils and books. They said they experienced some of the problems we are now experiencing, but we will go on. The Opposition should just accept the fact this is where we are and where we are going and get on board.

That lack of support from the Opposition is also affecting the community-building initiatives. We are trying to build communities and the Opposition is trying to break down communities using all these ethnic, racial positions that they have. Some of them want to be martyrs through it, so that it could be written in history for their grandchildren to see: "I tried to save you by doing some foolish thing." Instead, they should try to bring the country together. We are bringing the country together through several ways by way of some of the programmes we have. We are doing it in such a way that the people enjoy themselves.

One such programme is the Best Village Programme. That programme can bring communities together. The Senators opposite can say what they want. This year we have the largest number of villages taking part. Thank God for that. [*Desk thumping*] It was a joy to see some of those villages perform. Brigand Hill, Manzanilla is an East Indian village. I watched their performance. It was beautiful. They brought the whole community together in their folk presentation. Some of them are going to be so proud because there is an environmental competition as well. In the communities you would see the names for best block, street, best community centre. There is the handicraft aspect of the programme as well. Those are things that the community would like. We do not know what we have.

This year, for the Best Village finals, we are pleased to host a folk group from India, courtesy the Indian High Commissioner. [*Desk thumping*] He has promised to bring an Indian folk group to Trinidad, as part of the finals. We sponsored a religious interfaith group to a conference in India some time ago and they saw everything. They would be performing at the Queen's Park Savannah with the

same groups the Senators opposite were trying not to have perform. The Opposition should listen and think about it. They have gone miles ahead of us.

This is the first year we have introduced a Junior Best Village. We took them in the communities during the Easter vacation. The young people in each community represented different ethnic groups which reside in Trinidad. There were Chinese, East Indians, Syrian/Lebanese, French and Spanish. They lived the life, wore the dress, ate the food, sang, danced and learnt about each other. That is our way of breaking down some of the barriers so that the young ones can appreciate each other. All races performed in Sangre Grande. We saw them perform the whole story of Ram.

On November 07, 2003, they would be in the Queen's Park Savannah for the day. We would have these huge tents decorated according to the particular ethnic group. Tobago would be coming to depict the French. Warrenville would also depict the French. I think both Tobago and Warrenville would be combined. The Syrian/Lebanese group from Couva would also be there. We would have a street parade. There would also be food and dress on display. During that day each of those groups would spend 25 minutes on stage demonstrating some of the things they have done. You have seen them on television on Sundays at 3.30 p.m. There was an Amerindian group as well. That is our way of trying to break down some of the barriers. We want the children to learn from each other. The nice thing about it is that the embassies have also gone along with us. The missions that we have here decided to assist. If we wanted any help to ensure authenticity, we could appeal to those embassies and they would be there with us.

This is real. This is mission. We have to get it done. We have started with the children and they are responding. I hope that some of the Senators opposite do not touch them and carry their prejudices over to them and spoil them. If you do not, we will be assured of a community with all love. That is my prayer this evening. The Senators opposite should not tell a village: "Do not go." That is politics. The partisan politics that we try is what is destroying Trinidad and Tobago. Once we could get rid of that, we could move forward. I invite all to the Queen's Park Savannah on November 07, 2003, when the children would be there for the day. The adults would be there from November 08 to the end of November. We will have the East Indian folk group with us. The Indian High Commissioner told me that I would see a similarity in some of the things we do in our villages, which were not necessarily East Indian villages. That is something that we are all looking forward to.

I only used that as example of a community-building initiative. We are out there singing with Anaculture. We started with Anaconda, they left us. We

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continued those community concerts where we brought the communities together in a peaceful way. At the time they are singing and enjoying themselves, we say they have put down their guns and held each other's hands. We have to do other things to make the communities feel as one.

What is our vision for the 21st Century? I am going to read this part. We see this ministry as a caring, responsive and professional organization, delivering quality service in an equitable and sustainable manner, empowering all communities to achieve a better quality of life. I know Sen. King is quite concerned about the word "sustainable". We want to empower all our communities to achieve a better quality of life. As we proceed, our mission is the holistic development of all communities. That is a great challenge. We want to empower the communities, so that they can do things for themselves, through any of the agencies that we have. That is important. I have given you all the characteristics and stakeholders; mentally, physically challenged and able-bodied. That is the work of the Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs. One would ask: "How do they do that?". It is a lot of work.

I use the word "work", but I told people we no longer go to work. If we had to go to work we would time it on an 8.00 a.m.—4.00 p.m. basis and do the things that workers really do. We have passed that. The staff works 24 hours per day. When do you see the village council groups? We do not get any professional allowances or anything extra. But they do it for the love of it. They recognize this is important to Trinidad and Tobago. Regardless of what the Opposition talks about in terms of the natural gases, if we do not have these sustained communities and the people who are empowered to do things, all else will fail us. We in the Ministry are trying our best to do that.

There are certain things that we do. We have partners with whom we work. Part of our business is to strengthen the relationship with our partners. We have to improve the physical infrastructure in the client community. If you noticed—I spoke to the Cabinet this morning—one of the things people want is space to do something. Every community wants a community centre. Some people say that there are some communities that do not need it, but my desk and my mails do not tell me that. My mails tell me that they all want space out there, whether it is for their programmes, to show their talents or educate themselves. Whatever it is, they all need spaces. The building and renovating of community centres is a big priority for us. There is a new design for the buildings. With the explosion of information technology we must have buildings which would cater for that. With respect to the old ones which were rectangular in shape, they are now being

renovated to bring them in line with the modern technology. One area such as La Tosca in Nariva now has, as part of its plan, an area for medical doctors to pay visits. We are responding to the needs of the communities. The building is no longer a 2 x 4 building. When we are finished with that building it would be able to respond to the needs of the community and carry us to what we want to do for 2020. All our client communities are working.

We have upgraded our human resources unit within the Ministry. Everyone in the Ministry was trained in information technology. We brought people and paid for them because we know it is important. They are all outside on the fields. We have been upgrading our premises. If you go now you would see our first attempt at ramping the premises so that there would be access for wheelchairs. We would also be adding two additional floors. Our people are now trained in customer service. We have training programmes for our staff so that every member of staff can go to one of the centres and give lectures in various programmes. We have to strengthen our staff because we have to respond to what is happening.

Here are some of the things we want to emphasize: quality service to the community, equitable treatment and an empowered work force. Last week I was at the Attorney General's Office where we gave out some checks to NGOs and those who worked in the communities for us. I told them they were all extensions of the staff of the Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs. Do you know why? They are doing work out there which we also want to do. They were very pleased to know that. I said you did it, we facilitated you, keep doing the work and we will keep facilitating you. Team approaches, creativity, integrity in all affairs, transparency, best practices and continuous learning are the things we demand from all our workers; from the Minister right down to the cleaner. If you go to the Ministry at any time, the cleaner will also be there waiting to serve you. They all know about everything that is happening. Whatever we do, everybody takes part in it. This is what we call service to our community.

Madam President, let me give you some examples of the programmes that we have to support what I have just said. We see the output as holistic and transformational. Sometimes if you go to a programme that we have had or a graduation, somewhere you would see a sign stating "Transforming Lives" regardless of what it is.

Here was a group of women that came and protested outside. We moved that group from protest to productivity, from picketing to promoting business. I am quite sure all of us remember the young women who came outside the Ministry. There were approximately 50 of them who wanted to see the Minister. Of course,

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the number became very large because the advertisement was that jobs were being given away at Jerningham Avenue. Those who were smart knew why they came. As soon as persons arrived everybody was given a placard. What do we do, turn them back, call the police? We invited them in. With some reluctance, eventually the leaders came in. I had a talk with them. They told me: "We want to talk, why do you not come down and talk with us?" I asked them where was their headquarters. They said that it was in St. James. I promised to go but I told them that I was going in peace. They said that I should not worry. I went there the next morning. When I arrived there was a CEPEP group from the village which formed a guard of honour. That was the first thing I noticed. They meant business. I walked into their very humble room. They did not sleep that night. That night they wrote all the things they wanted to talk about. Clearly, my going there was what we should always do; meet those people. They had several things they wanted to do.

Here are some of the things that happened to that group. They became the umbrella body for a number of women. The group is now 200 strong and call themselves Women in Transformation. As a sign of goodwill and peace, we upgraded their office. They were given desks, chairs and computers. They felt good. Then they asked for several programmes. When I was listing the programmes one woman said: "What about me, we cyah be secretaries too?" I understood what she meant. We went to Lenore's School of Business and we met a very senior principal who understands people. When the principal spoke to me she said the young lady told her: "Miss Williams say to check you out and see if I am comfortable with you." I cringed when I heard that, but I understood. Lenore's School of Business took approximately 30 of them in. They would be there for one year. They would sit the Pitman's Examination. She is still working with them. They have taken one examination and they would be continuing. It costs a lot of money, but they go. She says they attend their classes every day. They would become secretaries.

Another group of them did institutional strengthening. The leaders of that group, through the CDF, did institutional strengthening with the groups, which involved management and financial accounting. They are very serious with that group. Some of them joined the Women in Harmony Programme, some did geriatric care, landscaping and two other programmes. Where are they now? They have graduated in several of these areas. Their lives have certainly been transformed. If you see them now, compared to what they were before. They are now on the radios talking as well. They felt that they had achieved and had a story to tell.

They are now at the point of opening a co-operative. They have opened an employment agency, because they now have to find jobs for other persons. We have been giving them all the support that they need to get all these things done. They are not a CEPEP group but a lot of them did horticulture and landscaping so we bought them tools. They can now go out and do work in places on their own. It is just amazing how they keep their books together. As part of the horticulture programme, they did floral arrangement. They are now looking for larger headquarters and quite, rightly, they need it. That is what we call transforming lives. They are very proud of what they are doing. Those ideas about the cooperative came from them. As they moved on and got themselves exposed, they found ways to do other things.

Some people felt that we should not have professionals moving from programme to programme. Our business is to sustain their lives. We will be with them right through until we think they are on their feet and could move on. That is what is happening within the ministry. I wanted to use that as an example of what has happened to show how things work within the ministry. We have a video tape with the title "From Protest to Productivity. From Picketing to Promoting Businesses."

Of course, I expect them to move to do other things. Not only that, the group has become much bigger. You would hear from several other groups such as Women off Welfare and other people who have benefited from the work that the ministry has done. That is the kind of intervention that this ministry has to do. It comes with a price, but we are quite willing to move on with them.

#### **4.30 p.m.**

Madam President, we also have our Community Action for Revival and Empowerment (CARE) programme. I was not in the Parliament in the other place, but I understand there were some criticisms about the CARE programme. The ironic thing about this is while the criticisms were being levelled in the other place, on that very day we were at the Attorney General's Office handing out cheques to different groups. I think it came over on television the same night, and one would have seen some of the groups coming forward to receive their cheques and saying what project they were involved in, what they have learnt and how grateful they were.

Those persons, who have worked these projects and have done very well do not really have to reapply all the time. We go out there and see the projects and we continue to finance these projects. For example, there was a little pre-school in

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Ecclesville—we liked that one—when the lady was receiving her cheque, she told us that she knew about Vision 2020, and that everyone must be computer literate. The lady asked for computers for this pre-school. We gave her the computers and we also paid the tutor to work with these kids. I wondered how she knew that, and the Senator does not know that. That is part of the CARE programme. I think the lady was one of the persons who were picked up on the television. When I first saw the request, it struck me—and this lady is a very humble woman. When my officers get a request they will go out and see where the request came from. They went out and saw that she was in a pre-school. She had vision. She knew where she wanted to take her kids and she asked us for two computers so that she could start this process. That is what happened.

There was a gentleman from the National Hindu Youth Organization. This organization came forward and they had a programme of training. The officers went out and they found that there was a programme of training. What was nice about that organization is that although there was a religious bias to it, the personnel in this training were from the entire community. They did not say only persons who belonged to that particular organization would be trained. It was for the entire community. That is what we mean when we talk about partnering. I can show you that this is what we used on that day. I could call the names of all the other organizations that were there and who received cheques.

When I hear people go to the other place—well I did not hear it here—and say that there was discrimination in how things were being done; sometimes I take it very lightly. I know that whenever we are handing out cheques we allow the press to come in—if they want to come and see what we are doing—and we allow people to talk about the programmes they are doing in their community. Similarly, with the Community Development Fund, whenever someone gets a cheque or anything like that, they will tell us what they are doing with the money and how it is being spent.

Two weeks ago “MLIO” came forward. Do you remember that anti-crime conference which started at the Trinidad Hilton Hotel and ended at Crowne Plaza? That is what they were doing. We could have done that for them, but they did it for themselves. They went out there and they had consultations and they prepared a brief at the end of the conference. They asked us to assist them. Is crime a problem? Yes. So, here was an organization, very empowered, and wanting to help the community. There is where the fund goes. So when one hears CARE, that is how we spent the money.

**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. G. Morean*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Madam President:** Hon. Senator, you will have 15 minutes when we return from the tea break. We shall now take the tea break. I know Senators thought that I had forgotten the tea break but believe me, I had not. So, the Senate is now suspended and we shall return at 5.20 p.m.

**4.36 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**5.20 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**Madam President:** Hon. Senator, you may continue.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams:** Thank you, Madam President. I started this contribution by looking at the communities and some of the criteria that we looked at when we worked with these communities. I said that we worked with communities regardless of economic circumstances—which means that we are in all the communities—disadvantaged, as well as those communities that are more advanced—and regardless of the ethnicity. We showed where some of our programmes crossed all racial lines; regardless of age—we talked about our Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme (GAPP) for younger people. We have our placement service where senior citizens who could afford to pay for this service, pay for persons who have graduated from the Women in Harmony Programme and the GAP Programme. If there is a senior citizen within the community who cannot afford to pay for this service, the Government pays the caregiver for that person.

Madam President, we also talked about gender bias in the workplace. We said that regardless of gender, we would work with the communities. I noted some of the programmes that we could use, for example, we had our Women in Harmony Programme, which gives us the geriatric care. We also have our horticulture programme and the non-traditional skills programme. There were women who did not have the opportunity to engage in these programmes, which were previously opened to males like plumbing and so forth—and we gave women the opportunity to learn these new skills. Hopefully, in time, that will not be necessary.

Madam President, we talked about the physically challenged. I want to talk a little about a programme, which we have designed for the physically challenged. It is a programme made by BorderCom International. This particular programme will last for about six to eight weeks. We are hoping at the end of this programme,

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the graduates would be able to earn a livelihood on the basis of merit and, therefore they are going to be exposed to Microsoft Office Special and Certified Business Professional courses for a period of nine weeks. There are two centres: one in St. Augustine and one in San Fernando. It has cost the organizers some money to renovate these premises. In the first instance, the programme will be mainly for those who are wheelchair bound, and then we will have it for persons with other disabilities. The important thing about this programme is that it is an international certification and, therefore, the graduates will compete with the able-bodied community. We are certain that at the end of this programme they will be able to do so.

We have already received some support from business places that have said that as long as they are competent—and the basis is on true merit—these persons will get employment. The programme will be starting in two weeks' time, and it will cater for 26 persons of the disabled community. We are very proud of this initiative. At the end of this programme, we will continue. The physically challenged, for some reason or the other do extremely well in terms of technology and, therefore, we felt that this was an area that we can expose them to, and they are extremely delighted to do it. They will not only be doing the technology itself, but they will be working on things like leadership, customer service, sales, business etiquette and business communication.

In order to facilitate the centre at St. Augustine, the Government has built ramps to accommodate wheelchairs. We have widened the doors and refurbished the restrooms for them and, similarly, we have done some of the same work at the San Fernando centre.

Madam President, in addition through the Community Development Fund, we have been able to provide a bus for the disabled persons, and there is another application in for another bus for a school, because it is difficult for children to get from place to place and, therefore, we are going to be able to do that for them. So, the physically challenged are being taken care of in this way.

I also want to let Senators know that the school is now devising a programme for persons who are mentally challenged in some areas, and the blind will also be taking part in this programme, but the first group would be the physically challenged. I want to commend this programme and this is the way we are seeing it. As we said, we have made an intervention in all our communities.

Madam President, we are also looking at the area of crime and, therefore, we have a responsibility. We have partnered with the Ministry of National Security

and Rehabilitation in a programme called: The Community Safety and Enhancement Programme, which was launched some months ago. It has taken some time for us to build this programme. I am very pleased—just two weeks ago we had a visit from the Commissioner of Police—because one of his officers coordinated the programme—to discuss where we are going with this programme. Following the visit of the Commissioner of Police, we had a second meeting with heads of all the police divisions in Trinidad and Tobago to discuss the Community Safety and Enhancement Programme.

This programme, somewhat, was formerly called the neighbourhood watch group, but there are some differences to this programme. There is a committee which is being put in the area. The important thing about this programme is that there is a community desk, which would be chaired by someone from within the community. The groupings for this programme would be the community, Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Commerce and the police, whom we have partnered to bring out this Community Safety and Enhancement Programme.

Madam President, what is important here are the groups which would be represented in this programme. In St. George West—I need to say something about it because some of us feel that there are groups that are not participating in programmes—there is Paxvale Residents Association; Morvant Community Welfare; Smith Hill Action Group; Gasparillo Village Council; Homestead Gardens Association; Cascade Community Council; Patna River Estate; North Post Neighbourhood Watch; Carenage Community Council; Success Central Community Council; Dundonald Hill and the Western Police Division.

Let me read the groups in County Caroni which will be participating in this programme and they are: Enterprise, Caroni Savannah Road, Roystonia Couva North, Brickfield, Couva Village Council, Caparo, Union, Lange Park, Montrose, St. Helena, Coryal, Caroni Association and Central Division Community Police. I could call the number of groups in each area that would be participating in this programme. These groups have already registered, and we are going out there to train them, and with the help of the Community Police we are setting up these groups. People are now taking care of their own community, and that is empowerment.

What is good about this programme is that the politics are not anywhere there. The reason I called some of the groups is to let people know that if we allow the community to go forward and participate, we would make some headway. What kills the community is that there are certain barriers that are being put up there—imaginary, physical and otherwise—that prevent the community. This is one of

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the programmes within the Ministry that we have initiated in response to crime. We are on the ground with these programmes and I am quite sure that this programme is going to make a difference.

