

SENATE*Wednesday, October 18, 2006*

The Senate met at 10.30 a.m.

PRAYERS[MR. VICE-PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]**APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)**

[Third Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [October 16, 2006]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, the debate on the second reading of the following Bill, “An Act to provide for the Service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th day of September 2007”, which was in progress when the Senate was adjourned on Tuesday, October 17, 2006 will now be resumed.

Those who spoke on the Bill are as follows: On Monday, October 16, 2006: Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill, Minister in the Ministry of Finance and mover of the Bill, Sen. Wade Mark, Sen. Mary King, Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley, MP, Sen. The Hon. Danny Montano and Sen. Basharat Ali.

On Tuesday, October 17, 2006 the speakers were: Sen. The Hon. Martin Joseph, Sen. Ato Boldon, Sen. Prof. Ramesh Deosoran, Sen. The Hon. Rennie Dumas, Hon. Colm Imbert, MP, Sen. Raziah Ahmed, Hon. Penelope Beckles, MP, Sen. Dana Seetahal, S.C., Sen. The Hon. Howard Chin Lee and Sen. Dr. Eastlyn Mc Kenzie.

The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Christine Sahadeo): Mr. Vice-President, first, let me congratulate the Minister of Finance and hon. Prime Minister on his presentation of the 2007 Budget. The theme of the Budget 2007 is: “Vision 2020, Moving Onward”.

The response to the budget was very interesting. We heard comments such as, it was not an election budget. A renowned economist gave it a rating of ‘A’, yet there were others whose comments were that the budget really had too few fiscal measures.

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Let me suggest to this august House, and to the public at large, that budgets are really cumulative in that fiscal measures are not introduced for a period of one year but, in fact, they are continuous. You may recall Mr. Vice-President, when the 2006 budget was presented many were of the view that it was an 'election' budget.

Mr. Vice-President, I am still a bit disconcerted when I hear an 'election' budget because when a budget is introduced, it is because the government of the day looks in terms of the measures or the issues which are most important and give them priority. As a matter of fact, I would call it a budget of a government that cares.

Mr. Vice-President, one would recall in last year's budget we introduced free tertiary education, we increased the personal allowance to \$60,000 and we reduced personal taxation to 25 per cent, and also corporation tax to 25 per cent. It is in that context I would now make my contribution.

I would first deal with those salient issues which were brought up by various Senators and then deal with the more specific issues which were raised during the budget debate.

One of the issues I would elaborate on is with regard to the stock market. It is a fact that we are seeing lower prices in the market at present than we have seen in the last two years and there are several reasons for this.

In the Trinidad and Tobago Stock Exchange Annual Report, in the General Manager's and Chief Executive Officer's report the decline was attributed to a decline in activities due to two factors. The first factor was the introduction of electronic trading. Share price movements were no longer influenced by bids, only active trades. And this is a very significant point. Therefore, the market could no longer bid up the share price. In other words, the actual transaction is what would impact on the market price.

It is also no secret that the enforcement of the 50 per cent equity investment limit by insurance companies did, in fact, have tremendous impact on the market. The question is: What do you do?

Pensions and insurance really are there. The investments are there for the long term. These are not short term investments. Any investor will tell you investment in equity is really a long-term investment. The question really arises: What do you do? I am also an investor although a small one and, therefore, I am fully aware of the concerns of the investor particularly the larger ones, particularly the pension funds. The question is: What is the way forward?

We have also gotten the assurance that the Central Bank is presently looking into it. Also, let me inform this Chamber that insurance companies', pension funds also have the opportunity to invest externally. Our stock market was so buoyant and the returns were certainly in excess of external markets that really most of the investments were taking place right here at home. But there are certainly other options. In addition to this, the Central Bank has given us the assurance that they are, in fact, looking at solutions.

But Mr. Vice-President, there is another issue which certainly, and I think, Sen. Ali may have introduced it and a former finance minister did not talk at all about the sharp increases in share prices in the previous two years, and, therefore, what happened. Those who are in the investment market will tell you that the local equity market was significantly overpriced. That is fact.

The PE ratio which is what investors look at was in excess of 22. Let me say it in layman's terms. It means the share price divided by the earnings per share will give you in excess of 22. We are all aware what happened in the collapse of stock markets when one sees share price holding on. Of course, as investors, we all enjoy it, we get dividends and capital appreciation but really to blame the regulator, I would like to say that is unacceptable.

We also know and certainly from other markets when one sees the stock markets falling one would find people putting their money into other areas and one sees an upsurge, for example, in the real estate markets. This certainly happened in the United States and certainly we saw some semblance of that here. The regulator has a responsibility and that responsibility is to ensure when the pensioners are ready to get their pension that the fund, in fact, has those moneys.

But there is another issue which has not been distilled at all and I think it needs mentioning. In 2001 the International Financial Reporting Standard IAS 39 Financial Instruments, Recognition and Measurements were adopted in Trinidad and Tobago. This was an international requirement. This requires companies to fair-value their financial instruments. In other words, you could not leave your investments at cost and what, in fact, happened by restating their investments at market value; it meant they would have brought into their income statements the corresponding revenues.

Mr. Vice-President, there is an issue here, which I think is what should be addressed because what you find happening is that these fair-value adjustments now form part of the retained earnings of companies and there is a danger of making distributions of what is called unrealized profits. That is what I thought would have been of greater concern because really unrealized profit is a term which is not defined in the standard or the Companies Act.

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What we should be doing as a government, as we also have a responsibility, is to have dialogue with the local accounting body which is ICATT and the regulator, in terms of ensuring unrealized profit now in terms of retained earnings and what impact this can have if a company decides to distribute dividends based on unrealized profits, particularly, if the market were to fall. Remember, when one holds shares when a price increases, you have what is called an unrealized profit; that is, the average investor. It means if the price were to fall back you have what is called an unrealized loss. It makes you feel good when it goes up; you think you have a lot more. Really it is the time when you are ready to cash in on those shares would, in fact, be whether you realized a profit or a loss.

I will now move onto another area. Much has been said on the senior citizens grant. To be honest, yesterday I was a bit taken aback when I was not allowed to intervene. Probably the time has reached now that we have a viewing public when there is misleading information or information which is so incorrect, I wonder how our Standing Orders would now be accommodated to ensure that we correct that information on a timely basis so the public at large is not going to have to listen to information which is grossly incorrect and, therefore, influences the general public.

The point I am making is those of us in this Chamber will certainly have the opportunity to hear the correct version as they are going to hear now, but the viewing public who listened yesterday may certainly not be viewing this morning and, therefore, will not have the opportunity to hear these corrections or amendments.

The first issue was why do we change a name? People ask, what is in a name? We are all going to become old in a few years' time, some earlier than others.

Mr. Vice-President, I do not know about you but when I reach the grand old age of 65 I would much prefer to be referred to as a senior citizen. We talk about the dignity of the human being.

10.45 a.m.

Let us get to the substance of the issue. The substance of the issue is, really: What is a grant vis-à-vis a pension? Please let me say, categorically, that a pension is really for past services. You can have either a contributory pension or a non-contributory pension. A grant is a gift or assistance.

I saw a report in the papers because I did not have the time to look at the television when the budget debate was in progress in the Lower House, and

reference was made here again, where the Leader of the Opposition indicated that because we changed a name by "vaps", we could take away a grant and do whatever we want.

Let me again assure the viewing public that that is incorrect and misleading. Even the change of a name means that we have to come to the Parliament and make an amendment under the Old Age Pensions Act, Chap. 32:02. As a matter of fact, any variation to the senior citizens grant requires parliamentary approval. I hope I have now set the record absolutely correct.

What is more disconcerting is the whole issue of the senior citizens grant, which we have introduced. In addition to increasing those at the bottom by \$200, we have sought to increase pension availability to those of our senior citizens who may have been employed and may have other income. Once you had income in excess of \$1,000 you did not enjoy what we called an old age pension, but what I will start referring to as the senior citizens grant.

Mr. Vice-President, I can assure you, when we looked at the system, we recognized that we should look at some enhancement. We then introduced the concept of a qualifying income ceiling of \$2,150. It means that if you have other income over \$1,000, we will then adopt a pro-rated mechanism so that at least you would enjoy some level of pension. It means that if you have other income of \$1,400 now, you will then get a senior citizens grant of \$750, whereas in the past you would have gotten absolutely nothing. I am sure this Chamber will applaud this effort as we are now introducing into the net in excess of 10,000 senior citizens; [*Desk thumping*] not just \$200, but a scale of grants ranging from \$1,000 straight down to as low as \$100.

I will now move on to some of the issues regarding the Heritage and Stabilization Fund. As we are all aware, a bill was laid in Parliament and I am sure my colleagues would have taken time to peruse it as it has been a burning issue for some time. [*Interruption*] I know a person like you would have gotten a copy and looked at it. As my colleague, Sen. Wade Mark said in his contribution and took credit—rightly so—that they introduced the Revenue Stabilization Fund, they put the grand sum of \$416 million. I want again to advise this Chamber that they set up a revenue stabilization fund and this was a method of smoothing government spending given fluctuations in oil and gas prices.

We went a step further. We have now introduced a heritage and stabilization fund. This really means that, having gone one step further, these funds that we have introduced will be placed in investments and will therefore create a

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sustainable economic activity and replace revenues from any depleting oil and gas resources. It is really so simple.

At every debate we would hear that we are only putting it there to take it out when we are ready. I assume many Senators on the other side believed that every budget debate would be: So how much you are putting? Over the last three years we put 100 per cent of surplus revenues. The Fund now stands at \$8.6 billion. We have gone a step further. In the Bill, the entire amount will be transferred to the Heritage and Stabilization Fund. We put our money where our mouth is.

What is interesting in this Bill is our whole approach in terms of deposits regarding surplus revenues. We have taken it a step further. What we have proposed in this Bill is that deposits will be made on a quarterly basis. So, Mr. Vice-President, you no longer have to wait until the end of the year and people are guessing what will happen and what will be our expenditure profile. This Government does not play games but, just in case, we are saying that deposits will be made to the Fund on a quarterly basis. This also has the advantage that, as it is going to be a US-denominated account, they will not create that huge demand for US at the end of the year in the way we have been putting it previously.