We are moving around to all the counties. We are aligning all these groups with the police division. The police officer in charge of the division will be in charge of the groups together with other members of the community. We are quite sure that at the end of the day, the Community Safety and Enhancement Programme would be part of a successful response to crime intervention. So that when people say that nothing is being done about crime, I want them to know that things are being done at all levels—even at the lowest level we have people taking control of their own community.

I also want to let this Senate know that within the ministry, we have been talking about gender and what we expect to achieve. We are working on the National Gender Policy. We are coming to the conclusion of the consultation. I think today is the last day in Tobago. I understand that yesterday was a very successful day in Tobago with the national consultation programme. We had about 30 of these consultations where we have met different groups such as women's groups, disabled groups, religious groups, trade unions, teachers and public servants. At the end of these consultations, we are going to put it together so that we could come up with a gender policy. We probably should have consulted with parliamentarians and, therefore, I will wish to invite all parliamentarians to submit papers to us at the ministry with respect to what they would wish to see within the National Gender Policy.

Madam President, this National Gender Policy is important for Trinidad and Tobago, because there is some discrimination. When we talk about discrimination according to gender it is not only necessarily female, but most people think that it is the female that we are talking about, but there is discrimination with both male and female. If we are moving to where we want to go for Vision 2020, then we need to harness all the resources and we have to give each person an equal chance and, therefore, the national gender policy is going to be extremely important.

The non-traditional skills programme that we are running presently is simply because there was some kind of discrimination at that level, and the women were not allowed to participate in those programmes. Even now that we have trained these women, we still have problems in getting work for them, because the job sites are not designed to accommodate them. Therefore, we are saying with a national gender policy, it will say that job sites are to be built in such a way to

accommodate both male and female, and in schools, the selection of subjects there should be for both male and female. Probably, some of the children who we see go astray maybe they were not satisfied, because they did not do what they would have liked to do. Most likely, they were not given the opportunity to choose what they wanted to choose, simply on the basis of sex. That is one of the things that the National Gender Policy is going to ensure, that there would be no discrimination at any level. Let me just ask my colleagues again to participate in any way that they could either by sending forward any memorandum to the National Gender Policy. We are hoping by the end of the year to have our first draft of the National Gender Policy.

Madam President, I have tried this evening to let you see the work of the ministry, and how we try to respond to what is happening out there. One of the important matters that we had to put in was the evaluation and monitoring system. We could spend as much money as we want, but we have to know the impact of the programmes on the people. This year we are going to put that in and we will also be doing some tracer studies to see where our graduates go and how many of them are picked up, and to what extent we have been successful in what we have been doing. Let me assure Senators that the monitoring and evaluation system will be in place for all the programmes.

When we did our programmes, we ensured that we did not only attack the technical areas, but for all our programmes we have also put in components of life skills and self-esteem—whether it is with the adult male, female or children—we found it extremely important to develop that side of the person. Therefore, I hope Senators see that the time we have spent in Government, we have moved in a most holistic manner. We cannot come to a conclusion—you know sometimes one could end a speech and say, well we conclude—but there is no conclusion to the work of the Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs. I would like to describe it as, a work in progress. We must go on. We will continue to work, and we will continue with our watchword of professionalism. We will continue with our focus on the communities with special emphasis on the vulnerable communities. We will try to bring in the most highly trained persons to assist us and we will use the most state-of-the-art technology.

Madam President, let me assure you that we intend to do so in the most caring way.

I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Ambassador. Christopher R. Thomas:** Madam President, I am here against better domestic advice, better collegiate advice and better professional

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advice, but I did feel that I wanted to make a short intervention—indeed, I am here even against your better judgment—but I thought it was important to say a few words in this budget debate.

Conventional standards for a developing country budget suggest a number of criteria. I will list six of such criteria and they are: the balance of trade payments; public debt, in relation to the gross domestic product (GDP); the question of poverty, how a budget handles poverty; how a budget handles employment or unemployment; the political statement that the budget makes in relation to the Government's involvement with the people—some chose the term caring; and the budget as an instrument of economic transformation.

Now, when one looks at the budget from these perspectives—let me say that these are not necessarily my own criteria, these are six criteria that I have drawn from a document: *Some Contemporary Issues* which was published by one of our deceased national economists, Mr. Frank Rampersad. I share these criteria, but I do not consider them to be exhaustive.

When I try to evaluate the budget against these criteria, I find that the balance of trade payment is healthy. It is \$2.9 billion—if I am correct. The public debt to GDP is not healthy. This debt is way beyond what is considered to be acceptable standards. I believe, therefore, it is 51.8 per cent which is an increase from last year. It is incumbent upon the Government to give some clear indications to the people as to how it proposes to manage this particular public debt, particularly when the Government is seeking to raise another \$3 billion debt for fiscal year 2003/2004.

The explanation given by the Minister of Finance that the Government is seeking to re-finance the debt does not reduce the debt. Refinancing does not reduce a debt; it simply extends the period of payment. The ratio remains the same and the accumulation is still there. I feel, therefore, that the Government owes us an explanation in terms of what measures it is going to take to reduce this debt. The Government admits that the debt is high, but it also says that this debt is manageable. I think at 51.8 per cent the debt is very unmanageable, and certain fiscal measures must be put in place. We would like to know what are these measures. Normally, public debt should range between 25 to 30 per cent of GDP.

On the question of poverty, I believe that the measures put in place by the Government are very impressive. I certainly feel very satisfied with that. On this point, I would like to suggest to the Minister of Social Development that he should not be too bothered with the question of whether the term is “alleviation of

poverty” or whether it is “eradication”. The current international thinking is that the term “alleviation” is a better term to use than “eradication”. [*Desk thumping*] It is so because “eradication” tends to be very elusive and so distant; it is not something that you could put your hand on. So the international jargon now says let us try to move in stages. So “alleviation” is like a middle road—you move from one level to another—and “alleviation” could take several forms. The development of housing is a part of alleviation and so is anything else, for example, the development of schools and medical care. So that “alleviation” is obviously the better term for us. I regret somewhat that I would have to disagree with my Independent colleague on this question.

With respect to employment, again, I feel satisfied with the measures the Government has taken. I am not happy—and I support Sen. Dr. McKenzie when she says that it is important and good that the Government should seek to provide employment, but that employment should be structured and focused and it should form some kind of transitioning possibility, so that tradesmen become skilled, and not necessarily having a burgeoning unemployment amount of money. For example, last year it was \$80 million for the CEPEP, and for the fiscal year it is going to be \$225 million; when you add that to the URP and other things you are talking about almost \$500 million for these projects. So it seems as though it is rising rather than being structurally focused and managed.

#### **5.40 p.m.**

With respect to caring: Is the Government a caring one? When I look at the social measures that the Government has put in place, I come to the conclusion that the Government is a caring one. I think it is important to know that from my perspective it is a caring Government.

The final criterion is the question of instrumentality for economic transformation. Here, I have some little difficulty in terms of the procedural approach that the Government has taken in terms of the use of some of its resources. I, therefore, see the Government and the budget more as a caring budget than an innovative budget; it is more, what I would call, an enlightened budget, but not necessarily a very progressive budget.

The present circumstances in Trinidad and Tobago would suggest that we could use a lot more of our offshore resources to build and sustain the economy. This is the point I believe Sen. King has made repeatedly over the last two or three years and which I do not find sufficiently in the budget itself. I do not wish to extend the debate on the question of what development involves. I think the

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Minister of Social Development is correct. There is an internal development that must take place if we have to get to Vision 2020, but there is also an external development that must be looked at. Development is not only internal; development also has to answer to what you might call the national relationship to the global economy, and unless you can change that relationship, as it exists at the moment, development will not take place. Chiefly because development is not absolute, it is relative, and it depends on the movement of external forces to a large extent. In that respect, I want to talk a little about what I perceived to be areas where the Government might have been a little more progressive in dealing with the question of the economy.

During the recess of the Senate some two months ago, I took the opportunity to visit a number of institutions of Government: I went to the hospitals; I went to the clinics; I went to the courts; I went to the universities; I went to LNG; I went to Petrotrin; I did not get the opportunity to go to the prisons—although I had asked on several occasions, I did not get any responses and I did not propose and still have not proposed to go to the prisons except in the capacity as an Independent Senator.

But what have I discovered from these interactions over time? I want to read a few to you, Madam President: \$60 million on exports of tuna fish from Trinidad and Tobago to the United Kingdom. I sat and spoke with a manager from the United Kingdom who said this is the level of his export trade from Trinidad and Tobago. He comes here three times a year. He attributes \$6 million of that \$60 million on imported packaging. This situation, I am sure, can be multiplied for a number of other industries in the country. My question is—going back to what Sen. Seetahal has said: Is it not possible to provide for packaging in Trinidad and Tobago so that when we are exporting our tuna they are packaged here? Madam President, this will provide work to a whole line of industries.

I am making the point that Sen. Dr. McKenzie was making about the transition out of CEPEP, where small industries of its kind can be formed. I do not believe that the packaging industry is the only one of its kind; I believe there could be hundreds in the country at the moment. So my suggestion to the Government is: Would it not be very economical to form a team of persons who will survey our economy and our industries, see to the extent where these things are falling between stools where we can indeed bring them up to scratch, so that there could be a larger local component of things that are now done abroad which can be done here? So I used packaging as an example of what could happen nationally.



With respect to platforms and rigs—I travelled with someone who is responsible for the development of platforms and rigs in Trinidad and Tobago. These are, in fact, structured and built in Texas and Europe and are transported wholesale to Trinidad and Tobago. Some of our people do minor repair works. Each platform costs \$600 million. In discussion with university professors I was told that simply by extending the engineering course by one year, to include design, you would begin to build a cadre of local engineers who would be able to do much more in this area and, perhaps, ultimately, we may become an exporter of platforms rather than importing platforms. He said one year additional course of engineering could provide for this.

I want to talk a little about the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). As Minister Gift said yesterday that the question of dispute settlement is one of the major issues in negotiations and I ask myself: Has the university or the Government thought that this dispute settlement being so important that there should be a larger component of trade law, so that when these disputes have to be interpreted they can be done through your local lawyers, if they are trained in trade law? If you do not, then you would have to keep importing lawyers in trade law to handle trade disputes. We have the case of Mr. Cassell, who was recently imported to deal with another matter, but I am not sure where we are in terms of trade law. When I spoke to the university it was a very minute course in the totality of their work over three or four years to become an attorney.

As Sen. Smith has indicated, crime is a major question and one that the Government has to come to terms with. In my travels to Atlanta and a number of other places, I have been consistently asked the embarrassing question: Is Trinidad and Tobago ready for the FTAA secretariat in relation to what we hear happening in the country? I have had to constantly indicate that it is not as bad as it appears. I do agree with Sen. Smith that it is one of the most pervasive and destructive elements in the country today, and we must take hold of it.

I, therefore, support Sen. Prof. Deosaran's call—in fact, I would make it a plea to the Opposition to cooperate and collaborate in this area so that the country could be rid of crime, or at least that we could remove the high incidence of crime in this country. I think it is important that we cooperate on this matter. I also think that if we are told that the average person does not need to fear for crime then we are implicitly saying that we know the areas where crime emanates; and if we know those areas then we should focus on those areas and seek to eliminate them.

I made a statement on kidnapping when I said that perhaps in the reform of the police service one could look at having an administrative structure. The issue

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is not numbers; it is technology; it is intelligence; and it is data surveillance, and maybe the time has come to look at the service, as one in which there could be an administrative staff to man the issues of the computers. All police officers cannot be trained in computers, but there could be a whole force of police officers that can be released if there is an administrative layer in every police station, dealing with surveillance data retrieval; data transfer and data dissemination so that the police officers can be out in the streets. From San Fernando you can have information available to Diego Martin in a few seconds, if you have those kinds of computers in all offices and police stations. Madam President, this might be something that we can look at when we deal with the question of police reform.

With respect to health; the health experience I have had worries me somewhat. We have a lot of hospitals and we are planning to build more, but I would give you just three examples: my niece needed an X-ray, so she went to the Port of Spain General Hospital and the only X-ray machine was broken and could not be used, so she had to spend \$200 for an X-ray in a private institution.

In another case, I was told that one had to go and buy needles at the pharmacy in order to get a biopsy done at the Port of Spain General Hospital. What I considered to be a classical case that I have come to see over time was at a particular clinic where a heart patient—first of all you had to pay heavily through your credit card to even enter before you were seen—had to pay \$50,000 for the lease of health equipment; \$36,000 for the surgeon; \$3,000 for his assistant and the rest went to the clinic. But what we discovered after? When we arrived there we were told that you had to bring soap; you had to bring rag; you had to bring everything for that person. notwithstanding the cost, there seems to be some need for control over medical care facilities.

I therefore want to call for—I think the newspaper referred to it some time ago—an ombudsman for health care, so that we can have prices, treatment, and everything else under control. While the Port of Spain General Hospital is being geared to handle the health care, as it should be, I am also calling for an effective national health insurance scheme.

On the question of the FTAA, the hon. Minister gave us a long, very informative and impressive account of what the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is now doing. I was very impressed with the account and I thank him for his kind words to me yesterday. I ask a number of questions: Where are the facilities for our overall national plan for things like bilingualism? Are we sufficiently bilingual? I would give one simple example. Five years ago, when the Government had thought of the idea of running my candidate for the Secretary

General of the Organization of American States, (OAS), the Prime Minister was kind enough to allow me to use one of his secretaries to prepare a note for Cabinet, and while I dictated the note and discussed countries, the secretary asked me where we should go, and what kind of mission we should mount. I said, Uruguay. And she said, “Could you spell that for me?”

So, Madam President, we have to be a little more open, a little clearer, a little more developed in terms of our neighbours to be able to appreciate a market of 800 million people that is coming on stream. If we are not prepared for that, then we need to start preparing for that now. We are talking about 2005, are we sufficiently bilingual? Do we have facilities for international conferences? Do I see this anywhere in the budget? Communication, information in preparation for 2005?

Some years ago, a Prime Minister of this country—probably for more selfish than other reasons—decided to establish something called the International Marketing Organization (IMO), which was to run in conjunction with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It died three or four years after it was established. The Minister of Foreign Affairs would be more *au courant* with that than I am. Governments can move only as fast as their countries permit. My question is: Are we ready to revisit this proposal? Can the foreign service, in its capacity, handle the volume of trade, the volume of accessing markets that will take place beginning 2005, whether you get the secretariat or not? Can you handle it now? Twenty of those countries speak Spanish. Where are we in all of this?

I therefore feel that we should move more aggressively—and I am calling for an academy of national language teaching. We need to have an academy probably in Port of Spain, San Fernando and Tobago. The Prime Minister spoke of a small academy—I believe it was Cedros when he was there at the meeting—and I think that it should be expanded. I think it should embrace not just fishermen, but businessmen, taxi drivers, teachers and people. There are some programmes that I saw in Atlanta where it moved from the nursery level to the “man in the street” and almost everyone was speaking English and Spanish. I feel that we should do that and move very quickly to a national academy. I think if we do that we will solve a number of issues. We will start looking at being able to interchange, being able to exchange views and also being able to communicate.

Take the question of Ispat; Ispat produces ingots very cheaply in Trinidad. Ispat sends a large amount of its ingots to their office in Indonesia; to their office in Mexico; and they recently opened an office in Ireland. What does that say? Mexico covers NAFTA and the entire FTAA, whereas Indonesia covers the entire

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Asian States; and Ireland covers all of Eastern and Western Europe and their economy. So while we continue to get ingots, by what is called transfer of prices, Ispat is having these things processed in their business centres abroad, and to be resold abroad, as well as in Trinidad and Tobago. Where are we in all this? This is what we referred to as the globalization of trade. Where is Trinidad and Tobago in all of this? Is there somewhere we can manage to shift the influence and the operations?

Many years ago in the United Nations one of our colleagues suggested indexation of prices. Indexation of prices was supposed to work on the assumption that you can take as much cocoa as you want from Trinidad and Tobago but when it is processed and sold we get a percentage of the net profit; it did not prosper. Today I ask: What can we do to ensure that this transfer of pricing that is taking place now at Ispat can be changed in such a way that we in Trinidad and Tobago can benefit more? In other words, this is not exactly the offshore/onshore, but it is a structural change in the relationship with the global economy. When I talk about developing, it is this structural change in that relationship, to which I refer

Finally, let me also say that we might go one step further in being a caring Government. I also made the point last year that I believe we could become bilingual in one generation if we took it right. On the question of caring, I raised the point last year that perhaps we should move—while we look at these several social programmes—to what we call institutional de-linking periodic increases in NIS, in old age pension—I detest the term “old age pension”. I asked that it be changed last year. I do not know what is the statutory reason to keep the term “old age pension”; it can be called “senior citizens’ pension” or something like that. We keep saying, “old age pension”. It is even heavier than the amount we give to the people when we say “old age pension”; it sounds heavy and then they are given \$750 to \$1,000. So I hope we could change that term. However, could we de-link it altogether, and have a system where institutionally all pensions are adjusted to move with the cost of living as a number of enlightened institutions now do? So that one does not have to wait for the benevolence of Government every five years to move a pension from one level to the other. It can be automatic every three years on the basis of some kind of adjustment with the pensions.

In that respect, I look forward to that Pension Reform Bill that the Ministry of Finance is putting forward. I want to finally end—and I am glad the hon. Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation is back—by saying that I will wait with much eagerness for the reform of the prisons, even if it means that I have to

comment on it blindly. I do not mean that literally, but I have not been given the opportunity to visit the prisons, and I do not know whether I will ever be given that opportunity as an Independent Senator. But if I do or do not, I will certainly wait anxiously for that Bill because I think it is tremendously overdue.

Thank you very much, Madam President.

**The Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education (Sen. The Hon. Danny Montano):** Madam President, I rise to make a very brief intervention into the debate for the 2003/2004 annual budget. Before I go very far one of the things I would like to comment on is the very special dress of the lady Senators that we have here this evening. [*Desk thumping*] At the risk of being somewhat chauvinistic, I would really like to compliment all of my colleagues who have dressed so elegantly and stylishly in the traditional dress. They have certainly set a very shining example for the rest of us.