Mr. Vice-President, additionally we have very stringent measures for withdrawal and, again, with the price of oil and gas as it is now, all the gurus have predicted that we should see sustained levels of prices of both oil and gas. We have seen some falling, but certainly it will not be much over the \$40/\$45 per barrel. In terms of our sustainability and our putting aside for a rainy day, we have taken care of that, therefore that Bill will be before us in the very near future.

Much has been said on inflation, and rightly so. In our budget statement, we said very clearly that inflation is the major priority in this coming year. We recognize that it is a major challenge. The question is how we are approaching it. We have already seen a containment of expenditure. I know with the high prices of oil and gas many were already asking what was going to be the budget in terms of dollars this year. In developing countries like ours where we have some high levels of capital infrastructure, the economists will tell you that you are looking at inflation rates of about 5 per cent. It means that there are monetary and fiscal measures that must be introduced to ensure that we contain inflation. We cannot allow inflation to reach double digits. This Government is fully aware and taking all steps to ensure that inflation is contained.

As we all know, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources will be coming—I think today—so I will not go too much into our whole approach to agriculture and food prices particularly. There are two elements. We are looking at locally grown food items and imported food items. I think Sen. Prof. Deosaran was very succinct yesterday in again making the comment in terms of mark-ups on food items. Obviously, Sen. Prof. Deosaran visits the supermarket on a regular basis.

Amidst it all, this Government continues to provide subsidies in various areas. We know of subsidies at the pumps—in gas—in electricity and water and there are many social programmes which are in place to help those less fortunate.

One of the interesting features in this budget is the introduction of the Financial Literacy Programme. I am excited about this because it does two things. It should reduce liquidity, take out some of the money from the system and encourage our citizens to get into a mode of saving, particularly providing for a rainy day or for their old age.

Mr. Vice-President, I just spoke about pensions and, as you know, we are also into pension reform. However, each of us as a citizen has a responsibility first and foremost to put aside for our retirement. It is only in those circumstances that we may not have been able to put aside that there is government intervention in terms of assisting those who may not have been able to.

Nations are grappling with this problem and that is why I am so convinced that with the introduction of the Financial Literacy Programme, we will see individuals really taking advantage of savings and investment and in the whole approach to spending—that culture of spending—we should see a change. Mr. Vice-President, as a nation, we need to go back to the good old days and recognize that savings are important and how we go about it: Again, in that area, we are more than optimistic to see very much happening in that regard.

Much was said about the state enterprise sector and special purpose state enterprises. The sector remains critical to the achievement of this Government's Vision 2020, which aims to create an environment where the citizens will enjoy a better standard of life. The comments made regarding the special purpose state enterprises could be nothing further from the truth. When we just introduced the concept and there were a lot of nervous individuals, including the various chambers, TTMA, et cetera, we hosted a joint meeting where we went ahead and explained to them how the special purpose state enterprises would be structured. They left pretty assured and comfortable.

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The reason for that was that these companies really were there for execution, project management, sourcing contractors and overseeing project execution. The big question is: Why could the ministries not have done it and why do we have to persist in having it done through the state enterprise sector?

Mr. Vice-President, what is funny—not funny; this is too serious a matter to say that—is that on a one-to-one basis, when you talk to businessmen, they say: “Christine girl, how do you get the job done when the rewards system does not take into consideration the performance of the private sector and when the system of payments is normally delayed?”

I would have to refer to Sen. Prof. Deosaran again in terms of when these agencies come together whether they will speak out and say that in the situation where all the projects have been outsourced to the private sector, that benefits they have seen accruing and about the efficiency the system has allowed, particularly in terms of delivery. Too often, it seems, we criticize and when things work well we do not in the same breath say it is working. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, there is—and let me state it very clearly—I can well understand the concerns, and there must be concerns—but when the information is now shared—remember yesterday it was said that we do not share information—when you are told this is what is happening and at the end of the day these are the results, will we continue to say this is what was seen and this is what would happen when we are fully aware that the public service reform is right now in progress and over time we will certainly see a shift in these measures?

11.00 a.m.

Two years ago, this Government introduced what is called the “Supplementary Public Sector Investment Programme”. In our history, we have never introduced this. The reason is that we believe as a government we should share information with the public. We only looked at the Public Sector Investment Programme, which forms part of our budget documents. For the first year we have a separate booklet on it, which gives details of all the projects which have been carried out by state enterprises, which are using their retained earnings or borrowings. In fact, what you will see, if you refer to this, is the substantial infrastructure, which has been carried out by the state enterprise sector, may I add, with efficiency.

As a matter of fact, this year we are supposed to be doing infrastructure works in excess of \$6 billion in the state enterprise sector. As I indicated, the state enterprise sector has a very important role to play and they continue to do it in a manner which demonstrates a high level of governance.