This debate started off quite calmly and serenely in keeping with the season, but as soon as the debate moved to the Opposition Benches it quickly deteriorated. You know, Madam President, this is the honourable Senate of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. This is not the other place; this is not Woodford Square; this is not Balisier House; this is not Rienzi Complex; this is the honourable Senate of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, and I would like to think that our behaviour and our language ought to be in the highest parliamentary traditions. Sadly, matters quickly deteriorated. And I would like to say that we should all watch our language; we can make errors, but I think we need to set an example for those who follow us. There are some very young persons who are listening to what we say, and looking at how we act. My friend, Sen. Seepersad-Bachan, spoke about leadership, and we are, by the very definition, part of the leadership of our society and we must lead with responsibility and act responsibly. [*Desk thumping*]

I listened to Sen. Wade Mark make his contribution and some of the statements sounded hysterical; they sounded rather pathetic in the context of what has happened to his party and the resurgence and continued rising strength of the Government. Quite frankly, nothing that has happened justifies the type of language that was used in his contribution. Nevertheless, to deal with one of the issues that he mentioned concerning the Manning administration establishing hit squad, mongoose gang, Ton Ton Macoute and all sorts of things—it is instructive to see the reaction of a so-called responsible Opposition Senator. He is the Leader of the Opposition Bench in the Senate. He has been in this honourable Senate for many years. He was here before I joined some years ago, and I really wonder

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where he is going with those kinds of inflammatory statements. It accomplishes nothing other than to perhaps mislead and misdirect some of those listening who might not have the judgment and balance to understand what he is trying to do. That is why I say, this is the honourable Senate; this is not Rienzi Complex.

It is always possible for any government of the day to exercise a degree of dictatorial powers. That is always the case under any democratic system. The question is whether we as a people can trust our leaders. And the leaders have a long track record in Government on both sides, and we can all draw some conclusions about the future from their actions of the past and by the things that they say. Therefore, to make statements like: “the Government is going to set up a mongoose gang”, is just sheer nonsense! It brings down the quality of the debate in a place like this, and I wonder though what he is thinking.

On Saturday, I was in a very informal meeting at which a number of business leaders were speaking. I was the only hon. Member that I could identify from the Government and the Opposition. Frighteningly, these leaders were trying to articulate that the Government should set up a hit squad to deal with criminals that can quite be nailed down. Madam President, I do not mind telling you that after I heard several persons articulate this view, eventually it fell to me to respond and I responded that under no circumstances, and by no stretch of the imagination, would this Government ever even think about it, much less talk about it, much less do it! That will never happen under this administration! I said, what is necessary and important is for all of us to use the democratic systems and processes that we have to our mutual and greatest advantage. I also said that we have systems that can work, and we have called for help in the Parliament from the Opposition and they have denied the help that the society as a whole needs, not the Government! The Government exists only for the benefit of the people; the Government does not exist for its own benefit. However, when we asked for the Opposition to share in the responsibility, they said, “No, no, no. It is your problem and, if anything, we are going to make it worse for you.” Madam President, that is a degree of irresponsibility that is just shocking.

#### **6.10 p.m.**

Just to contrast, I remember when I was an Opposition Senator, a junior Opposition Senator, and the then Prime Minister—and, Madam President, it is in the *Hansard*. I read it into the *Hansard* and I objected to the statement then as I do now. The then Prime Minister referred to the then Opposition as “enemies of the State”—not enemies of the government or enemies of the party but as enemies of the State. Madam President, I read it into the *Hansard*. I said, to the best of my

knowledge, I have committed no crime, and whereas the things that I have said may offend the sensibilities of the government and the party that was in government, I cannot see how anything I have said or have done could possibly make me an enemy of the State.

Now, Madam President, those are very, very powerful words when they come from the lips of a Prime Minister. You have heard nothing like that from the present Prime Minister who, by all accounts, is a gentleman, an honest man and a righteous man. [*Desk thumping*] So, Madam President, I would simply remind Members on both sides of really and truly what we are talking about. In terms of this special unit that the hon. Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation plans to establish, just so that it is clearly and simply understood by all Senators, understand this, that we are trying to develop our society, call it what you will.

If you look at the developed countries around us—the United States, Canada, Britain, France, Germany, Spain, any one of them—in the United States to deal with serious criminal offences they have the FBI; in Canada they have the RCMP; in Britain they have Scotland Yard and in France they have the Sûreté. I do not know what it is called in Germany or Spain but the reality is that they have long since established special investigation units to deal with serious crime. That is what is being done here. It is all part of the process of moving this society into being a developed nation; plain and simple.

Now, remember what happened when we brought some people from Scotland Yard who did an investigation of the police service—and I am positive that Sen. Arnim Smith has not read that report because what he is talking about and what he had talked about, these rogue elements and so on, is only the tip of the iceberg. When you understand the nature of the systemic managerial issues inside the police service, you begin to understand the nature of the problem, and, unless you can reform the structure of the police service, you are not going to be able to deal with the issues; plain and simple.

I said so when I was in Opposition. I asked the then government to change the laws to do something about it. They had six years and did absolutely nothing whatever. I stood on the opposite side and read exhaustively from the O'Dowd Report—silence from the government. They “doh” know what to say, they “doh” know what to do, they just left it alone and it was left to the then Leader of the Opposition to ask the then Prime Minister, “Let us try and get this thing sorted out.” Legislation was drafted. They were in government, did nothing about it, they are in Opposition, they do nothing about it and they want to solve crime and they expect anybody to take them seriously about what they say? Madam

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President, they fail to understand their constitutional responsibilities and obligations to the Senate, to the Parliament and to the people.

Sen. Mark went on talking about investors leaving the country and so on. I would ask him—he has left. He always seems to leave when I am speaking. I would ask him: name two. Name two investors who have left and I will name you ten who have come in because, Madam President, all you need do is to ask the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation how many foreigners have applied to come and live here and he will tell you—a long list, a long list. I could give you also a long list of people who are buying all kinds of property all over the country. So he is just talking absolute nonsense.

He talked about the desalination plant and he wanted the Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment to explain the desalination plant. Well, I have done this about three or four times already but I will do it again. WASA was producing water and selling it to the plants in Point Lisas at approximately \$2 a cubic metre. They knew they had an election in 2000 and they wanted to have water for all. They woke up to this fact a bit too late so that they only had a year or so to do this, so they said, “Let us put in a ‘desal’ plant” because they said that the “desal” plant could be put down in one year and a reservoir in the Central Range would have, however, taken two years to build.

So the fastest way to reach the political objective was to put down a desalination plant. The water from the reservoir, spread out over many years, would have cost about \$2 a cubic metre. The water from the “desal” plant now costs \$4.46 a cubic metre. So all that happened was that we got extra water but at a cost we did not need to pay. Groundwater could have been had in the same volumes at less than half the cost because WASA is doing it now. WASA is doing it now at less than half the cost and what they did—so that what we are losing every month, on that deal, is TT \$16 million a month. That is what the cost of that thing is. That is the loss on it. I think that is straightforward at this point.

Madam President, he went on to talk about the benchmark for the price of oil in the calculation in the budgeted revenues and so on and so forth, that we used 25 and—[*Interruption*]

**Sen. Mark:** Who is “he”?

**Sen. The Hon. D. Montano:** Sen. Mark, I was referring to you; you came in late. He referred to Norway as using \$21 a barrel because Norway, he said, has an economy that is similar to ours. Well, it is similar in a way, Madam President, but



let me just give you a bit of information to show you how a little knowledge is a dangerous thing and he does not understand what he is talking about.

The benchmark of \$25 is used for two purposes. One, of course, is to calculate or to estimate what the Government's revenues are, and, in terms of international crude prices, it may translate to the equivalent of \$23 as compared to Norway's \$21. So if you want to compare like with like, it is 23 to 21 not 25 to 21. In any event, the first thing, of course, is then to calculate the Government's revenues. The second thing is that it has an impact on the calculation of the amount of money that goes into the Revenue Stabilization Fund, okay? Norway—that was the comparison that was used by my hon. friend—has a population of four and a half million, okay? So they are about three times the size of our population—a little more than three times—but they have a petroleum fund, like our Revenue Stabilization Fund, that stands at some US \$43 billion for a population of four and a half million.

How did it get there? Well let me just tell you. Their GDP is US \$143 billion. What is ours? Eight, eight and a half billion? Total government revenues in Norway are US \$71.7 billion, which translates to TT \$452 billion for a population of four and a half million. If you bring that down so that the ratio is the same size as ours, 1.3 billion, our revenue—[*Interruption*]

**Madam President:** Senator, will you give way?

#### PROCEDURAL MOTION

**The Minister of Public Administration and Information (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith):** Madam President, I beg to move that the Senate be continued until the completion of the debate on this budget.

*Question put and agreed to.*

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**Madam President:** You may continue, Senator.

**Sen. The Hon. D. Montano:** Thank you, Madam President.

As I was saying, Norway's government revenue—that is not loans, this is government revenue—is \$452 billion. The equivalent revenue for Trinidad and Tobago, if we had their revenues, would be TT \$130 billion. That would be the size of the budget that we would be debating here today and that is the difference between Norway and Trinidad and Tobago. So the point of the matter is, it is in their interest—I spoke to my colleague here, the Minister of Finance, and I said,

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“If we had \$130 billion of revenue, what would you do? What would your benchmark for the price of oil be?” He said about \$15 because everything else would go into the Revenue Stabilization Fund. That is the point. So when you do not understand what you are talking about, you talk nonsense.

Madam President, to move on a bit, Sen. Mary King spoke very briefly—  
[*Interruption*]

**Sen. Mark:** “Yuh finish with me?”

**Sen. The Hon. D. Montano:** For now, for now; [*Laughter*] but you missed a lot of it. I was going to deal with you longer but you left, you know, and my time is going.

Sen. Mary King spoke about the literacy rate and said that 46 per cent of the adult population was functionally illiterate; but, you know, those figures can be a little misleading. I do not want to criticize anybody, certainly not my good friend, the Senator, but ALTA, the Adult Literacy Tutors Association, I think it is called, actually says that only 23 per cent of the population is functionally illiterate but another percentage may have difficulty with reading and so on and so forth. I do not know how they do the measurement and I do not know where the yardstick or the barrier is and I really do not know how these “fellas” do these things, but it is instructive to know this, Madam President.

A very recent survey, just a few months ago, from the National Centre for Education Studies in Washington, DC—this is an American national institution—states, and, let me quote, that 40 per cent or more of the adult labour force performs at the two lowest levels on the literacy scales suggesting that those workers lacked the skills needed to interpret written material at the home or the workplace. That is in the United States. That sounds like what is happening here so, I mean, is that really so? We always think of the United States as being a developed nation but the reality is, however they are measuring it, it seems that the measurement seems to resemble ours rather closely and therefore one has to look again at how they arrive at these numbers.

Now, just to fill you in, we certainly share your concerns—

**Sen. King:** I hope so.

**Sen. The Hon. D. Montano:**—because we have major issues and we are very aware of it and I will get into some of what is going to happen about that—not this evening but on another occasion—but just let me share this with you.

In 1998, the number of students who passed the CXC with a minimum of five O'levels stood at 47 per cent of the persons who wrote. By 2002, last year, that had increased to 55 per cent and for 2003 that has increased to over 70 per cent; so that things are improving. The problem is that we have a huge population outside where we have a problem. We seem to be stemming the tide of the problem of the youngsters who are coming into the system. The problem that I face, that we all face, is we have far too many adults who are already out there who do not have the skills necessary with whom we have got to find something to do, and that is the challenge for my Ministry.

The Senator had gone on to talk about borrowing and increases in borrowing should only have a direct effect on the productive capacity in the country. I would draw your attention to page 21 of the *Review of the Economy* where it indicated very clearly that during the calendar year 2002 the level of productivity for all workers in all industries rose by 11.9 per cent in 2002, up from the 8.2 per cent increase recorded in 2001, and during the first quarter for the year 2003 productivity had expanded by 18 per cent. So that I think that just from the measurements alone we seem to be headed in the right direction.

Sen. Arnim Smith made his usual odd contribution, and, among other things, he said:

“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.”

Then he went on. The point that he was making was that all we had to deal with was crime. Madam President, that is typical of the very, very shortsighted view of the former UNC government. Everything was “now fuh now”. It had to be a “now fuh now” fix. There was no question of planning long-term for the future, and it is clear that he simply does not understand that the people we educate today are the people who will build and develop the society for tomorrow and the people who will not be the criminals of tomorrow and, therefore, everything that is done in terms of culture and education and whatever else, in fact, has a very meaningful and significant impact on the future of the country, and that simple point seems to be lost on the goodly Senator.

However, I am not surprised, you know, because again, Madam President, they seem to speak without any real knowledge of the subject about which they are talking. He spoke about the former Mayor of New York, Rudy Giuliani, and what he did to combat crime and he started to talk and it was very clear from what

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he said and the way he spoke that he had not read Mr. Giuliani's book because that is not what, you know—what he said here is not what Mr. Giuliani said in his book. It was very different, and if you read that you will see that he had an infrastructure and technology that we do not have. We could only begin to aspire to that. He had a level of education within his police service that we do not have. He did not have to “fight up” with the police service regulations with which we have to “fight up”. I mean, when you read it and when you see the tools that he had that we do not have, you begin to understand what the difference is, but it was clear that he was speaking from a level of ignorance and one must not do that, especially in this place. We are here to set an example. You must know what you are talking about.

Madam President, Sen. Dr. McKenzie spoke about the problem of accommodation for Tobago students and she is absolutely right and the Government is very sensitive to that issue. There are at least three initiatives on the drawing board that are going to change that, Senator. The first thing is that at the University of the West Indies new residences are being built. Secondly, there will be a new campus for what is now called COSTAATT, in the St. Joseph area, it would be a very large facility, and there will be dormitories available for students coming from Tobago and thirdly—in fact, there are four initiatives. Thirdly, the entire financing of students going to tertiary institutions is going to be changed but we will talk about that on another occasion and, certainly, built into that will be facilities for students coming from Tobago to study in Trinidad. The fourth initiative that should satisfy you there is that there will be a campus of the University of Trinidad and Tobago in Tobago so the students can go there as well. So that should solve that problem.

Sen. Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan spoke about what Vision 2020 is. Madam President, Vision 2020 was first articulated a number of years ago, at least five or six years ago, at a PNM convention in Chaguaramas, and it was pretty well set out where we were headed. In recent times, as we have come into Government, the specifics of the plan are being designed, but the good Senator knows very well, she is sufficient of a management expert to know that you only go forwards by looking forwards and you set your broad objectives.

Vision 2020 does not need to be defined down to the last nut and bolt, down to the last house that must be built or the last motor car that must be imported or whatever. There are broad objectives and the one thing that differentiates the People's National Movement Government from the former government of the UNC is that ability to vision and to see the future, at least in broad terms, and to

work for it. [*Desk thumping*] The UNC never articulated any such plan other than: “We going to build a ‘desal’ plant and ‘fellas’ goin’ get real rich; we goin’ build a big airport ‘fellas’ goin’ get real rich; [*Laughter*] we goin’ pave every road in de country, man goin’ get real rich.” Those were the objectives—short-term, very immediate and very personal to the individuals involved in it. The People’s National Movement does not work in that way. The Government of this party does not work in that way.

The Senator also began to talk—made some very odd statements and I checked what she said with my colleague sitting next to me and he heard what I heard, and that was that somehow a doubling of the GDP in Malaysia in the same time frame required only 7 per cent for so many years but in Trinidad it needed 10 per cent. I do not know how that arithmetic comes out because the reality is that 7 per cent is 7 per cent no matter where it is and the reality is, to double it in ten years requires only a growth rate of 7 per cent.

Now, again, Madam President, there is an old saying, you know, that my grandfather passed on to my father and it was very simple: you shoot for the stars and if you hit the top of the lamppost you have done well. You go for it. You set your target, you set your objective and you go for it. If you do not set an objective, you will never get anywhere, that is for sure, and that is what happened to the UNC. Then she asked a question, in fact a very good question: how do we create a competitive advantage for Trinidad and Tobago? Well, I know she has been here for the last three days but I know she has not been listening because if you listened to what has been articulated you would have heard how we are going to get there.

The other thing she talked about too was processing Venezuelan gas, you know, that we were not going to get rich by processing Venezuelan gas. Madam President, Trinidad and Tobago shares certain gas fields with the Venezuelans. Now, a gas is a gas. It is like the air in this room. If this room was half in Venezuela and half in Trinidad, and you had a pipe in here pulling the gas out of this side, you would pull gas from that side as well. So how do you separate it?

The only way to do it is to come to some logical arrangement with the owners of the gas on that side and say, “This is what we will do.” That is all it is. It is not rocket science. It is real simple arithmetic, and the reality is that there will be processing fees paid in Trinidad, the companies that process that gas will make a profit on the processing and the profits will be taxed in Trinidad and Tobago and the tax will come into the Government’s revenues. Now what, pray tell, is wrong with that? What could be wrong with that? If we can come to agreement with the

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Venezuelans—and we likely will, because this Government is well experienced in foreign affairs, unlike the last government—then we can do it. [*Desk thumping*] What they are saying is they could not do it, they did not even know how to begin to address the problem but we will solve it and we will all be better off for it. That is governance. That is why we are here. That is why the people voted for us and said, “You do it because they cannot do it.”

**Sen. Seepersad-Bachan:** Senator, please, just for clarification, and if I am wrong I am wrong. What I was speaking about, and probably you could tell me, is whether or not you are going to use the Venezuelan gas for projects in Trinidad, not for processing for LNG, which is what you are alluding to. Are we going to use it in our petrochemical industries? Is that the intention of the Government?

**Sen. The Hon. D. Montano:** Nobody could answer that at this point. [*Laughter*] Nobody could answer that. All you are doing is asking questions. You are not making a statement. [*Interruption*] But you are making a statement as if you are asking a question. It does not make any sense. [*Interruption*] You are not making any sense. [*Interruption*]

Madam President, let me just talk very briefly about the landscape of tertiary education. [*Interruption*] Now you understand. [*Laughter*] Now you understand. I am very happy that you understand. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*] I am so happy. [*Laughter*] I have gotten somewhere tonight. [*Laughter*] I am so pleased that you understand finally.

Madam President, let me talk very briefly about the landscape of tertiary education. When I came into this Ministry a year ago, the situation looked something like this. We had about 20,000 students coming out of secondary school every year and the question was, well, where do they go? What happens with them? At that point, in September 2002, the University of the West Indies took in about 1,800 students. They had given offers to 2,700 students and I understand that something like 5,000 students had then applied for places in UWI. So in 2002, 2,700 offers were made to come into first year and 1,800 took up those offers. At that point, the student population of UWI then swelled to about 8,700 students.