This brings me to another area. About three years ago, when I took office, one of the measures we introduced was the publishing of the financial statements of state enterprises. A former Minister of Finance—who had a very short honeymoon of one year, who always went about saying: “I couda, I shoudda and I would have”, made some disparaging comments in terms of the publishing of the accounts of state enterprises. Let me again use the opportunity to clarify the misinformation which has been given out. When we took office in late 2001, we reviewed the accounts of state enterprises and many of them did not have accounts which were up to date. When this mandate was introduced, many of the state enterprises had to bring their accounts up to date and then publish them. The Ministry of Finance took the decision that it did not make sense to publish the accounts which were in arrears and they allowed the entities to bring their accounts up to date, which would then be published.

At this time, we have 25 companies which have published their accounts. These companies are First Citizens Bank, Business Development Company, UDeCott, YTEPP, Estate Management and Business Development Company, Evolving Tecknologies and Enterprise Development Company Limited, NGC, Petrotrin—I can go on.

Sen. Mark: What about the next 50, Christine?

Sen. The Hon. C. Sahadeo: Sen. Mark, I hope you are alert. I indicated that many of these state enterprises were allowed—their accounts were in arrears—to bring their accounts up to date. Our decision taken was to publish the current and up-to-date accounts. Many of them had to do three and four years’ accounts. We are talking about governance in the state enterprise sector.

This measure, as we indicated, has two things: all the citizens of this country are shareholders of this company. We felt that not only those of us in Parliament should have the privilege of seeing these accounts when laid, but every citizen has the privilege of perusing these and, therefore, would fully understand the role and function of state enterprises and the efficiency and governance structure.

We made the board and the management responsible. By publishing these, I am sure that greater responsibility and a higher degree of accountability was placed on them.

Another issue which was raised was the central audit. There were concerns, it appears, in terms of the functioning of the central audit department. Let me assure this Chamber that the central audit is in fact functioning and is used in implementing various audits in the state enterprise sector.

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When Sen. Basharat Ali made his contribution he seemed very overawed by the contribution made in the Lower House. I agree, the Member for St. Joseph made some very good comments. He complimented me. I think I was referred to as “soft face”. I accepted the compliment blushing. What was of concern to me was a comment made and a serious attack on the accounting and auditing profession in Trinidad and Tobago, by the Member for St. Joseph and I think, endorsed by Sen. Ali. I was concerned and confused. Somehow I felt, Sen. Ali, you must have missed those sentences. Really, the comments made were that the accounting profession, in terms of the quality and substance of their audits, was questionable and if they were to do a proper audit and bring up the issues, they would no longer be able to enjoy that audit. I have grave concerns. We all belong to various professions and one thing we must always strive to do is respect those professions. If we have concerns, certainly we need to list them.
[*Interruption*]

Sen. Ali: Since my name was mentioned, we were not questioning the quality of the audit, but the methodology. That is what I was trying to say. It is the methodology used by the public accountants such as PricewaterhouseCoopers and Ernst & Young, against the methodology used by the Auditor General. What we were really saying is that the accounting and audit methods used by the public accountants will never find any discrepancies by what they do; corruption, overexpenditures or anything else. I am speaking from knowledge. I am not speaking by guess.

Thank you very much.

Sen. The Hon. C. Sahadeo: I am also speaking from knowledge. I belong to the profession, albeit I have not been a practising auditing accountant for many years. They belong to professional bodies and they must comply with international standards. We can take a pretty good contribution and tarnish it with something like this by targeting a profession, for which I believe we should have a little more respect.

I would also like to talk a little about Caroni (1975) Limited. Again, whenever the company Caroni (1975) Limited comes up, of course, it is a topic which is still high in emotions. I have never seen an issue in which there has been so much misinformation, and deliberately so. Let me again take this opportunity to inform both the viewing public and the Members of this Parliament as to where we are with Caroni (1975) Limited.

At the outset, part of the VSEP offer included a few things. It included an enhanced VSEP which has all been paid; and maintenance, in terms of putting good the pension plan, which was seriously under-funded in excess of \$400 million. We are still awaiting the finalization of that. The database of Caroni (1975) Limited was so poor—one can understand because there are over 13,000 members in various pensions—that verifying the database has been a long and tedious exercise. All pensions are being paid and we have also made an enhancement. At a later date we will give a full update once these tenders go out, in terms of purchasing annuities. We would then come back and give you the final figures for the cost of the pensions to the Government and where we are. Pensions continue to be paid and we have done some upgrades in that area.

The other area in which there has been much misinformation has been the agricultural two-acre plots. I do not know how many of us here have been in infrastructure development. Before deciding on which lands should be put to agricultural use, as you can understand, we had to do a land use and capability survey. With acreage of over 75,000 acres, you could appreciate it took a while.

Let me get to the point. After doing all of this, we looked at 17 estates. The request was that the 7,247 employees indicated that they would like to participate in this arrangement. Albeit, this was supposed to have been closed off early, we have left it open even up to the present time. We have bent backwards and forwards to accommodate the former Caroni (1975) Limited workers.