Well, we had several meetings and discussions with the university. I met with my counterparts from the other Caricom islands and we spoke with the university and we suggested to them that they needed to expand what they were doing, that the levels of intake, they were not meeting the social mandates of the member countries. I am very happy to say, Madam President, that working with the

principal of the university at the St. Augustine campus, who understood what my problem was, he agreed that he would do his best to increase the intake, and he has done so. In this year—but only at the request of the Government. It did not happen by itself. The same request could have been made by the previous administration. It was not made. It was made by this administration and they simply responded. We just had to ask and they responded.

**6.40 p.m.**

This year, they have taken in 3,300 students and the enrolment at UWI is now just over 11,000. That is where we have taken it. Just to give a little background. We still have 20,000 students coming out. Of the 3,300 that actually got places, they had some 7,000 applications. So there is a tremendous backlog of students who are trying to go to university and for which there are no places. Hence very simply, there is need for another university. The principal at St. Augustine says the maximum number of students he can accommodate in the facility that he has there is approximately 12,000, so he is almost there.

**Sen. Seetahal:** Could I ask, please, the Senator to clarify for me how many of those are from Trinidad and Tobago, bearing in mind it is a regional institution? Because you are talking numbers but I am not sure if those 3,000 are all Trinidad and Tobago people.

**Sen. The Hon. D. Montano:** Most of them are, but I do not have that information. We tried to get all of the information from the university, but because it is so close to the beginning of the year and to get all of that data, we just did not have enough time to add it all up. They did not have it, so we would have had to sit down and add it up manually. We just did not have that time.

By far and away, most of them come from Trinidad and Tobago, but the fact of the matter is there have been increases. Now we cannot be so selfish as to say we only want increases from Trinidad and Tobago. The reality is, we know that the small islands are an integral part of our economy and, therefore, whatever is good for us is good for them, therefore, they must share in that as well, and they have. So, hence the reason and some of the justification for another university. In fact, the international—

**Sen. Mark:** May I ask on a point of clarification. May I ask my honourable colleague whether he is aware of the crisis of accommodation at UWI? It is total madness, so I wanted you to tell us, the classrooms are overfilled. I just want you to clarify that for us, if you are aware.

**Sen. The Hon. D. Montano:** Madam President, I am not unaware of the problems, but I am also very aware of what happens in some of the more developed countries where the same principles apply, and where states use the resources that they have to the greatest level that they can. The University of the West Indies is not now the only national university or premier institution that is now chock-a-block full. It is not the only place.

When I went to school in Canada, some of the premier schools were the same way because they also knew that they had a social mandate to fill. That is just the way life is. The fact of the matter is, the students there know that they have a place, they have an opportunity for a good education and they have a future. Thank heavens that we asked the university to give them that and they have the opportunity. I apologize that it is a bit uncomfortable. We will make it better in time, but they have the opportunity. That is the main point.

**Sen. Mark:** That is what we did when we said education for all—secondary education for all—and they attacked us!

**Sen. The Hon. D. Montano:** The point I am making is that of the 20,000 students that we have coming out of the secondary school system, we still only have 3,000 or so going into the University of the West Indies. What happens to everybody else? That is only a bare 15 or 16 per cent of the student population coming out of secondary schools. What happens with everybody else? We will start a new university.

What is now called COSTAATT has a major role to play in the future of tertiary education, as well, Madam President. It will be part of the new university. It will be put into the university as a college of the university. They will fall under the umbrella, and the degrees and certificates that are awarded will be awarded by the university, but the college of whatever it is. The name may very well change at some point in the future, but again, COSTAATT also has been a success story. The number of students who are enrolled in associate degree programmes has increased from 2,000 to 3,000 come January of this year. A 50 per cent increase in this year simply because there was the political will to do so, and it will go way beyond that. The intention is to take that to about 10,000 within the space of the next five years.

Madam President, I am just going to try to wind up very quickly now. One of the issues that still tends to haunt us is the issue of vocational training. We do recognize that it has a very serious part to play in the education of students. The Ministry of Education will be doing its part in Form V and Form VI, but we still



need to do much more than that because there is already a huge pool of students outside the secondary school system that we need to do something with. That road map has not been completely settled and therefore, I cannot really tell what the plans are at this point, although there are some very definite plans, but we will talk about that on another occasion.

I can say to you, Madam President, that I am very pleased to say that Cabinet has, in fact, approved some draft legislation that will establish an accreditation council. The legislation will be sent to the Attorney General's office.

**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. R. Montano*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Sen. The Hon. D. Montano:** Thank you very much fellow Senators, especially to my older brother. [*Laughter*] As I was saying, the draft legislation will be sent to the Attorney General's office for review and finalization before it is brought into the Parliament and I hope that it will be brought within the next few weeks.

This accreditation council will be an independent unit from the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, and will have a very significant role to play in developing a seamless system of education so that schools can articulate their programmes from one into the next, into the next, and that credits can be transferred from one school to another, one programme into another, and that sort of thing. Of course, there are issues of the regulation of many of the foreign programmes that are coming in. There is the issue of the regulation of many of the privately-owned institutions that are operating and they will be given that responsibility as well.

I do not need to get into that now because we will be dealing with that in detail very, very shortly. In terms of funding, I did mention a bit earlier that very shortly we will probably be bringing legislation—it may take a little while—that will change the landscape of funding students for tertiary education. It is planned that all students going to all tertiary institutions, including private ones, will be able to benefit from the grant loan fund schemes that will be arranged.

**Sen. Mark:** My hon. friend, can I ask for clarification, Madam President, through you, I know the Senator is developing to be one of the decent persons on that side. I want to ask him, because I know it falls under his portfolio, but I think

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it is important for the hon. Minister to clear the air on what this section of the social and economic policy framework matrix, under human capital development that is going to be carried out by the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTAATT), I would like him to tell us whether it is a typographical error.

It says, Madam President, through you to the hon. Minister, under principal strategies and measures, to establish targeted recruitment programmes for male Trinidadians aged 17 to 24, especially Afro-Trinidadian males. I would like to know if this is a typographical error, or if this is a deliberate policy to discriminate actively by the PNM, and you are the person whom I believe is best placed to clarify this point. Is this a Cudjoe quota system?

**Sen. The Hon. D. Montano:** Madam President, the Senator reads quite well. [*Laughter*] I do not know what it is he did not understand. It is very clear. It says exactly what it is. If he wants to know why, it is very simple. That is where we have a major social problem. We must address the social problem very specifically. It is not any form of affirmative action. It is a social action to deal with a social problem. End of story. There is nothing mysterious about it. Any segment of the society that needs special attention by this Government will get it. It is as simple as that. There is nothing strange or sinister to it at all.

Madam President, I think I had finished what I was saying about funding. I just wanted to say one other thing, and that is, over the next year or two, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education will be changing the way that we look at tertiary education. Up until now, both ministries have been reactive and reacting to the demands of the marketplace, the demands of the social sector, the demands of students and the demands of parents. Both ministries are working very closely together to look at what is going to happen into the future, and what is beginning to happen is that we are trying to define what the economy is going to look like, five to 25 years from now to meet the demands.

In that regard, I have already commissioned the National Training Agency (NTA) to initiate a study of all third, fourth, fifth and sixth form students in the secondary school system to get them on to a database to find out where they are, who they are, what their interests are, what they expect from the educational system, both the secondary and the tertiary educational system and what it is they think they want to do for themselves in the future.

Now we recognize that a Form III student will probably change his mind as to what he can reasonably expect that he will do when he graduates from high

school, or whatever, and hence the reason that we need to track everybody from Form III coming forward. But we need to know that we have the plant and capability in place so that we can absorb all the students to be able to give them the type of education that they are looking for.

The other thing that we are doing, and it is being started as a pilot project, I have asked the NTA to build on a recent study that they have done in Point Fortin and to try to take the information that they have in terms of the level of employment, the types of businesses, the numbers of businesses, the people who are employed, and they say, "Well, if this is what the economy in Point Fortin looks like today, if we do certain things and, of course, what things should we do, what can this economy look like in five years, what can we do? How can we see that economy with intellect so that it can develop itself into something else? How can we reengineer that economy by developing the intellectual capabilities of students living in Point Fortin?"

We are starting now to look towards the future to define the future and then build the capacity to meet what has to happen for the future so that it becomes not reactive, it becomes proactive. That is a major shift. It may sound very small but, in fact, it is going to be a major task. It is going to take a lot of effort to try and get it right, to try and fine-tune all of the information so that we can plan effectively for the future.

Madam President, I certainly spoke for a lot longer than I intended. I thank you for your indulgence and I would certainly like to take my seat, but before I do that, I would like to wish everybody a happy Divali and a safe weekend.

Thank you very much.

**Sen. Brother Noble Khan:** Thank you, Madam President, for allowing me these few moments to share on what I think all will agree with me is one of the major yearly activities as far as the parliamentary agenda is concerned. That is on this, our national budget for this year, October 01, 2003 to September 30, 2004.

Allow me, Madam President, to extend my congratulations and appreciation to the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the Ministers in the Ministry of Finance, that is Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill and Sen. The Hon. Christine Sahadeo, their staff in the Ministry of Finance, especially the budget division, all the Cabinet Members and their staff, and by extension, all who have worked on these documents.

This is the second budget of the Eighth Parliament and some experience would have been gained from the previous budget exercise and its

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implementation. It is hoped that the learning exercises would inform this and subsequent budgets, due cognizance being taken of changes which take place.

Changes, as we know, have a permanent content. It should also be noted that change is critical in all that we do and to have command, that is control over change, is most desirable. As we know, the Parliament is an important link in the change process. One could think in terms of change and the need for taking charge of that change as far as one's own affairs, and this is applicable to a government, a Parliament, a people, a nation and an individual and would have implications for not only correct ideas but of life's behaviour, conduct itself.

Success is what we hope to achieve and success is having true faith. From faith one starts to inculcate some knowledge influenced by wisdom which should go into practice. One needs to have firm resolve and determination to righteous conduct.

I quote from our holy scripture, and I think this might be applicable and encapsulates some of the thoughts in order to save time. I quote:

“When the earth is shaken with her final earthquake and earth yields up her burdens, and man sayeth, “What aileth her?” That day she will relate her chronicles because thy lord inspireth her. That day mankind will issue forth as scattered groups to be shown their deeds. And whoever doeth one iota of good or an autumn's weight of good will see it, and whosoever doeth any ill or an autumn's weight of ill will see it.”

Accountability, responsibility, transparency, control, efficiency and effectiveness are all implied, and this should be influenced by faith-based values on which we could look towards our Constitution for some guidance. This has been included not only in our Independence Constitution, but it also continued to remain in our Republican Constitution. Perhaps it might be instructive to regularly look at what has been referred to as the preamble to our Constitution. I give a quote here:

“Whereas the People of Trinidad and Tobago—

- (a) have affirmed that the Nation of Trinidad and Tobago is founded upon principles that acknowledge the supremacy of God, faith in fundamental human rights and freedoms...”

Then I go down to (d):

- “(d) recognize that men and institutions remain free only when freedom is founded upon respect for moral and spiritual values and the rule of law;”

These I have brought into the mix so it would just refresh our memories.

What I would like to stress again is need for genuine collaboration, cooperation and partnership as they seek to pursue a path of betterment through the establishment of a harmonious society. One of peace, for growth and development in the common parlance as we know it and have heard so much of here today, of developing the potential of everyone during pre-birth, birth, babyhood, childhood, adolescence, adulthood and beyond.

We could possibly get into the meat of the matter by wise and judicious use of all our resources, natural, God-given, and our capital stock built over time, and this includes that permanent input: our people.

Much has been said over the past two days and in the other place, but one gets the feeling that if there has been any change for the betterment from the last budget to now, this has only been marginal, and there are claims of slippages too in certain areas. Nevertheless, I too have hoped, like our distinguished colleague, Sen. Dr. McKenzie, a true patriot and symbol of inspiration, who indicated in her contribution of having hope. I too have hope. The hope I speak of is not a resignation or fatalistic demotivator, but of a belief in ourselves, and I allude to what I have previously said of faith and of change.

I would like to make reference to a quote from an anonymous person who as a young boy I came in contact with and still it remains with me particularly when alone with the Alone. I share it:

“You are this world's sole truth. All else illusions such as sorceries breed. The desert thorn prick many a feet. Do not complain if their feet bleed.”

These are important words to myself and they have guided me for quite some time. Also, there are elements of reliance and sufficiency which are important; Concepts on which inner strengths are built. The reliance I speak on is the reliance on our creator; the sufficiency is sufficiency in him. You cannot progress if you do what you have to do. This is important.

I have raised certain factors away from the traditional approach to budget discussions and what normally obtains. That is the usual matrix of input, activity, output in which we have parameters such as sustainable development. We have heard quite a bit of these elements which I will quickly run over: people-centred development; government in a democracy—democratization of the society; integrated planning; prioritizing of resource allocation; debt management; revenue raising; managing the economy financially from the financial aspects, implementation and monitoring; future budget linkages in development planning,

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particularly with Vision 2020 and its sustenance; diversity of the economy from plantation to sustainable; a redefinition of economic development, from industrialization to knowledge-based.

I do not want it to be felt that I think these areas are unimportant, even from what I have said before. They are integral. We must consider these things, but what I feel is needed, why I have mentioned them before, is to bring into place certain elements which have been around with us even as our Constitution and pre-Constitution, and to think that these are important elements which should definitely form part of all that we do. As the budget exercise is a most important one, it might be a good place to refresh ourselves in these areas.

Over time we have definitely built up some stock. We are not at base ground or below base ground. We have from our past initiatives been able to develop some skills, conceptual as far as our people are concerned, technical, human relation skills, and so forth. Regretfully, these are not as much as we would like to have, so there is need for building along these areas. But importantly too is the infusing of moralities, spirituality and God awareness into the matrix, and those cannot be ignored.

Some of us may say that it is there, but the balance is in need of adjustment. A recognition of this imbalance is one thing, and I think that recognition is positive. But as in so many other areas, the question of reinforcing these necessities and implementing them in our lives seems to be highly elusive, but they are indispensable.

There is need to bring them into being. The need for what our young have identified and have caused us to have these expressions shared, forming part of our make-up, and there are negatives. The lack of soul, the lack of feeling, the lack of love, the lack of respect and a predominance of fear, of injustice and expansive threats of peace. When I speak of peace here, I speak of peace within the self and peace in our society.

Within the question of the budget, I know much has been touched on here: poverty, a bedrock for disquiet. We have heard it said that it is about 20 to 30 per cent. I reserve on the question of statistics after hearing from here, there and over there, but where are our statistics, the question of reliability? This is a basic tool in any planning exercise. Where is it? We definitely have to get serious. This is an elementary tool. It is like trying to write without a pen, if we do not have proper statistics. Since I have been small, we have been hearing this. Today I am about ready to exit and the system still exists. Where are the proper statistics? We definitely have to get serious.

This has implications for our Vision 2020, which I think so much hangs upon for the future of our nation. So, if we could take just this element as an elementary input into the matrix, one wonders what will take place up the line. We have heard some very brilliant inputs. I would particularly like to make reference to what our Minister of Public Administration and Information said on the hopes and aspirations which he hoped to bring into place as far as making our society and particularly the implementation agencies, the public service, responsive. One could surmise from an elementary look, from a very simple mind like myself, that if the planning process is not done properly, and even before that, the conceptualization, if we do not have it right, what will be the outcome?

**7.10 p.m.**

Madam President, it is all well and good to think in terms of coming to the Parliament or elsewhere and creating something, but having it right is most important; support is also much more important. It is for this reason that I have always stressed and you would hear me talking continually about the question of collaboration and participation, elements that bring us together.

I have touched on poverty, and much has been said on it. I mentioned it in the last budget, and my submissions to the hon. Minister have stressed the point. This budget follows in the tradition of the last one, and one could understand that; it is highly social in input and addresses certain questions. In fairness, one would expect that what was done in one frame would flow into the next, and the time frame to see the output or the desirables is pretty short, so there is need to give that feeling of fair play to see what is coming. I must say that over the period last year to this year there has been a strengthening, at least, a confidence, coming from the preparers of the budget.

We have heard much about health. There has been some increase, as far as services are concerned, and as far as meeting the needs of the less fortunate, those at the lower end, to whom all of us, and the nation, have a true commitment.

Madam President, there is the question of injustice. I speak here of injustice against the judicial system, which is one of the chief agencies. In my humble view, I do not know if that, in itself, does deliver justice, particularly to our poor. I might be on sensitive ground here, but when one thinks in terms of cost and agencies that the State has put in place, not being functional, one wonders if there is any seriousness when we speak, on a platform or elsewhere, of bringing justice to our people, especially with regard to the poor.

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It is important to note that despite our pious platitudes and what we may even do, there is, historically, a big gap between the rulers or those who profess to serve, and the servees, so to speak, those who receive the service of trust. I do not think that the mistrust has been vitiated as yet. When these things continue to flow, our desire of building a better society by squaring with our people or by extending out has a big question mark over it. We feel, possibly, that the negatives are being reinforced. We are free, but things are getting worse. We could look at it from that angle. I am not blaming anyone for that; I am giving an overview as I see it. I have confidence that those committed to serve are genuine and will definitely be making efforts so to do.

With respect to the utilities, we have heard about the question of water. If I may dare say, I can bring a personal experience into the discussion. I live on a hill. I form part of the Laventille brigade, so to speak. I was born and grew up in the East Dry River area, and I still live in Laventille. When I first went to live there I got water, but we do not get it any longer. This morning, even my wife had to go and “take her thing and come by the pipe and wash it and all that”, and she is an old person, but we will make out, inshallah, as we say, God willing. That was just one example, and I only used it to show what takes place in areas other than the more salubrious ones or the less fortunate. I suspect that if you take it in ratios or percentages, this obtains, not only in Laventille or the back of Felicity or where have you, but throughout the nation, so the question of priority could be asked here.

Madam President, concerning the question of electricity, I do not know what is the reason, but within recent times there has been a number of outages. Transport: Forming a solution for that seems to be elusive as well. I am speaking here about mass transport. Labour: I am not only speaking about the division that exists in the structure of labour, as such, but about the high unemployment rate. I know on the books and what have you, they tell you that there are very many economies that run together, but between the poverty rates of 20 to 30 per cent of our population, I do not know how many different structures you can have.

Madam President, in the Caroni area you can expect more of that taking place. Our feedback in that area is not pleasant. Come January the position will be very difficult; the question of the high incidence of alcoholism and splash spending, so to speak. I mentioned January, because of the question of no work to fill that hole. It will flow over again and, I guess, those at the lower end, not at the national level, as such, but within the whole structure of our people, our womenfolk and children, will be then under some form of stress. This is a situation that should be



closely monitored by all ministries, particularly, the ministry responsible for social services. Very brilliant suggestions came from the ministry responsible for social development, and I would think that they are pretty well on line in meeting them, at least, at the planning stage. With all these things, implementation is a big question mark. As to the question of meeting the challenges of Caroni, we could expect the negatives would be significant.

**Madam President:** Sen. Bro. Khan, the Hansard reporters have asked that you either keep your head up or speak a little louder; they are having difficulty in getting the last words.

**Sen. Bro. N. Khan:** Thank you, Madam President.

I made mention of the situation within the Caroni area, what flowed off with its closing down and the social negatives that are impending or continuing to build. My suggestion is that all the ministries that have an interest in this area should definitely get into action to see what they could do to ameliorate the negative consequences that have started to pop up in this area. One suggestion is, particularly, the government-sponsored agencies should definitely take an active part in meeting those challenges. I think that those who are least able to defend themselves, our womenfolk and children, will be at the wrong end of receiving those negatives. There is a high rate of alcoholism, abuse and wild spending; these are just some things that pop up within the society, in recent times, through the closing down of Caroni and so forth. I brought this up because I was dealing with the area of labour.

With respect to crime, the spiralling continues to be upward, as alleged with the percentages and what have you. There is a general cry all over the place; I do not know if it is inside of here as well. All these elements of crime did not just happen as though you went home and switched on your television or radio, but these are the products over time. I am sure all of us agree that solutions to them will not be quickly reached. I will, again, like to bring an analogy. I will use the Laventille situation or even the central situation: Let us say a flood takes place and all the water reaches down on the lower end, it is not because of the water at the lower end, but because of the reasons higher up: poor drainage and planning, the practices of the residents and what have you. So to blame one person or to seek the head of one person, one wonders if that would solve the situation.

There have been some advances in addressing the question of crime, and I take it that what is in the budget is pretty short-term. I, myself, loathe when I see army personnel properly attired and armed and a police officer in like arms and

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dressed in the same way, only that the word “police” is written on him, as against our regular police who direct the traffic in a civil way. It might be in my mind, but very often you see an element of insolence or intimidation that come from these officers when they are attired in this way. One wonders if that is the way we should really go, if our country has reached the need for such action; I do not think so.

Madam President, it has always been my feeling that the army, particularly, and our protective services should be there to protect our nation from outside; I think that was the original concept of armies. To use it inwardly on our people, I do not think that is the path at all to go, definitely not. I do not know how the army feels about that. I would think that they, too, would be suspicious of that, because they are not trained that way. If it is a civil function, let civil society and the instruments of the State deal with it in a civil way; this is my feeling, and I feel strongly about that. If this continues, you will be opening up a can of worms, and when it bursts out I do not think that you will be able to handle it.

Madam President, many of us are just passing through, so I think we should have a second look at this way of addressing crime. I agree that it is complex and there are many inputs into it, but just asking for the removal of A, B, C, L, or H, will not help. There has been some plan; I would think that the entire Cabinet has some say into it so we could, possibly, address it in that way. Time is not in our favour, as far as these are concerned, but, again, it has been around for quite some time.

Regarding the question of housing, a great backlog exists, and some attempts have been made to assuage this backlog; the question of hope will arise. I would share some words on the youths: Last year was declared the “Year of the Youth” and, as far as I could recall, the ministry responsible for youth had its budget cut. We have heard some very nice statements made by the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, but I definitely felt heartened when Sen. Hackshaw-Marslin shared her concept of the youths. I feel that there is some hope for our youths. Thank you, Senator, for those thoughts; let us hope that they get off the ground.

The spectre of legalizing abortion is haunting us. I will inform this Senate and the nation at large that this will be resisted, strongly. Any attempts to make our defenceless women and, very often, our nation, pay for our sin of damnation, will be resisted. Those who worse than least are able to defend themselves are the targets; if we are to view ourselves as a civilized nation, I think it is our function and duty to protect them and create the definite environment of caring for our women and our young girls, particularly, when they are in what is referred to in the literature as “crisis pregnancies”.

Let me reiterate: We will oppose any attempts to do so as not in the interest of our people and as negative as far as society is concerned, and will be counter to what our Constitution stands for; we will resist it. I had also suggested to some of the ministries and the ministers, when we met, that there should be some form of funding to meet the expenses which will have to be incurred and are met at the moment by private homes. When I say private homes I mean within the faith-based sectors that cater for these women and girls until they have their babies and are re-integrated into society.

Perhaps, this is not a service. I wonder if I should use the word “service”? It is a function that is not much publicized, because of the very nature of it, but one would think that if we are a caring society, we should start caring even pre-birth, preconception some would say, in conception while the mother carries the baby. We should care lovingly for that child, and not support any attempt to terminate such pregnancies, as suggested by the legalizing of abortion.

We know that the family is the bedrock of any society, the very basis of any civilization. We should pride ourselves on trying to form a civilization of which, not only we could be proud, but which we could share with the rest of the world. We have heard much about the family. The Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs, the Ministry of Education and what have you are very much concerned about the family. I would think that the attempt to address questions within the family is one that is not easily realizable. With the recognition of these areas of concern, we should definitely attempt to ameliorate or address them. Definitely, the question of how soon will always be with us; the impatience will always be there, because we know that with one loss, one going the wrong way, how hurtful it could be for the family and, by extension, the whole society. Again, I am speaking from the negative end.

Health: HIV/AIDS—we know that a committee has been announced and we hope to address questions about health and HIV/AIDS. When I say we, I am speaking as a person coming from the non-governmental organizations/community-based organizations sector. I will refresh our minds of what I said earlier about the question of collaboration, participation and partnership. I speak here of genuine attempts, not manipulation or use of, because I suspect that our people have been aware of these things for quite some time and they loathe it. This is where some of the mistrust that exists in our societal relationships could have had its origins.

I agree that these are all urgent matters. Coming back to the source of our very existence as a nation, as a people, I speak here of constitutional reform. We know in the last year this came up as a motion, and there has been some recognition of

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the need for it, but the question of instituting the necessities so we could get on with this work still seems to be on the back shelf, as far as urgency is concerned. I strongly urge that we bring it forward. Right now we might be riding on a crest of understanding, hope, expectation, faith in ourselves, what we are capable of, and our God, but if we do not ride the wave now, it means that the negatives will be drawn back into the back swell. I strongly urge that we look at this question of constitutional reform and institute the necessities as early as possible.

In order to get things off the ground, we must have a proper system, and we have heard much talk about that. Possibly, in this area, when you look across this august Senate, there are skills one could identify with; even in our public service and other areas. In the public service, per se, and the state agencies, we have heard of attempts at reform being made over time. I shared some time ago, when these reforms started, my feedback from within the public service. There was a great amount of disquiet and demotivation, insofar as what was done. There was a great input of what was referred to as “people on contract”; I do not think that went down well. So there might be need for a sort of independent look at our public service. I have asked for this before and I will continue asking for it, because this is one area that if we do not have it right, we would not get the deliveries.

Again, there is the question of reform of the parliamentary rules. The world is moving towards more deepening of the processes of involvement and, possibly, the days of Rousseau, Hobbs and all these people—If my memory serves me right, it was Rousseau who said that we exercise democracy on the day we vote, and after that, to use a local parlance, “everything fall down”. That was in the 1970s; one wonders if he were to appear now if that would still be relevant. There is need to have the necessary inputs into the parliamentary system, where we, ourselves, could feel that there is participation, there is genuine involvement.

I have touched before on the question of the evolution of the financial system, and I linked it with the British experience, where we are started with their exchequer and audit audience from which we formed our model. Perhaps, we can look at it again. We have moved further away from that, but much has been learned, discovered and arrived at, as far as techniques, systems and changes are concerned. So there is need, therefore, even as an ongoing process, that after every period of time there could be a continual overlook. This has not been done since 1959. With respect to the financial system and the Parliament rules, I think much has been said about it, but nothing has been done.

Reform of the prison: Again, this is part of the social services, and has been dealt with exhaustively and was mentioned before by myself. I know that the

environment is a very important aspect, because without earth and the natural resources I do not know where we would be. The feedback within recent times has not been pleasant. I am speaking not only in Trinidad and Tobago, but at the global levels. These challenges have been recognized at the global level, and I am sure we in Trinidad and Tobago, partnerships and signatories to many conventions, are strongly urged to speed up our processes.

We must thank the Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment for his contribution. I recall that since the last budget we had asked for some posts in the Forestry Division. I see that after one year he was pleased to tell us that 42 forestry posts had been recreated. We do not know if these 42 posts will take us out of the forestry; I speak of the forestry that we find ourselves in as far as the environment is concerned. It is a step, and we hope that “more better” would come, as we say.

We should remember that nature cannot be ordered around; you must obey her, so to speak. To all nature is law, to her great command we are but frail; I am speaking here about the species. We have to live together with nature to recognize its position in our being. It is not that we are not responsible or that we should not assume that responsibility, but it is important to definitely recognize it. Very often, half of our misery and weakness is derived with not being connected with the soil. If we allow this to continue, if we allow the roots of the earth to rot—I am speaking figuratively—we become detached from the earth, we abandon her, and a man who abandons nature has begun to abandon himself; do not ever forget that.

In our tradition, we always look upon the pure form of connecting with nature, that interconnectivity known as *defitra*. When I asked what it meant, it was said that it was “the natural way”. These might be instructive.

At the macro level, the rationalization of land use is most pressing. I speak here, not only of Trinidad, but Trinidad and Tobago and our little islands around, wherever we have any spot of land; our seas are precious to us and most important for our very existence. Although all of us may be passing through, we have to think in terms of the future: our children and future generations, so there is the question of the development of zoning, national parks, coastal zones movement and management. We have heard much of the agencies under which the State is responsible: the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) and so forth. It is important to have these organizations, but to get them functioning and delivering is a challenge, but if we create them and do not have them functioning, I do not think that we will get very far.

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We have heard about the whole question of quarries, and what have you, and our forests burning. Some of us might recall when I spoke about the ice melting. It bespeaks our forest burning and the ice melting, to those of the north. We heard of the proposed tree-planting project, and we support it. There should be fire control in the dry season; do not wait until it starts to burn. We have heard much about the protection of our flora and fauna, the bio-ecological regions, the coastal areas, control of pollutants, and solid waste.

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

My mind runs on solid waste in Tobago. I remember that somewhere in the 1970s, when I used to be in the budget section in Tobago, the question of the sewage plant came up. I do not know what is taking place now; it has been quite some years since I have been to Tobago. To me there was always a threat coming out of Scarborough, the drift downwards, what would take place in what was referred to as the Lowlands area, where there is a bay. The feedback I get at different times is very depressing, as far as our resources are concerned, our coastal waters. I would like to again urge and support the Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment in his commitment and also in his attempts to address these questions which are urgent.

Education: As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, education is the incubator from which all else relates, and the implementation of the budget proposals are expected to lead to a better life, not only immediately but also long-term. We support these initiatives and are heartened by the proposals aired, and the fact that values are being introduced into the curriculum. I speak here about faith-based commonalities of those values, that have been referred to as positive values. I also stress that we have the assurance that denominational schools will continue to form part of the educational process.

Culture is the next area. On the one hand, as far as our country is concerned and thinking in terms of mobilizing, I would like to humbly offer culture and agriculture as two areas on which we could, definitely, put some concentration. I will explain in a little while. The plantation type economy derived out of gas and oil could be self-sustaining in support of industries that could be naturally attracted to them, and that should be firing the economy. I think some allusion was made by some of the speakers here of using some transferred from what generated here into the other area to help develop and build. I think this is as far as diversity of the economy is concerned.

This has been well mentioned, so I will only be over-stressing what has been said before, that as far as culture and agriculture are concerned, you are dealing

with the mass of the people on the lower end. They are the people who form the very soul of our nation, and there is a commitment towards them, if not for our own survival, to put it in a very crass way. This, in itself, should be fueling our actions in these areas and, particularly, in the area of agriculture, which would, more or less, provide for food security and would be able to help people at the end of a line so, at least, they could have something to eat.

**7.40 p.m.**

In the area of culture, I think the argument for it is well known; I just want to stress the point. I remember in 1976, in Laventille I went to listen to an election meeting. It was fasting month, Rosa month, and the speaker was on the back of a truck—

**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. Dr. E. McKenzie*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Sen. Bro. N. Khan:** Thank you very much. I am almost at the end, but I am thankful for the gracious sharing of these extra minutes. I was speaking on agriculture at the time. It was a whistle-stop meeting, so to speak, and a very prominent person was speaking. He said, "Agriculture, agriculture, what are they talking about agriculture? Who planting?" I do not think he had meant that. The motivation for people planting was not there. I do not know if this is a cultural hurdle we would have to get through but that much time has passed and that we could definitely address these questions of social interaction as far as meeting these challenges. Though there might be challenges and negatives to be overcome, these should definitely act as a way of making us really go at it.

Much has been said about culture and what is understood by it. Indeed, for as many people as you might have there might be a definition of culture. Culture is important, and when we think in terms that every human being, each one of us is unique, there is no one like me and there would never ever be anyone like me. Each one of us could say that to ourselves. We could see our differences but that in itself is a beauty of ourselves. That definition of "self" is most important if we as a people are to continue existing as a people, as a community and developing one's knowledge, one's attitude to life and all that makes us what we are. This recognition would need us to allow for that development of ourselves and would

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allow definitely for pursuing paths of sustainable development. I think someone mentioned the question of sustainable development—pop words I think, are sustainable development.

Of course, our nation would establish norms, bases of justice, fair play and harmony so that all our people would be allowed to share and respect and understanding would become the order of the day. These are important. We must feel a sense of belonging; we must feel that the basis for ourselves rests strongly on justice which we all accept and believe as part of our very make up, our very fabric.

Another area as far as that is concerned that would have overflow into how we relate, not only within ourselves as a people but also in what has been referred to—and it has been touched here, the question of the globalization of the earth; talk of the overview of the United Nations international institutions and so forth. One wonders when they were created if the situation still exists. There is the question of terrorism, and a host of other things, world free trade and all these other aspects which have become common knowledge to us over time.

I might advert here that within recent times the initiatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in these areas have been very creditable and, though we are small specks of dust—I think it was De Gaulle who said this in referring to the Caribbean—we had still been able to make an impact in the world and, therefore, one can definitely continue to do that. There is much that we can show and share with the world. In this globalization effort though there would be attempts made to subsume everything under the transnationals—I think that term has gone out with globalization, but a few companies that run the whole structure and the mighty nations, we know a familiar one from the North. One remembers and it comes to my mind, it might be instructive, the incident in Grenada, when it was said “you cannot be in my backyard and doing things that I do not like.” A few days afterwards there was the invasion that set us way back to what I refer to as before Toussaint L’Overture, as a Caribbean people. These are some of the things which face us.

As a boy I went to Nelson Street Boys School and I was not always tall as I am now. Maybe I do not know the difference, but you would clash with other boys, but there was always a resistance, physical and otherwise. No matter if you were big you would put it up. Sen. Arnim Smith knows about that—as big as you were your finger might stick him in his eyes and when he bawled “oh God,” you knock him down. These are some of the things. Do not mind, as a small nation there are still strengths among us. These are just diversions in meeting this globalization struggle. This is one area as far as globalization is concerned.



I think, too, the question of the arts, while we are on culture, are very important aspects because we are dealing with the creative aspects. The nearest one could come with one's creator is by prayer and some men express prayer in different forms. And this finds itself in the performing arts, the visual, the paintings, the music, the dance, the poetry, song, food and clothing. There is need to support these areas. One gets the impression—you may have heard me say this before that very often like a dog when you take skin off salt fish you throw it out and that is how it is treated, like skin off salt fish or the scales off the salt fish, our approach to the arts. To some extent one gets the impression at least in talk, we hear plenty talk. "Talk cheap", as they say, you come shoot, not talk—solve the problems. Sen. Smith might remind us again, and very graphic is his method, I am picturing that too. So this question of dealing with the arts, give it the respect it deserves because if you are dealing with aspects of creativity and you do not respect it, what else? I know there are people who paint. For the longest while you have been hearing about the museum. There has been some update within recent times with some of the shows and some of the art work that you see. Perhaps this might demonstrate how I feel about it.

Recently I visited America. It is only twice I have been to America. They were pretty recent. I was up there about three weeks ago where I visited two museums and when I had finished visiting those two museums and a Broadway show I had felt satisfied. I looked at the work of El Greco at the Metropolitan Museum and I think it is said the only work by Leonardo Da Vinci in the western hemisphere in a paint gallery in Washington and also works by Picasso. I always said that I would have loved to see a good Broadway show dealing with high performing arts. It was "You're in Town off Broadway" but it looked as a Broadway show: I felt good. I like jazz too but I missed out on going to hear some jazz. Maybe another time. But this feeling towards the arts, I think we should not allow it to deteriorate, particularly among our young, to develop those creativities. I am of the view that definitely Government support is needed and not only Government support, but also the national support and our private agencies and what have you. I also think the work of artists should be purchased as part of our cultural heritage and placed in government buildings, places like the airport and the port. I know we have some here.

Mr. Vice-President, I thank you for allowing me these few moments. Let me quickly recap that I would like to see the elements of spirituality that could be based on our religious traditions, whatever they may be. And when I speak about spirituality I speak about an element of God consciousness which we should allow in our day-to-day affairs and more so in all that we do, in our workplace, wherever we are, this is indispensable and particularly here as we share in this

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budget. I know we are almost at the end of the time and I seek your indulgence to just give a little expression.

Recently we had the departure from our mundane plane of a great soul from our country, Pundit Krishna Maharaj, the Dharmacharya of Trinidad and Tobago. He was attached to one of the biggest Hindu organizations, as we all know, the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha, and I would like to recognize and mention that his contributions to the national welfare of our country, Trinidad and Tobago and beyond were significant. He was a humble, loving, dignified person, a patriot, an icon, a good and loving person, and a friend. We will remember him. May he receive the Mooksha which Bhagwani has promised to those who are his. I would like to say Om Shanti for him. In our tradition we say we are surely God's, and to Him shall we return.