We first did the paper allocation. You will appreciate that it was out and we asked the former employees to indicate the locations they would have preferred and we tried to manage it. It was not by a lottery draw as they said. It was a random draw—a lesson in statistics will help all of us—from which we then assigned these plots, under proper audit procedures from Ernst & Young. Therefore, it meant that we went through them.

The next step was the physical identification. To date, we have done physical identification in excess of 6,500 plots. [*Interruption*] I am proud of that, Sen. Mark. Let me explain it to you, 6, 500 plots in 17 estates meant—I was there for all the allocations. I took time from my busy schedule because, again, we wanted to inform the people. It was not politicking like those on the other side; it was because of caring for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Let me explain what the process was. For each of these sites, in the first instance, we invited 150 former employees, stakes were put in by the surveyors and they were then introduced to their two-acre plot of land. We did not give

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them a piece of paper and say: Go look. We did what is called a physical identification. Where did the confusion arise? It was not confusion, but deliberate misinformation. It was stated in the newspapers that nobody got their leases and the question was also asked: What is Government doing? Let me again assure our listening public and Members of this Parliament that what the 6,500 and excess employees got was a letter which is tantamount to a licence.

11.15 a.m.

Mr. Vice-President, let me again indicate that when the infrastructure work is completed only then the leases can be prepared. You know, those Members on the other side would be the first to have said, why are we giving them leases and we would have to change them if there is any meandering or changes, and we would have to go and rework. Mr. Vice-President, we are in modern times. We have to look at doing things differently, more efficiently and more effectively. [*Desk thumping*]

Let me explain to you why this letter is good title. [*Interruption*] You know, if my friends on the other side would listen, they would be educated today. [*Desk thumping*] Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh, let me explain it to you. When you were in the MBA class you seemed to have learnt quite a bit. [*Laughter*] Mr. Vice-President, sorry. We indicated that when the infrastructure is completed, it would mean that all the designs will be finalized and, therefore, leases can be prepared specifically. As I indicated, these licences are very much up to scrutiny. The ADB is using them in terms of giving them loans. It is being used by the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources to register them as farmers and, therefore, it means that they could get all the benefits.

With respect to longevity, in terms of when these leases over the years—as you would appreciate, these people are going to have children and it is going to be an asset. A measure of comfort is that these leases are going to be prepared. So, when they talk about these people not getting their leases they are correct, but they have not continued the sentence by saying that they are just as well positioned, and they are even better positioned. We have given them the benefit of the doubt by registering them as farmers, and it means that they can, in fact, take advantage of the various subsidies.

The mere fact we have in excess of 2,500 of these former workers being registered as farmers has certainly sent a message. In other words, we should be seeing these farmers putting these lands to productive use. They have already begun the process. I have been advised that to date there are 408 of these farmers,

by the last count, who have already begun putting their lands to productive use. It takes time to do so. It appears that my colleague on the other side would like me to take him to these locations.

Mr. Vice-President, let me now move on to residential plots.

Sen. Prof. Ramchand: Mr. Vice-President, before the hon. Minister moves away from Caroni (1975) lands and farming, et cetera, I would like to ask her a question. In 2005, Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith told the Senate that 68,000 acres of former Caroni (1975) Limited lands are reserved for agriculture. Yesterday, Minister Rowley hazarded a guess of 42,000, and from what the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources has been saying, the figure looks like 12,000. Notwithstanding the Prime Minister's pastoral objection to gambling and speculation—[*Interruption*—]—would the hon. Minister like to play a number and tell us how many acres are actually reserved for agriculture?

Sen. The Hon. C. Sahadeo: Mr. Vice-President, I am tempted not to answer that question, based on the inference of gambling, but since he is my friend on the other side, I will be respectful. First of all, all of us here debated on that Vesting Bill. Mr. Vice-President, let me again say that when that Bill was vested in June 2006 all the land then belonged to the State. Is that correct or not correct? [*Desk thumping*] Let me again make the statement here as I have done before. Parliament had no oversight of Caroni (1975) Limited lands because they resided in a state enterprise. Again, that was an option that this Government had but, again, being a transparent Government, we decided to—

Sen. Mark: We give you all pressure—

Sen. The Hon. C. Sahadeo: Mr. Vice-President, you know those “woulda coulda shoulda” things, I do not understand these things at all. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, the speaking time of the hon. Minister has expired. [*Crosstalk*]

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

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. C. Sahadeo: Mr. Vice-President, as I indicated, the land forms part of the state lands. It means that we are moving forward in terms of growth and development; and in terms of economic sustainability. For example, 2,000 hectares were assigned for the expansion of the Point Lisas Estate. We had

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a few industrial sites, because you cannot have residential communities without having industrial sites. So, we have assigned some acres for that purpose and, in terms of housing, we have allocated some lands.

Mr. Vice-President, let me say at the outset that as a Government, what you have to do when you determine where you are going to put your housing development, you have to look at all the lands in Trinidad and Tobago, and make a decision as to what is the best land; not the most arable, but the least arable where you would have your communities. That question continues to be an academic one. If I do not use Caroni (1975) Lands to build houses, I would have to use other state lands. The important thing is that we are putting lands to productive use, and it means that we are seeing the results at the end of the day. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Prof. Ramchand: Mr. Vice-President, I just want a number. At the present time, how many acres are reserved for agriculture? I just want a number.