Let me also wish Shubh Divali to all in our nation, in this honourable Senate but especially to our Hindu brothers and sisters and their families on this occasion of Divali 2003.

Soon our Muslim brothers and sisters will be entering into the month of fasting and we wish them success in their endeavours in pleasing God, Almighty and that their devotions be accepted. Following, we would be entering the Advent of the Christian community and the celebration of the birth of Lord Jesus, the Messiah will take place. Not too long ago the Bah'ai' Faith commemorated the birth of the Bhagwans, one of their prophets and also the Orisha community had the rain festival.

These are all areas of high spiritual input and I invoke God's blessing that we share in these and that our nation continues to be blessed and may we go forward in the implementation of this budget which, I think, would lead us to a better Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you.

**Sen. Robin Montano:** Mr. Vice-President, I rise tonight a sadder man than I was at the beginning of this week. I know you would be disappointed to hear that but I am, and I will tell you why.

Mr. Vice-President, I have always prided myself on being a democrat and a liberal. I have also prided myself and continue to pride myself on being a patriot. I have said in this honourable Senate before and I would say it again, it is in the interest of every single citizen that the government of the day succeeds. It is not in our interest that the government of the day should fail but that is what democracy is all about, when governments fail for whatever reason, they are voted out. That is what it is all about. Therefore, although I sit in the Opposition and although I

criticize, I criticize with a view to trying to put right what I see going wrong. This apparently is misunderstood but I will deal with this later. I want to deal tonight with the terrible failure of the Government in this debate.

I listened for the last three days to hon. Minister after hon. Minister talking and boasting about Vision 2020. “You do not understand what Vision 2020 is” they said to us. “Vision 2020, is a glorious thing! Developed nation status by 2020!” Do you know what? That is great. When I listened on the surface to what every single Minister has said over the last three days, I think to myself good grief, I must be living in a different country because I cannot fault or disagree with any of the lofty aims, ambitions, and plans that they have. Who can fault such a thing as developed nation status by 2020? Who can fault education for all, food for all, everything for all, whatever everything might happen to be? Who can fault the beautiful statements that have fallen from the various Ministers’ lips? And yet when I dig below the rhetoric I come up empty-handed. All I have seen is empty rhetoric and Sixth Form debating.

A debate ought to be a give and take; a debate ought to be where you say this, the Opposition says, “what about what you are doing here?” One would expect that the Minister would say yes, you have a point here but you do not have a point there, let me explain to you. Because it is not the Opposition on trial during a budget, it is the Government that is on trial; it is the Government giving an account of its stewardship. So it is the Government to say this is what it has done and this is what it is going to do and this is the standard—and this is my point—by which you can judge us. Which comes back to the point I had made last year in this seat, in this honourable Senate on the last budget debate when I said to the Government, “Hello, if anybody is home, what are your benchmarks?” As I said, the lights are on but nobody seems to be home. What are your benchmarks for Vision 2020?

First of all, I know what I mean by developed country status. What do you mean? I have not heard yet in this Parliament or outside of it a definition in one sentence of what the Government means by developed country status. I have seen no definition. Do you mean, for example—and I am pulling this out of the air because this could be one definition. Let us say that 70 per cent of all school leavers in the year 2020 would be going to university. If that is the case, I am giving a definition for them. I do not know what their definition is. Just using my definition of 70 per cent, how many school leavers go to university?

My understanding is, and it is not important if the figure I give tonight is incorrect, if it is a bit more or less. My understanding is the present figure is

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approximately 7 per cent. Let us, for the sake of argument, use that 7 per cent figure and you are planning to go from 7 to 70 per cent in the space of what is now 17 years. At what stage are you going to hit that? Is it going to be 7 per cent right up until the year 2019 and then all of a sudden in the year 2020, it is going to jump by some magical figure to 70 per cent? Or are you going to plan, for example, by saying by 2007 you are going to have it at 11 per cent—I am using my own benchmarks—and by the year 2010 you would have it, let us say, at 15 per cent, and by the year 2012 it would be at 20 per cent and so forth? But notice how I am going up and notice in using this hypothetical example, that I am applying certain benchmarks and looking at the gap that you are going to have to fill.

I know and my brother, the hon. Senator has said tonight that this plan was hatched by the PNM some five or six years ago. I know that to be true too, but surely five or six years ago they had some idea of what their benchmarks would be and what they would have to do and yet today what we hear continuously is that they are planning it and they are still in the process of planning. Holy cow! What have they been planning for the last five or six years? Are they going to be planning it for the next five or six years? Put another way, what is their standard so that the country as a whole can judge whether they are succeeding or failing? Because if one says this debate is terrible because all the Opposition does is criticize and they do not put forward anything. Look at the wonderful things we are doing. Let us assume for the sake of argument that everything that the Opposition has said is irrelevant, let us assume that none of the points that have been made on this side of the honourable Senate are relevant, okay, fine. You tell me what your benchmarks are for success so that I can judge. I would not criticize you, on my standards anymore. Let me criticize you, if I have to, on your standards.

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

Madam President, last week Tuesday, the day after the budget, I went on Morning Edition with my good friend, Sen. King and my good friend, the Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Hon. Kenneth Valley, and Minister Valley opened the television programme with a lofty statement of ideals and what a great budget this was and so forth. When they came to me I said, “Look, simple question, I am a bottom line man and I want to know from you Ken—because he is my friend, so I called him Ken—is this a good budget on crime?” “Oh yes,” he said it is a great budget for crime. “Okay, that is great, I am glad to hear.” This budget is therefore going to reduce crime.”

“Yes,” he said, on national television. “Okay great,” I said. “What are your benchmarks in time? When can we see crime falling? Let us say what is going to happen in four, eight and 12 months from now?” I know that the year is divided into quarters but I was dividing it into thirds to give more time. I went on to ask him, if he did not like my time constraints, to tell me what his were.

I was not trying to trap him or anything. I was trying to find out how do I judge his failure or his success. What were his standards? Is he going to tell me this time next year they did a great job in crime because there have only been 400 murders and 683 kidnappings and they thought there were going to be 1000 kidnappings? Is that what it is? Of course, my figures are outrageous, I hope, but what are the benchmarks so at least we and everybody else can say you are keeping faith, you are doing what you said you would do and you are in line with what you are promising? I have paid close attention and nowhere have I found anything that I can hook onto so that this time next year I can say congratulations to this minister and to that minister, “Hey you have failed by your standards”. Nowhere in any of the contributions we have heard has there been any kind of benchmark, but we hear Vision 2020.

I agree with the concept. All right-thinking persons must agree with it but “Hello, what are your benchmarks?” How do I know that they have succeeded? It was a simple point that I asked last year. I will say it again and again and again. I have not seen it. I have not seen one benchmark and my friend, the Minister of Public Utilities has not given me any benchmarks. Madam President, the hon. Minister said that is not true. When did the hon. Minister give me the benchmarks?

**Sen. Dumas:** Thirty-three thousand acres of forest to be planted is a marker. What you are asking for is a planning tool. You do not put that in a budget.

**Sen. R. Montano:** Madam President, with the greatest of respect, my friend simply does not understand. Last year my friend, the Minister of Housing said they were going to build 10,000 units a year. I said when that enters the prime ministerial jargon it sounds really good and gets into the public psyche and everybody says, “Gosh, is that not a good thing?” But my information and I do not know the exact number is, that in the last 12 months something like 260 houses have been built. How many have been built and completed in the last 12 months?

**Sen. Joseph:** I told you that by December, some 1,970-plus houses would be completed. I cannot tell you how many have been built but there are more than 200.

**Sen. R. Montano:** Madam President, with the greatest of respect—because I have my friend’s contribution here and I can give it to him if he would give me a moment. What he said exactly is this:

“By December 31, 2003 a total of 1,952 housing units would be completed. An additional 847 units would be delivered by March 2004.”

The last time I counted, 12 months goes from October to the end of September. Twelve months does not go from October to December 31. As I understand it, and again if I am wrong, great. This is the kind of news that I would prefer to be wrong on, but my information is that in the last 12 months 260 units have been completed, more or less. If 1,952 units are definitely going to be completed by December 31, that is good news, but that is a far cry from 10,000. I asked a question last year and I ask it again, if you are going to build 10,000 units a year, you have only got to look at it to see that it is going to create dislocations in the economy.

**8.10 p.m.**

How are you going to deal with those dislocations? There will be dislocations vis-à-vis materials; there will to be dislocations vis-à-vis workmen and everything else. How are you planning for those dislocations? Because the last time this happened in Trinidad and Tobago during the last oil boom, there were massive dislocations in the economy and housing became not less expensive, but more expensive, as workmen and materials dried up.

So are you budgeting for that? And I do not mean budgeting in terms of money now, but budgeting in terms of being able to provide the necessary expertise, the necessary materials and the necessary workforce to be able to do this without dislocating the private economy. Are you doing that? And if so, how? Again, what are your benchmarks? Again, we had none!

So this is why I say I am sad, because instead of dealing with us at a level which we can all sit back and say, “Well, you know, okay, we understand”, we come and we are met with—it is almost an arrogance and almost an invective: “Who do you think you are?”, seems to be the attitude to questions. You have no right to question; you have no right to stand and say anything. Really? I beg to differ.

You know, I listened with sadness to the Attorney General. The Attorney General stands and says that she has not heard any criticisms of the Government by anybody, by any leading businessmen or economists and so on. Well,

everybody knows Lloyd Best, one of our foremost economist commentators. In the *Express Business Magazine* of yesterday, which is when the Attorney General made her contribution, Mr. Best wrote quite a critique. I would not read the whole thing but I would read page 16 of the magazine. Under the rubric: “Time to speak out”, he says:

“The case against Manning is that in the interim he has found it possible not to have learnt any lessons, not even ten years into a revival that started in the middle 1990s. He still has not seized the indispensable necessity of revenue stabilization and the imperative of defining properly and managing it carefully. He can however be forgiven. It seems that no section of the governing, validating or graduate elites has been able to trump him. He can still get away with murder. The Budget documents he presents are replete with formulas, mindless slogans and colourful clichés that no one speaks out against. Doubtless here is the manifestation of the culture left behind by the early national governments. This absolutely scandalous Budget offering is full of goals we can all comfortably subscribe to;...

which is what I have been saying:

“but it has been met by a supine silence on the part of the professionals or by just kicking reactions on the part of the seekers of publicity.

The challenge of change remains essentially unposed. We are yet to be presented with a framework for estimating costs and requirements, for identifying contradictions and conflicts, for setting precise deadlines and for determining who must do what when.”

What I have been saying—benchmarks:

“We’re still at the stage of ‘vision,’ in the bargain blurred. The priority assigned by the Government to equitable distribution and social sector solicitude does contain very valid elements; but it remains essentially fake for want of a management method permissive of a reconciliation of the competing claims of heavy social investment with those of rapid diversification and transformation, expansion and growth at their service. In the precincts of officialdom, the conceptual framework is simply nowhere in sight. Worse, we the educated elites are simply twiddling thumbs. Economy and society in T&T are the very incarnation of drift.”

So, Madam President, where do we go? I listened to the Attorney General and she mentioned nothing in her debate contribution of a report that we got in today's

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papers of the Biche papers going missing from the Biche enquiry, and I could not believe that something like this—[*Interruption*]

**Sen. Morean:** He was not listening.

**Sen. R. Montano:** Well, if you said that the Biche papers had gone missing, I missed it and I confess that. In which case, I withdraw it. But I would say this, and I ask you this: Where were these papers being held? Who had custody of them?

Just for the record, I was a part of that enquiry and during the enquiry—and certainly in the findings of Justice Annetine Sealey—there was no evidence of any criminal behaviour on the part of anybody and Commissioner Sealey has never said so. So what are we reading about? Where is it coming from?

The Attorney General made great show of the criticism she has had on the question of legislative agenda and she says we are about quality not quantity. Well do you know what, Madam President? Let the country decide; let the country look back at her record of the last 12 months and let the country decide what they think about the legislative agenda. Let us see if she does not go to London—and speaking personally, I hope she does not—what she does in the next 12 months. Let us see what kind of legislative agenda she would bring.

But, Madam President, I have to tell you this, that as far as I am concerned, I was most disappointed that in the last 12 months—certainly it appeared to me that the Government did lack a legislative agenda—that what we found ourselves debating very often were minor Bills, amendments that could and should have been brought in a different manner. I remember when we were doing the Summary Courts (Amdt.) Bill, both Sen. Seetahal and I made certain comments. We said: “Why are we doing this in a piecemeal fashion?” It so happened that a few weeks later we had to go over something else.

As for the comments that the Attorney General made on the march that took place in Chaguanas—I think it was about two weeks ago—it was as if Sen. Arnim Smith had never spoken. I received an e-mail this morning from a young attorney who had written this letter last night to the newspapers so, obviously, it was not published today, but I do have it. He says here:

“Dear Editor,

During the TV6 news tonight (that is last night) I was horrified to view an extract of a report of the hon. Attorney General’s contribution to the budget debate in the Senate when she, alluding to the Opposition’s absence at the first



day of the Budget presentation in the lower House, accused the Opposition of, instead of being in another place 'encouraging people to break the law'. That comment by her, was a clear reference to the protest held in Chaguanas on the day of the Budget presentation.

What is dangerous about that comment was here we have a holder of the office of Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago attempting to score cheap political points by using parliamentary privilege to comment on the criminal culpability of persons who were charged on that day with taking part in a protest without permission. The hon. Attorney General has effectively pronounced guilt on those who are now before the courts on those charges. Thereby she may have prejudiced a fair trial of those accused."

This is a letter from a citizen, Madam President. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam President:** I just want to clarify this for my own self. Is it proper that we should be commenting at all on this whole thing, since I ruled against the Attorney General on that day that it was sub judice? I am wondering whether it does not apply here too. The lawyers could let me know here.

**Sen. R. Montano:** Madam President, I will be guided by your ruling. If you are ruling—and I ask for guidance here—that I should not go further with this letter, then I would not, but I would say to you that I am not commenting on the case per se; what this letter is doing is that it is commenting on the Attorney General's comments.

**Sen. Morean:** On a point of order. A ruling was made and that was not part of the record because a ruling was made. So what is the Senator talking about? The ruling was made and I was ruled out of order and I did not continue. It is not that I consider that I was commenting on the merits of anything, which is not what I was doing, but I have to abide by your ruling. I have abided by your ruling and Sen. Montano should also abide by that ruling. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam President:** Yes, because I think we are referring to the same thing here. So please be guided, Senator.

**Sen. R. Montano:** Very well, Madam President. I will move on.

As for the Attorney General's comments on kidnapping, again, it is almost as though I have never spoken; it is almost as though we never had a debate on kidnapping in this Senate; it is almost as though nothing that we have said has ever been dealt with. In fact, she brought up nothing new.

**Hon. Senator:** Neither you.

**Sen. R. Montano:** I am not bringing anything new and I am not going into it, Madam President, because, in fact, as I understand it, it is a breach of the Standing Orders, but I am replying to what the Attorney General has said and I am trying to say that nothing new has been said. What is more, I go back to my original point, which is, it is as though we have never been heard.

You know, Madam President, let me put it to you this way. If government were a matter of will upon any side, theirs, without question, ought to be superior, but government and legislation are matters of reason and judgment, not of inclination. On what sort of reason is that in which the determination precedes the discussion, in which one set of men and women deliberate and another decide where those who form the conclusion are perhaps intellectually 300 miles distant from those who hear the arguments? Small wonder that the drafters of our Constitution, recognizing that the Executive effectively controls the passage of legislation in the Parliament, made sure that governments, such as this one, cannot arbitrarily take away the rights of the citizenry by a simple majority.

In other words, Madam President, they have to convince us that we should allow the citizenry's civil rights to be diluted. We do not have to convince them. That is the point. They must come and convince us. But for the last 22 months there has been absolutely no effort whatsoever to reach out to us. From the time of the 18/18, when there should have been a power sharing, there was an absolute refusal. Even after this last election, in which they won, 20/16—and we are not going to go tonight into how they won. [*Interruption*] You say so, but I have not said so tonight and I am trying to make a serious point, which is that there has been no reaching out.

Now we have said time and time and time and time again, until we are almost blue in the face; we have said to them: “Look, there are a number of things that concern us. We fear on a number of matters. We have serious concerns. We are afraid and because we fear, because we are afraid—

**Hon. Senator:** Because you have a leader who does not understand.

**Sen. R. Montano:** No. We have a leader who understands all too well. Because we fear and because we are afraid we say: “Look, we are putting a brake on everything that requires our vote. Unless and until you sit and talk with us”—now it may very well be that when we talk with them; or put it this way, when they talk with us, it may very well be that we are not so afraid anymore. Or it may

very well be that we may be even more afraid and nothing gets solved. But the point of the matter is, this is what I have been trying to explain and it is clear—and I would be dealing with Sen. Titus in a few moments. But it is clear that he has not understood it when we have said—and I have said—we represent half the population of this country. It is clear that they do not understand this.

**Sen. Dr. Saith:** Not any more.

**Sen. R. Montano:** Yes, we do. Call the election any time. If you doubt me, call the election any time. But, please, I am really trying to make a very serious point here—[*Crosstalk*]

**Madam President:** Let us give the Senator an opportunity to speak, please.

**Sen. R. Montano:**—and it is this. They come and say: “Ah, you won't support no bail for kidnappers”, but hello—[*Laughter*] No bail for kidnappers? Who could disagree with that? But what about no bail for persons accused of kidnapping? Which is what I said before. But come and talk with us. You want to take away people's rights and then you say, “but this is necessary”.

The President of the Republic comes and says: “Hey, legislation is not the answer”, which we say—

**Sen. Mark:** We agree.

**Sen. R. Montano:** But that does not happen. We do not hear anything. It just goes in one ear, out the other; and again, we are the wicked ones because we will not vote as they want.

**Sen. Mark:** Yes, yes. Imagine that—puppets.

**Sen. R. Montano:** But as I said, this is why the provisions are in the Constitution requiring the special majorities and it is for them to convince us. But I will tell you this, you are not going to convince me by beating me over the head with my own stick and saying: “Hey, vote as I say, otherwise, wadap!”

**Sen. Mark:** That is the AG's approach, you know.

**Sen. R. Montano:** Of course. You are not going to do it.

**Sen. Morean:** No domestic violence.

**Sen. R. Montano:** Thank God for that—no domestic violence, I mean.

But this is the point and I have said in this House and outside: “If you really want to get the thing through, what is so difficult about sitting and talking to us?”