Sen. The Hon. C. Sahadeo: Mr. Vice-President, the reason I went into those details in terms of acreages was to really inform this Parliament of the 2,000 hectares there, in terms of the few industrial sites, et cetera. I am sure that when the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources comes here he may have the answer. I can always get that information.

Mr. Vice-President, as my colleague, the Minister of Housing indicated here on Monday, there are 20,254 residential plots that will also be made available. [*Interruption*] Mr. Vice-President, sometimes I hear “we” and “them”, but we are all citizens in this country. [*Desk thumping*] The land is vested in the State.

We heard a very resounding contribution by Minister Dr. Rowley. He indicated the importance of culture. We want people to own their homes. It inculcates a certain type of attitude to family life which is sadly lacking. We are saying that we want to introduce and make sure that all our people are properly housed. [*Desk thumping*] In that regard, the Ministry of Housing, in terms of building houses—when we started this process, we really first thought of only Caroni (1975) Limited workers. They are getting priority access but, at the same time, we agree that we will increase it and we will have the introduction of mixed developments.

What is most interesting and what I was hoping for in their contributions is that the level of congratulations should have been in the revised downward pricing of this land where we are now taking into consideration a whole policy on pricing and making housing more affordable. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Vice-President, it is, in

fact, based on the site. We have worked it out. We have taken up all the infrastructural development cost, and we will now attribute a small value in terms of these lands.

In the Development Plan which was laid in this Parliament when we passed that Bill it stated very categorically that cost. I am assuring this Senate today that we are looking at revising the prices downward in terms of making a whole plan of housing more affordable. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: We were selling it at \$15,000.

Sen. Dr. Saith: You were giving it away to your friend.

Sen. The Hon. C. Sahadeo: Mr. Vice-President, I would just like to indicate and review a few of the comments made by some Senators. I know that Sen. Dr. Eastlyn Mc Kenzie is a family person and is very high on family life. Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie, you took me back a minute yesterday with your comments, in terms of legislating higher excise duties, et cetera, on both cigarettes and alcoholic beverages. I think you said something—I cannot say it like you, but I wish I could—“If you like something and if it has to kill you well, let it kill yuh.” As a Government, we need to be more responsible. We need to send a message particularly to our young people that these are the kinds of values that we want to inculcate in our young people. [*Desk thumping*] Beyond that, the bigger issue is that when we smoke and drink, what does it cost the coffers and what does it cost the Government in terms of health support.

We already have a stressed health system, it appears so from the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme (CDAP) and, therefore, let me say again, in terms of those measures there were two sides of the equation. [*Interruption*] Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh, I am so depressed, thank you.

Mr. Vice-President, with respect to the area of gambling, as you know, we fully recognized—we are not just dealing here with moral ground. The first thing that we said was that many of the Private Members’ Clubs were operating outside their mandate. As a matter of fact, their activities are, in fact, illegal because casinos are illegal. If you did not correct then, you have to correct it now. As the people in Trinidad and Tobago will say, two wrongs do not make a right. [*Desk thumping*] We have to correct it.

Mr. Vice-President, the good thing about this Government is that we listen. We came back and said that we are going to have an adjustment period; we are going to have training; and we are going to make the transition less painful. [*Desk thumping*] I know how my friend from Tobago feels.

Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie: I just want the Minister to know that what I was saying about the people who are addicts and who like to smoke and so forth, when you try to discourage them, what they were saying is that: “Ah dying otherwise and it killing meh and gun shooting, leh wha meh like kill meh.” I am not saying that I support that, but I am saying that is their attitude.

Sen. The Hon. C. Sahadeo: That is why I got confused, because knowing who you are, I know you will not support that and, therefore, I now understand. I may not have been listening very carefully.

Sen. Basharat Ali asked a few questions in terms of revenues from the energy sector. Let me again submit to this honourable Senate that when we did our budgeting for 2006, we would have used a revenue price of oil for \$45 and \$3.75 mmbtu. In fact, what we realized in the first quarter of 2006 was that we had US \$63.87 per barrel; in the second quarter, US \$64 and in the third quarter, US \$70, giving an average over the year of US \$63.64. So, in fact, the revenue outcome we saw, in terms of the results realized would not have been at the \$45 but, in fact, is what was realized which is some \$18 in excess of what we have budgeted in this 2007 budget.

11.30 a.m.

Mr. Vice-President, he asked a question, I think I also answered part of it, I will go on to that. There are other factors which contribute to the difference between revenues, which were in fact enjoyed in 2006 and what we project for 2007. We have now Train 4 which will operate for the full year, so we should get more revenue from Train 4, but we have planned down time in Trains 1 to 3 for maintenance work, therefore we have a negative impact on revenue.

We also had some ownership changes in the oil producing facilities for which petroleum profit taxes were previously paid may not be now earned as they may be in, what you call a non-tax position. Then for example, we had a situation recently where you have the impact on the Deep Ibis dry hole and again, I think the hon. Senator indicated this certainly will impact in terms of your revenue outcome for this year as this will be set off as an allowable expense.