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Why do you refuse to talk to us? We have fears; we have serious concerns. Deal with them.” But do not look at me and say: “Listen, I ain't talking to you; you are going to vote this way because I say that this is the best thing for Trinidad and Tobago.” Really? Well, I am so sorry, I disagree with you.

You know, I listened with great pride to what my brother, the Senator, had to say tonight. [*Desk thumping*] I agree. Because I think he is bright; he is able and he is everything else.

**Sen. Dr. Saith:** And he is on the right side. [*Laughter*]

**Sen. R. Montano:** Whatever my brother does I will always support, but he said something tonight that I do not think he understood and I know he did not understand—

**Sen. Morean:** But he is bright so how can you say that?

**Sen. R. Montano:** Because he is not a lawyer. [*Interruption*] I am being very serious now, Madam President. He said something tonight that has raised the hairs on my back; it has frightened me and I will tell you what it is. I had intended dealing with this Brigadier without a brigade, Peter Joseph. [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*] Good point. It seems that if somebody makes a mistake over here, it is all right if you make the mistake over there; in other words, their philosophy appears to be two wrongs can always make a right.

But coming back to it, my brother said something tonight that is of great concern to me—

**Hon. Senator:** He is a Senator.

**Sen. R. Montano:** Senator—sorry. Please forgive me. Any time I say that, forgive me and let us pretend that I am saying it right.

The issue, though, is this. He said tonight that this new unit, in essence—he did not actually say it in these words, but this was the purport of his meaning—was going to operate the way an FBI or as Sûreté or the RCMP operate. I had to say to myself: “Well, hold it sheriff. He is heading for the strawberry patch.” Because what he has said in essence is that the Government is setting up the equivalent of an FBI, but they are doing that without parliamentary approval, without parliamentary scrutiny and without any accountability whatsoever to Parliament. If that is the case, then you have only got to look at it to see that that is wrong. [*Interruption*]

**Sen. Dr. McKenzie:** I do not think he said that.

**Sen. R. Montano:** With the greatest of respect, Sen. Dr. McKenzie, he did, and I listened very carefully. Then I would love to hear the Minister of Finance stand and say in definitive terms that that is not it. Because if that is so, let me tell you this; that is a mongoose squad; that is a hit squad; that is dangerous in the extreme. It is undemocratic and it is frightening, if that is so. You have only got to look at it to see it.

Now if I might turn to the contribution of Sen. Titus, which disturbed me, not so much for what he would say as a Government Senator, but because he is the Vice-President of the Senate.

**Sen. Morean:** Check the *Hansard*—

**Sen. R. Montano:** I do have the *Hansard* and I am going to read it in a few minutes.

**Sen. Morean:** Not this; the other Vice-Presidents.

**Sen. R. Montano:** Let me tell you this. If I can say this again, do you know what, Madam President? I am really not interested in what happened yesterday; I am not really interested in whether or not my colleague, Sen. Mark when he was Vice-President, was right or wrong. He tells me that he never did; I accept his explanation and if anybody can bring a *Hansard* showing that while he was Vice-President he did that, then I would be the first one to tell him to his face that he was wrong. Two wrongs, three wrongs or ten wrongs, do not make a right!

Now let me get on to the point about bias. I have here the case of *Locabail (UK) Ltd v Bayfield Properties Ltd and another*. The reference is: *1 All England Law Reports* for the year 2000, and it is at page 65. I do not intend to read the whole thing but listen to this:

“In contrast, a real danger of bias may well be thought to arise if there is personal friendship or animosity...”

and the point here is “animosity”—

“between the judge and any member of the public involved in the case,...”  
[*Interruption*] Will you just listen? If you listen you would get a bit of an education tonight. If you do not listen, you would not:

“if the judge is closely acquainted with any member of the public involved in the case,...”

**Madam President:** Senator, can I just interrupt you for a minute? I just want to set the record straight, because I did say at the time when Sen. Dumas was speaking, that the precedent was set in the past when other Vice-Presidents have spoken, and I have just clarified it with the Clerk and, in fact, other Vice-Presidents have spoken while holding the position of Vice-President of the Senate.

**Sen. R. Montano:** Madam President, I am not arguing the point of the right of the Vice-President to speak; the point I am arguing tonight is apparent bias and if you would listen to me—

**Sen. Morean:** Nonsense!

**Sen. R. Montano:** I know that the Attorney General does not want to hear me, but as I understand the rules—

**Madam President:** Senators, the Senator has a right to say what he has to say and then we will decide. Go ahead.

**Sen. R. Montano:** Thank you, Madam President.

**Sen. Dr. Saith:** Madam President, on a point of order. The Senator may have the right to say what he has to say; he has no right to impute improper motives to the Senator. He is claiming bias!

**Sen. Mark:** He is making a point!

**Madam President:** I have to agree that if you are imputing improper motives, then I would have to uphold that point of order.

**Sen. R. Montano:** Then let me tell you what the law on bias is about and we can go on from there. As I said:

“...a real danger of bias may well be thought to arise if there is personal friendship or animosity between the judge and any member of the public involved in the case,...”

Now, my friend says the presiding officer of the Senate is not a judge, but the point of the matter is that the law goes on to say—and I do not intend spending all night reading the law—that anybody who is in a position to make decisions, either a judge or quasi judicial authority such as that of a presiding officer, is bound by this:

“if the judge has expressed views, particularly in the course of the hearing, on any question at issue in such extreme and unbalanced terms that they cast

doubt on his ability to try the issue with an objective judicial mind; or if, for any other reason, there is real ground for doubting the judge's ability to ignore extraneous considerations, prejudices and predilections, and his ability to bring an objective judgment to bear on the issues..."

Now let me read the statements of Sen. Titus yesterday—One:

"The Opposition in both Houses also look forward to the budget, and for them, as far as I have noticed, it is: 'Let me see what is bad in there; what is bordering bad; let me see what I can criticize; let me see how well I could ignore what is in the budget and how much criticism I could level at the government.'"

This is the opinion of the Vice-President of the Senate of Trinidad and Tobago on the Opposition. He then goes on:

"If we demonstrate that adversarial qualities are what we are about, then adversarial qualities will filter down. If we demonstrate that we are, in fact, leaders, and I take it that Senators are appointed because of certain qualities that were seen in them that will filter down. If we demonstrate that we deserve to be in the Senate, then that too will filter down. If we demonstrate, however, that we are here and are prepared to make differences—you are on that side and I am on this side and I am not supporting you for any reason; that is also going to filter down. If we..."

I think this must be a typo in the *Hansard*:

"If we do not resort to civil disobedience, that is going to filter down too."

Who is he talking about, if not us? Then he goes on:

"When we could come to the Parliament and mislead the public, especially in defiance of the oath that we took as Senators, that is dangerous. Every single Member of the Senate took an oath."

Who is he talking about, if not us?

**Hon. Senator:** Every single one of us.

**Sen. R. Montano:** No. That is naive and a child would not believe that. He goes on:

"Too often we have been in this Senate and we have had to hear, 'We represent so many thousand people'. I do not know if that is what was referred to when someone said I was controversial...The budget has nothing to do with who you represent, except that it has to do with your representation of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, only." [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam President:** Senator, I am sorry to interrupt your train of thought. The speaking time of the hon. Senator has expired.

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**8.40 p.m.**

**Sen. R. Montano:** Madam President, I thank you and all the Senators here tonight for the privilege of being able to continue.

Those of us Senators who sometimes act as presiding officers of this House ought to be scrupulous in the manner in which our contributions are made when they are on the floor of this House, simply because they need to keep the confidence of Senators in their impartiality and integrity on occasions when they ascend those stairs and sit in that Chair. In other words, you cannot when on the floor of this House make statements that can be viewed as personal, vindictive and partisan and then in the next moment sit on the Chair and expect us to believe that your rulings on points of order are not biased.

While on that point, while I am on the question of the responsibility of presiding officers, let me say that the President of the Senate, and here I speak generally of the office as opposed to any holder of the office, is sometimes required under the Constitution to perform the functions of the President of the Republic. Again, I say that it is important for the proper functioning of our system and for preserving the integrity of our institutions that the President of the Senate conducts himself in a way that will engender public confidence in the performance of his duties when he is required to perform them as President of the Republic. In short, what I am saying is that partisan politics ought to be confined to the floor of the House as well as the floor of the other place in order for the system to work. Partisan politics ought not to affect the Chair in which you sit Madam President, as well as that Chair in which you sit at President's House. That is the point about the Vice-President.

Finally, there is a matter which I would like to bring to your attention because it disturbs me. It is about the recent dismissal of Hubert Alleyne, the former Chairman of Unit Trust Corporation. I am disturbed. In the business magazine of the *Express* dated October 22, 2003, there is a huge quotation.

“...or acting President Linda Baboolal, who ‘did the dirty deed’...”



It is clear the government had Hubert's dismissal well planned,... They waited until President Max Richards was out of the country, maybe anticipating some queries he may have raised before signing any revocation instrument."

The point I am making is this. Not only has this been in the papers but I also heard it on a radio programme earlier this week. It is not what I think. It is what the country thinks. The point I am making is that at all times our presiding officers must be extremely careful.

**Madam President:** I am not going to defend myself, but I am just cautioning you to be very careful in what you are saying.

**Sen. R. Montano:** I am not trying to attack you. This is the point that I had raised earlier about presiding officers. This is the point I raised about ascending the Chair. This is the point I had raised about Sen. Titus. I am trying to say that unfortunately, whether you like it or not, in politics perception is reality. It would be most unfortunate if the perception of your handling of this office was sullied in any way.

**Sen. Morean:** Madam President, again, I must get up to object on a point of order. Standing Order No. 35(8) states:

"The conduct of the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Members of the Senate...shall not be raised except upon a substantive motion moved for the purpose; and in any amendment,..."

Madam President, Sen. R. Montano is totally out of line. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam President:** I agree. I will have to uphold that point of order.

**Sen. R. Montano:** Very well, Madam President. Let me just say this. There are other issues I wanted to raise, but unfortunately, I do not have time.

**Hon. Senator:** Because you wasted your time.

**Sen. R. Montano:** I do not think so, with the greatest of respect. I wanted to deal with Sen. Yuille-Williams. She made a few statements that were disturbing. Perhaps, through you, Madam President, I could ask a simple question. When you were making your statements earlier this afternoon about associating with certain people for the sake of the children, were you justifying the Government's association with the Jamaat, or links with the Jamaat? If that is what you were doing, that is most unfortunate. To be fair she did not say that, but the intent could quite easily have been interpreted in that way.

**Sen. Yuille-Williams:** By you.

**Sen. R. Montano:** Let me ask the question bluntly and give her a chance to reply. She could say yes or no. I think so and I noticed that she did not say yes and she did not say no. All roads seem to go in circles which come back to the beginning of my contribution here tonight. What are you doing? What are the benchmarks? Can you please tell us? How can we judge your performance? That is all I ask.

Madam President, may I wish you Shubh Divali. May I wish all my senatorial colleagues on both sides of the divide, Happy Divali and may Mother Lakshmi's blessings be upon all of us. [*Desk thumping*]

Thank you.

**The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill):** Madam President, let me at the outset join with those colleagues in the past, who took the time to extend greetings of peace, happiness and holiness. Let me at the outset say to all my colleagues, that I wish you the very best for the weekend. I wish to thank all hon. Senators who continue to provide valuable insights into the process in which we are all engaged. The advice given; the criticisms received and the views expressed will undoubtedly benefit all of us.

The budget that we have spent some time debating was set out in a very simple template in order to aid our understanding of these very complex issues. We began our debate by discussing budget principles. We proceeded at the outset to indicate that we were concerned about national security. We reviewed Government's performance. We discussed our reform agenda. We also indicated our intent in the specific sectors. We then proceeded to deal with our efforts at stimulating the productive sectors of the economy.

We spoke of our priorities for Trinidad and Tobago. We said that our priorities for this year are education, health, housing, national security and the environment. We also spent some time in sharing with hon. Senators our investment in social capital. We talked about the Tobago House of Assembly. We spent time talking about Vision 2020.

I keep hearing Members saying to us that we are really moving too slow on Vision 2020. We need it to happen right now because you said that this was going to happen. Vision 2020 is a process and the process has begun. The process is one in which many of our citizens are involved in a discussion and a conversation with many others about issues and to develop issues that will undoubtedly guide us over the next 10—20 years. That process is ongoing. In the interim, the

Government is proceeding as it has always done in the past with a medium-term framework in which we would move the country forward, while at the same time understanding the realities of Vision 2020.

By way of process, once the Government established a particular goal, called Vision 2020, for those who do not understand it, basically it means that each of us will have the same level of service and the same opportunities for economic growth and development that exist in a developed country. That is primarily what it means. In that context, the discussion that is taking place needs to identify the institutions and the people who will get us there. The first objective that we faced was to determine whether or not we had the people and institutions in place to deal with this. This matter at this point in time is engaging our attention. In the passage of time, very shortly, all the questions you have asked would be made available to you in the manner in which you want it. The information, however, is currently available.

If you ask the Minister of Education what the benchmarks are, she can tell you. Why “can’t” she tell you? The process that went into developing some of the policies had to do with what we went to school and understood, the question of planning. The process is very simple. We understand the policy. We articulate the policy. We get people together. We have the benchmarks. We develop them. We take them to Cabinet. They are approved; we allocate funding for them, and we move ahead. You are saying that you need to be part of that process and we will do that in due course.

I wish to congratulate my colleagues because many of them answered many questions that were raised. There are a few that I want to deal with. One difficulty that faces me is this: I keep hearing about this need for us to be civil; for us to discuss with one another and engage in a process. I find it sometimes very difficult to engage in this process when the environment that is set up by the use of the words that you select to describe me is offensive to me. I wonder if the intention is really not to create a situation in which we cannot cooperate. There is no other way that I can understand some of the statements and words that have been chosen in some of the contributions. That disturbs me because in such an environment, it means that you are denying yourself the opportunity for us to take you seriously. That is an issue.

On one hand, if you are saying that you need to be taken seriously, then you must demonstrate that by the use of the words. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*] Whether or not I am now learning is not the issue. The issue is that the choice of the words that you use would elicit a particular response. On the basis of that

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response we would either forward or we would not. I am simply making the point that if that is the choice we have made, then the result that would flow from it would be one that we have to deal with.

Sen. Mark in his contribution made some comments on the NIS pension plan and a company called Hover Lain. I think that the particular statement that was made was something to the effect that some PNM Minister—I will tell you what it is. He said:

“I will like the Attorney General however, if she is still here to investigate an alleged payment to a former energy minister in the PNM who is today an energy consultant.”

I have a document from Lake Asphalt of Trinidad and Tobago (1978) Limited, a distributorship agreement which says the following. The contract date is November 29, 2000; the contract duration is November 29, 2000—November 28, 2005. It says:

LETT granted Hover Lain Limited the exclusive right during the continuance in force of the agreement to purchase TLA for resale in the Peoples Republic of China.

The other note I have is that this contract was executed under the previous government, Minister Finbar Gangar. Clearly, this statement from Lake Asphalt and this statement by the hon. Senator do not seem to make sense. I want to place on the record that this particular contract was executed on November 29, 2000 under that administration.

Sen. Basharat Ali talked much about petroleum, oil and gas, and the production price. Petroleum legislation is being reviewed and this whole matter of gas price would be dealt with in that particular legislation. The price at which the gas income was calculated for the budget was US \$120 per mmcf. You know what is happening today in the context of those prices?

**Sen. Seepersad-Bachan:** Well head price?

**Sen. The Hon. C. Enill:** Yes. Just for information I wanted to give that.

In terms of the contribution by Sen. Anmolsingh-Mahabir on NIS, the organizational structure of the National Insurance Board is one in which there are three particular parties. There are government, labour and the private sector. On the basis of that tripartite arrangement they conduct their business.

As I understand it, the customer base as at June 2002 is that they deal with 306,216 contributors. There is a staff complement of 450. There are 13 offices in

Trinidad and one in Tobago. They were established by an Act of Parliament in 1971 and there is a tripartite board of management. They deal with income replacement, short-term and long-term and employment injury benefits. Their asset base as at this time is \$8.3 billion; contribution, \$799 million; net investment income, \$649.8 million and their administrative expense ratio 7.7 per cent. The current status of the fund is that the capitalization of funding ratio stood at 76 per cent. They are unable to fulfill approximately 24 per cent of the obligation to insured persons. The fund status would be jeopardized by steady rise in pensioners' population; fluctuation in national working population and the maturing of NIS.

Many of the comments the Senator made in the context of the investment rate and the return that should be developed, we share as well. We have asked the board through our representative to look at those issues. We have absolutely no say in that organization. Even in terms of getting the contribution rates to what they are today, there was a discussion between the board parties and based on the agreement of the tripartite this is the configuration.

In terms of the accounts, I believe that this is one organization that lays its accounts in Parliament and they are subject to the joint select committee's process. I think that through that process we could get any of the information for which you have asked. It was one organization that is governed by an Act of Parliament. I am not sure which joint select committee they fall under? Is it yours?

**Sen. Mark:** Would you indicate to us, hon. Minister, whether you have knowledge of the fact that there was opposition from the employers and the workers' representative on the National Insurance Board to the implementation of any increase or increases in the contribution rates? Can you indicate whether they disagreed and the Government insisted that that be taken?

**Sen. The Hon. C. Enill:** The discussion took place about changing the return on the rate of investment of the assets employed as the consideration. Failure to do that resulted in this formulation. The first approach was that the fund should have been able to fund the additional benefit. When that did not work out this was the formulation that the discussions threw out. I am not aware of that statement you have made.

In addition to the \$1,000 on index minimum monthly retirement pension, there were other benefits that were considered such as the death benefit, sickness benefit, maternity benefit, injury benefit, survivors' benefit, invalidity benefit and

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medical expenses benefit. All were increased and in some instances they went from \$2,000 to \$4,000 in terms of the funeral grant; \$1,000 to \$2,000 in terms of the maternity grant and a fixed allowance of \$320 per child per month until age 18. In the last review, a significant amount of benefits was added.

The other piece that we are looking at now and is currently I think at the Attorney General's office, is the whole question of coming to Parliament to try to change the legislation to make it more reflective of the situation today. There are many obsolete provisions. They no longer use cards. There is the question of closing loopholes in the system; omissions and ambiguities in the law that require changes. These are currently being dealt with and should come to us here very shortly. I believe that there are 42 pieces of amendments to fix the NIS challenge.