It is no secret about the projected fall in BHP Billiton oil production; above it all, albeit, we would like to think there is a direct correlation between high energy prices and revenue from the energy sector. In fact, what prevents this direct correlation depends on the individual company capital expenditure profile and their tax planning. Mr. Vice-President, as you can appreciate, in the name of private enterprise, it is all about making money and making sure you do a good job. I just wanted to clarify that bit of information.

I know you mentioned other things, as a matter of being pressed for time. It is unfortunate that Sen. Dana Seetahal, S.C. is not here, as she had made many comments in terms of this Government being good at planning but poor at implementation, but somehow I have to spend a little more time during tea to really give her an update on what I said here, because, as I said, when you look in terms of why we had sought to use state enterprises and special purpose state enterprises effectively, it was to get away from that and make sure we delivered.

There were some concerns I think in Caribbean News Media Company and let me again advise that this company was incorporated in January 2005. The CNGTV took to the airwaves with limited content and coverage on June 05, 2006. To date the station provides roughly 50 per cent of coverage for Trinidad and it is expected to increase that coverage area to 90 per cent by the end of October. Coverage for the sister isle of Tobago is expected to be completed early in 2007. Currently CNGTV provides a content schedule of 11 hours of programming and will increase this shortly to a full broadcast. Like good governance indicates, you need to restructure when the time is right.

Mr. Vice-President, with these few words, let me conclude by wishing everyone present here and the Hindu community, Shubh Divali. At the Ministry of Finance at 12.30 p.m. today we will be hosting our Divali celebrations and my friends who spoke to me earlier, you are invited. Let me also extend to the Muslim community, Eid Mubarak and to the community at large, a very holy period.

I thank you, Mr. Vice-President.

Sen. Dr. Jennifer Kernahan: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, for giving me the opportunity to contribute to the budget debate 2007. The hon. Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Conrad Enill, in introducing this budget really should not have reminded the people of this country of the budget themes over the past four years, because all that he has accomplished was to remind us of the total failure of this Government to deliver, on all the promises made to the long-suffering citizens of this country.

In 2002, this administration promised to make "people our priority". A year later they promised to empower our people. In 2004, they vowed to ensure our future survival. In 2005, they claimed to address the basic needs with a focus on the family. Now in 2006, we are supposedly moving onward. The only problem is that since this Government had usurped power in this country using the guns of the Jamaat, instead of making people their priority, especially the most

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vulnerable, the disabled, the pensioners, the women, the children, these groups have been given the very least priority way down on the list; after multi-billion dollar complexes and Government buildings; after billion dollar tsunami centres; after multi-million dollar carnival centres, in which incidentally no stakeholder has had an input; after a private jet for the Prime Minister; way after multi-million dollar deals for offshore petrol vessels, they have been given the least priority.

These are the major priorities of the Government, while our women and children continue to be cannon fodder in the battlefield of the war being raged in our society for the control of the wealth and resources of this country, because what is happening is those who are not creaming off the wealth at the top are taking it by force of guns at the bottom.

I feel very emotional this morning, as the news of the murder of young Rehanna Ramlochan shattered our collective sensibilities. A young girl whose only crime was to go to the drugstore to get medication for her ailing mother. What was so sad is while you were reading that story this morning; while we heard it on the news this morning; in the newspaper the mother was making a heartfelt plea to the kidnapper to return her daughter before she died because she is ailing. She was kidnapped and a ransom demanded; her family was too poor to pay the ransom, but her life was not spared, because today in Trinidad and Tobago, the prevalent new gun culture is “sans humanite”.

Mr. Vice-President, how have our people been empowered? What power do workers enjoy in this country, when trade unions are falling like ripe mangoes; while thousands of workers are retrenched or being threatened with retrenchment and sent home to starve? Over 15,000 workers have been sent home in recent times: Caroni (1975) Limited, 10,000 workers; BWIA, NBN, MTS, Port Authority and we are not even talking about private sector workers who have lost employment over the last few years.

Sustainable employment and permanent employment have given way to contract work, temporary make-work programmes and schemes with the promotion of CEPEP, URP, MuST, HYPE, CCC, YAPA and myriad others. The hon. Minister of Finance spoke about our future survival, but I submit this morning that our future survival is very much in jeopardy, physically with over 300 murders already for the year and a done deal smelter plant.

Economically our survival is threatened by rampant inflation and increasing poverty in our society. Politically, our survival is at risk with the arbitrary high-handed and dictatorial manner in which this administration is seeking to

impose the very dangerous and repressive constitution of the people involving an Executive President in the tradition of Forbes Burnham of Guyana. On Government's focus on the family in 2005, has resulted the most brutal attack in the institution of the family that we have witnessed since the PNM crashed the economy and caused us to be delivered into the jaws of the IMF and structural adjustment in the late 1980s.

This unprecedented assault on the family that we are experiencing today is a direct result of the social and economic policies of this Government, not least of all their financing and supporting of known criminal and gang members, who control the depressed communities across the country, and the fact that they turn a blind eye to the drug barons and the money laundering, which is happening in the society under their very noses. The hon. Sen. Prof. Deosaran spoke about that yesterday and they pretended to be surprised and outraged when my colleague, Sen. Ato Boldon said that this country is practically being run by criminals.