In terms of the health issue, I heard what you said about promoting good health. In this situation, the Government's priorities for this year which are reflected in the allocations and programmes underscores health as an issue that has not, over the years, performed in the manner in which it should. Therefore, it is our intention to focus that in a particular way. Those would be dealt with during the course of this particular year.

In terms of pension reform, Sen. Mark talked about the recommendations but I do not think he talked about the problem. We do have a problem with pension plans. The same report that he quoted from suggests to us that in terms of the public service pensions, it would rise from 3½ per cent GDP in 2002 to 4½ per cent in 2020 and 9½ per cent in 2050. If you look at that escalation, you would recognize that is not sustainable and there should be some strategy in place to deal with it. The pensions committee that we have set up would deal with this whole pensions issue. For too long it has been pay as you go. As the public service matures, the call on Government in terms of its recurrent expenditure will continue to go up and up. That would interfere with the ability to put money into other programmes like health, education and transforming the economy.

### **9.10 p.m.**

I want to deal a bit with the question of debt because there has been a lot of debate about it. I do not think there is sufficient understanding of what we propose to do. We have stated, quite categorically, that for the period between the last time we reported and this time our central government debt has really gone down. There are, of course, some differences between what the International Monetary Fund (IMF) looks at, in terms of debt, and what we report. The reason for that is because in the IMF document, they assumed that we would have gone to

the market this year to raise an additional US \$300 million, and they factored that in. They also factored into their debt computation, Central Bank open-market operations. More than that, they have also factored in leases and BOLT transactions, which are not considered as public debt in the Government statistics. That is an academic discussion that is still ongoing because even within the fund they still have to work through that.

In the context of government accounts and those assets for which we have a liability, we are doing two things. As a result of the Central Bank's reduction in interest rates there is a section of debt that we can re-finance. I think we are going to save \$26 million per annum as a consequence of that, and we are doing that.

We have also said that we are restricting access to contingent debt; that is to say, in our current budget allocations we have attempted to put within that allocation, expenses that would have ordinarily been considered to be off balance sheet. We are closing that process and we are, in fact, reducing the cost.

The interesting thing about all of this, though, is that if you look at what the structure of Government's expenditure statement is, you would find that just about \$6 billion of whatever revenues we collect go toward debt.

Madam President, when we talk about increasing expenditure in health and in all the other areas that we have talked about, let us understand what we are talking about. We are taking revenue and immediately we have a \$6 billion charge based on previous debts. We did not incur all that debt. We came in and met debts. What we are seeking to do now is to manage it in such a way that it does not interfere with our future growth and viability.

I think our strategy is to stabilize what currently exists. I have heard some commentators make the point that we should be moving, basically, to create a different kind of economy to move to the situation of what would happen when oil and gas run out. Well, if you look at the statistics right now you would find that if you examine GDP data, the petroleum sector, I think, accounts for 25 per cent but there are other sectors of the economy that are doing quite well: manufacturing, services and some of those things. It is in those specific areas that we are looking to make incremental growth. While we do that and get it moving in the way it should be going then we would be looking at longer-term issues.

In fact, the Prime Minister has a committee right now that is really looking at creation of jobs, consistent with the future, based on studies that were done to determine where the country has its best competitive advantage. That study is not yet completed, but it would be very shortly and that would cause us to take the

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next step in looking at those future jobs.

I heard a comment that basically said we do not understand anything. Well, to the extent that we went to the same schools and we have the same degrees then, we must be from a different place. We do understand it. The fact of the matter, though, is that we are going to lay it out when we have done the work and when we are satisfied that we could deliver, based on what we have said and not one minute before. The danger is that if we lay it out before it is subject to interpretation—What is the word I am looking for?—speculation and misinformation.

I also want to put on the table, Madam President, the millennium development goals that the developed world has looked at over the last two to three years. They are as follows:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieve universal primary education
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Develop a global partnership for development

Madam President, Trinidad and Tobago, in its own way, is, in fact, contributing to the achievement of these goals by some of the policies and programmes on which we are embarking. It is within the context of the international issues that exist—these are issues that affect us as well—that we, as a country, are moving forward with our various programmes.

Sen. Arnim Smith spoke with passion about the hardships, and about crime, and we agree with him. The issue we have, though, is that there are opportunities for us to work together to deal with this particular issue, but those opportunities cannot come with ultimatums and preconditions. They must come, basically, with the objective of dealing with the problem in the interest of all of us. If the position is that there are preconditions to dealing with something like crime, then I am afraid that over time it is going to get to the stage when none of us would be able to survive. I think the strategy of dealing with crime as a political issue is one that



we need to examine. While we continue to talk and postulate, the situation continues to get out of control. We need help in this particular matter because this is a matter for all of us. If it is one thing I am sure about is that in dealing with this particular issue we need your help, but it cannot be on condition, it is too important an issue, the conditions will come after.

Sen. Prof. Ramchand talked about poetry and he talked about Lloyd Best. You know, it is interesting, Lloyd Best is a friend of mine but I do not know that Lloyd Best has ever agreed with anything that anybody has done at all. [*Desk thumping*] In fact, the last time he got an award he got it for not agreeing with anyone. It is therefore not surprising that he would not agree with anything that we do. It does not surprise me!

He did say, in the article that you referred to, Sen. Robin Montano, that the budget did have some strong points and that the budget did, in fact, recognize, for all its weaknesses, that the Government was concerned about dealing with the issues of health, housing and social interventions and he considered that to be a good thing. Therefore, while he said some other things—In fact, what I thought he was saying was that as a country; as a group of individuals existing in a space in which we all have to live and work, we were not coming up with the challenges that were required for us to move forward. I think that is what he said, and I think that he is correct. We would certainly like to continue the discussion to engage in the process but we have to understand that the same way you have feelings, we do too. We do! Therefore, if we want to move forward we need to stop the posturing and to get on with the people's work.

Sen. Prof. Deosaran asked the question whether or not the social programming agenda was being appropriately dealt with. I can tell you that at this time it is not. However, we have taken a decision that we are going to put some time and resources into making sure that we are targeting those individuals who need the benefits. We are, in fact, setting up at this time among the Ministry of Planning and Development, the Ministry of Social Services and a number of other institutions, a core group to try to determine how to deliver to those individuals who are in the greatest need, as quickly as possible, and to ensure that there is no abuse in the system. One of the things we know about our own folks is that where there is a loophole they will find it.

Institutional strengthening: You are correct! Let me tell you what we found when we went into the Ministry of Finance. Institutional strengthening was not a priority for the last administration. Let me tell you why I say that. In the Ministry of Finance, presently, of the 3,000 employees on the administration, there are 500

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vacancies in critical skill sets. The reason for this is not because of the last administration, but because of the system that operates in our delivery mode. Sen. Mark will know that if you wanted to get somebody, the process by which you have to go through, from the day that you decide that this should happen to the day that you get the individual it could be four years. It does not matter whether we are in power or you are in power, the system does not at this time, support implementation in the manner in which we would like to see it happen. To the extent that is the system in which we currently operate, we have to exhibit some leadership within those systems to try to get the best individuals.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. Saith will tell you, we are faced with a situation where the criterion for leadership is based on years in service. Could you imagine, for example, we are talking about Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA); we are talking computers; we are talking about GSM technology in police service. What that means, Madam President, is that you need a manager who understands technology, human resource, logistics, vehicle maintenance, structures—you need structures to deliver. Nothing in the experience of the individuals who currently lay a claim to the position has brought them to the stage where they could handle these issues. Therefore, the dilemma that you face, as you try to go forward to deal with all those other issues is how do you bridge that gap that exists between the expectation of delivery of the population, and the system that does not support you.

**Sen. Mark:** Constitutional reform.

**Sen. The Hon. C. Enill:** So then we need to talk—[*Interruption*—]but we have to talk after we have dealt with the issue of crime. [*Interruption*]

Sen. Seetahal in her contribution talked about the question of not seeing any moneys for prison reform. The reason for that is, currently there is a mechanism that is being looked at in terms of a BOLT arrangement: Build/Operate/Lease/Transfer. It is not that it has not been dealt with; it is just that there is a different mechanism being used to deal with it. I thought I should tell you that. The statement in the budget about being serious about the issue is in fact so, but the funding for it is based on a mechanism that we are looking at. [*Interruption*] BOLT is a transaction where the bank would build for you, operate, lease and then transfer it to you somewhere down the road. [*Interruption*] Build/Operate/Lease/Transfer (BOLT). [*Crosstalk*]

**Sen. King:** You said “Bank”.

**Sen. The Hon. C. Enill:** I said, “Built”. I meant, “Build”, sorry. You see,

Madam President, what is possible when we talk. We can solve all the problems.

Sen. Seepersad-Bachan talked about a number of things including local content and so on. I want her to know that we have considered local content. In fact, what we have done in the Atlantic for negotiations is that we have identified a number of the specific industries and placed them as a schedule of activities in which there must be local content. It is specific in terms of the industry, type, values and so on.

Sen. Brother Noble Khan, it came across to me that in your contribution you were talking about partnerships and cooperation, and you were really suggesting to us that we should come together as a group and work together for the betterment of this country. I want to thank you for that particular contribution because I believe that it is a correct statement. It is a way by which we could all move forward.

Sen. Robin Montano, I do not believe that what was said by Sen The Hon. Danny Montano was that the Special Crime Unit is a mongoose gang.

**Sen. R. Montano:** No, he did not say that, and I did not say that he said that.

**Sen. The Hon. C. Enill:** What I understood he said was that the special unit in the fight against crime is an acceptable method of dealing with the escalating crime—and he quoted the examples—as is done in other countries through some of the institutions.

**Sen. R. Montano:** Madam President, this is very important. My point on the matter is this. What I was saying was, I understood him to be saying just that, but the logical conclusion of what he said is that, in fact, the Government, effectively, intends to set up this unit and use it as if it were an FBI, Sûreté or a RCMP. That is the logical conclusion and what I was asking is: Is this really so? If it is so, this is extremely dangerous. If it is not so, then fine, that is the point.

**Sen. The Hon. C. Enill:** It is not so. [*Interruption*] To do that you would need legislation. [*Interruption*] No, it is a special unit with a particular focus.

Madam President, I also consulted with my colleague on a statement that he responded to. Out of an abundance of caution, and to ensure that there can be no misunderstanding, our policy position has always been and will always be that all the programmes that we have are for all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore 3893 where it says: “Establish targeted recruitment programmes for male Trinidadians aged 17-24,…” We wish to delete, “especially Afro-

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Trinidadian males” because that is an error for which the printers have taken responsibility. So that will be dealt with. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Mark:** “Ah like that.”

**Sen. The Hon. C. Enill:** In consultation with my colleague, we have agreed that statement, as it is there, does not reflect our policy position and we want to correct it. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

Madam President, we, on this side, have certainly benefited tremendously from all that was said.

**Sen. Mark:** Madam President, on a point of clarification. Are we going to have the particular page withdrawn and reprinted?

**Sen. The Hon. C. Enill:** Those that have not been distributed, we will. Those that have been distributed, we will send out an errata sheet. In fact, those instructions have already been given to the printers. [*Interruption*] We feel very strongly about miscommunications.

**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. C. Enill:** Thank you, Madam President, and hon. Senators for that great honour. For the benefit of hon. Senators, as we leave this place, rest assured that the Government's objectives of promoting macroeconomic stability, promoting economic efficiency, promoting savings and investment, protecting vulnerable groups, preserving the environment, developing our human resources, strengthening our health sector, expanding our manufacturing sector, reforming our agricultural sector, accelerating our housing development programme, strengthening our internal security, enhancing our infrastructure, expanding the energy sector, promoting national identity, promoting consumer welfare, improving public administration and enhancing the link between Trinidad and Tobago, are all objectives for which we have very specific time frames and very measurable and specific benchmarks—[*Desk thumping*—]—which we will be prepared to share with you.

**Sen. R. Montano:** Wow! Great! I am waiting for that!

**Sen. The Hon. C. Enill:** You will get it.

Madam President, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

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*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

**Sen. The Hon. C. Enill:** Madam President, in accordance with Standing Order No. 63, I beg to move that the Bill not be committed to a committee of the whole Senate.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Question put and agreed to, That the Bill be now read a third time and passed.*

*Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.*

**9.40.pm.**

#### **DIVALI GREETINGS**

**The Minister of Public Administration and Information (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith):** Madam President, before I move the adjournment, and in order to give my colleagues an opportunity, let me take this opportunity although it has been done many times during this debate, to wish the national community a very happy Divali, a very religious Divali and that we all learn from what Divali celebrates, and to my colleagues in the honourable Senate. Madam President, Shubh Divali.

**Sen. Wade Mark:** Madam President, on behalf of the United National Congress, and all of us on this side, that is the Front Bench here, I take the opportunity to extend Divali greetings to the Hindu community and, indeed, the entire citizenry of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Because of the occasion, I want to indicate that Divali for us culminates the return of Lord Rama from exile after some 14 years. On this day, that is tomorrow, Hindus pay homage to Mother Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity. The occasion signifies the triumph of light over darkness, good over evil, justice over injustice and knowledge over ignorance. On this day the atmosphere is charged with feelings of solemnity, fellowship and religious gaiety as feelings of brotherhood are re-kindled. In this period of extreme turbulence, instability and growing darkness in our nation, we pray that Mother Lakshmi may shower her choicest blessings and remove not only the darkness from our homes but also remove the darkness of injustice, discrimination, division and inequality

from our minds, hearts and actions as we collectively, Madam Attorney General, celebrate this auspicious occasion.

I hope, Madam President, that the lamps of universal love, peace, unity and harmony will prevail. I also think it would be remiss of me and my colleagues if I do not at this time extend to you the President of the honourable Senate and your family and to my colleagues opposite and their families, as well as my Independent colleagues and their families, and I also on behalf of the Front Bench take the opportunity to extend Divali greetings to all members of staff, including our police officers who have been giving us protection on this occasion. Shubh Divali.

Thank you, Madam President.

**Sen. Dr. Eastlyn McKenzie:** Madam President, let me before I extend Divali greetings to the Parliament, staff and media and the national community just say a few words.

In 1964 when I came to Trinidad to training college, it was the first time as a Tobagonian that we had witnessed anything at the college and there were lights and so forth. Now, in Tobago, there is a very strong Hindu population and they celebrate Divali. Last Friday was our celebrations at Market Square and deyas were lit and everybody participated and enjoyed it and learned from the Hindu community. So, very soon probably we in Tobago would be celebrating Divali and the Minister of Culture and Gender Affairs would bring over more groups because many come from Trinidad to celebrate Divali with us. It is a spirit of learning for us just as the Hindu community in Tobago celebrates Christmas with us and we have our Eid celebrations. So we are really getting to know the culture of each other very much and I think we could only be better for it. Soon, probably, I would understand more about the culture.

Sen. Prof. Ramesh Deosaran—I hope his wife is listening wherever she is—promised that he would get his wife to make an outfit for me next year because some of us feel—and we decided to include Sen. Mary King from our bench—very left out and lonely and Sen. Prof. Deosaran has promised to correct that. I know already and I am sure that Sen. Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan would have seen about Sen. Dr. Kernahan because we are the lonesome ones. We do understand and we admire the ladies in their dress, and I remember seeing Sen. Satish Ramroop in his pretty shirt that signifies that the men also enjoy the occasion. We feel very happy that we could understand each other and I hope this would go a

long way to breaking down the barriers of ignorance about the culture of each other and our religious festivals.

Let me, on behalf of all of us on the Independent Bench, wish the total population an understanding of each other and to the Hindu community not only to enjoy Divali but also to share with us and teach us what the whole thing is about. To the members of the media, the police, the members in the public gallery and all those who would be hearing and seeing us out there, we say happy Divali, Shubh Divali. I have learnt something.

Thank you very much.

#### ADJOURNMENT

**The Minister of Public Administration and Information (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith):** Madam President, I beg to move that the honourable Senate be now adjourned to Tuesday, October 28, at 1.30 p.m.

Madam President, this day has been set aside for private Members but we do have a time constraint in respect of a motion on the Order Paper, so on Tuesday, we would take the motion first and then depending upon our time we would proceed to Private Members' business.

**Sen. W. Mark:** Madam President, I am hearing this for the first time in the context of Private Members' Day being moved from Tuesday, and the hon. Leader of Government Business has not seen it fit to discuss the matter with the Leader of the Opposition. Private Members' business is our business and if we are to have an agreement we must be consulted. As of this time we have not been consulted. I just want to put in on the record.

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. L. Saith:** Madam President, I regret that the hon. Leader of the Opposition feels that way. The Private Members' motion that is to be debated is by Prof. Ramesh Deosaran. I did discuss it with Sen. Prof. Deosaran who was quite happy to allow this but I do apologize to the hon. Senator.

**Madam President:** Hon. Members, before I put the question, let me too take this opportunity to wish everyone in this honourable Senate, other parliamentarians and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, Shubh Divali. The message of Divali is now widely accepted by the nation since many non-Hindus, as was just said, light deyas as a symbol of this message.

What is important is that we do not just mouth the words of the message but that we allow the light and the goodness, peace and unity to define our lives over

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the next year and so by our own actions bring positive vibrations into our homes, our communities, our country and more so, into this honourable Senate.

May each of you have a peaceful, holy, joyful day tomorrow and I am sure those of you who are not Hindus would be going to your friends or neighbours' homes to share in the goodies. I hope you have a very joyful day and may Mother Lakshmi smile on all of us in Trinidad and Tobago.

**Sen. Prof. Deosaran:** I am sorry to interrupt but I just want to get the assurance from the Leader of Government Business, in case there is no time next Tuesday, what happens to the Private Member's motion? Could you advise please?

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. L. Saith:** Let us say if there were not time, of course, we would have some discussion. I believe we would have time quite frankly. But if we do not, we would discuss an arrangement.

**Sen. Mark:** Madam President, it is wrong and I am letting you know it is wrong for the Leader of the Government side to believe that if there is a motion by Wade Mark as No. 1, he can come to Wade Mark privately and ask him to stand down that motion. I believe that it is wrong.

**Madam President:** Sen. Mark, the Leader of Government Business apologized.

**Sen. Mark:** This is not the first time.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Senate adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 9.50 p.m.*