The 2007 budget grandly announces that we are moving onward. However, the \$38 billion question is: Moving onward to what? Are we moving onward to more social chaos, anarchy and a growing culture of violence characterized by the murders-a-day-syndrome, to which we have become accustomed, frighteningly so? Our people are suffering. Are we moving on to more unplanned development? Because Minister Dr. Keith Rowley was here yesterday and he spoke about the Government, million dollar obsession with housing. But what about our obsession with planning? Because what is happening is that when you put houses all over the place; every nook and cranny where you feel you can get two or three votes more; what is happening is that you are placing people in a position where they are unable to access other social services such as transportation, health and infrastructural services. I drive down the bus route every morning and there are hundreds of people 6.30 in the morning, sweltering in the sun, little children, mothers and so on who are unable to access transport and you are putting more and more houses in an unplanned way because you refuse to bring a national physical development plan. This Government long ago abandoned long-term planning and therefore the people are the ones who suffer at the end.

What are we moving onward to? A society in which guns are openly carried by what can only be described as paramilitary forces, in communities that were literally dying of neglect? Are we moving onward to living with the total distortion of our culture, our sensibilities, our values, our economy, our lifestyle by a drug trade that flourishes unfettered by any legislation or institutions to deal with money laundering? How far onward are we prepared to move into a society

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which is building a huge social and economic infrastructure and is being constructed on a base of dwindling, non-renewable resources.

How far onwards are we prepared to move when the independence of important institutions, the Judiciary, the Police Service, Parliament are under attack by the Executive? How far onward are we prepared to go when apparently the new job description of the head of the Cabinet in this country is Prime Minister/AG/DPP/CJ/Commissioner of Police/turnkey. They say those whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad. This Patrick Manning administration is surely marked for destruction by the Gods, because it has literally gone mad with power. [*Desk thumping*] How else do you explain a Prime Minister standing on a political platform and predicting the imminent incarceration of his political opponents? How else do you explain a Prime Minister actually admitting in this honourable House that he told the CJ of this country to resign or be charged? Some of us are sniffing too much of our gas and dreaming of unlimited wealth and unfettered control over this country.

11.45 a.m.

Mr. Vice-President, the hon. Minister of Finance reminded us in his opening remarks that Vision 2020 has the following objectives: Poverty reduction, creation of strong families with high moral and ethical values, citizens having access to adequate and affordable housing, first class health care which enables our citizens to live healthy lifestyles and systems to support the most vulnerable.

Mr. Vice-President, with respect to poverty, this Government has allegedly targeted poverty for rapid reduction and elimination. They have been in office for five years, spent over \$100 billion, and what have they achieved in terms of their stated objectives? However, to understand this political paralysis from which this Government suffers, you have to understand the syndrome from which it suffers.

I am sure that you are familiar with the story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde by Robert Louis Stevenson, published in 1886. Dr. Jekyll was an unassuming, quiet, sympathetic doctor who was something of a scientist, but he was obsessed with the concept of living forever and he invented this potion which he drank and on drinking this potion he would turn into a homicidal maniac for a few hours. On reverting to his original state he would be unaware of the crimes he had committed as Mr. Hyde.

Mr. Vice-President, I strongly suspect that this administration suffers from the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde syndrome. [*Desk thumping*] We see all the nice laudable objectives about poverty, families and health care, et cetera, that is Dr. Jekyll

speaking and the actual performance of this administration is the work of Mr. Hyde.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: Homicidal.

Sen. Dr. J. Kernahan: On the issue of poverty what does the Dr. Jekyll side of this schizophrenic administration have to say? On Wednesday, October 11, 2006 in the *Newsday* we read, Roberts: "Poverty levels falling in T&T" and he said:

"Poverty levels in Trinidad and Tobago seem to be falling and the Government is making funding available to communities in order to help them alleviate poverty"

He also said:

"Despite claims from the opposition UNC, PNM's approach to social development put people in the centre."

He went on to say:

"In partnership with the EU government, Government has created 14 regional social centres throughout Trinidad and Tobago where poverty alleviation programmes are developed to empower persons..."

Then, Mr. Vice-President, he went on to link the breakdown of family life to poverty and he says:

"The Patrick Manning administration will continue to place focus on the family and make it a cornerstone of Government policies."

That was Dr. Jekyll speaking. What Mr. Hyde has actually done is to ignore for the last five years the concerns and the issues and the suffering of women and children and the family in this country, and more specifically, over the last two years a study commissioned by them on the status of the family which has made so many comprehensive recommendations to upgrade and support and make the family a stronger unit, in order to withstand all the modern day pressures of life, nationally and internationally.

So they have ignored their own report, Dr. Jekyll told them about this report, he made this report, and Mr. Hyde has ignored this report. They have actually turned this back on the most vulnerable: the single mothers, the children and their marginalized family. In fact, while Dr. Jekyll weeps crocodile tears for Sean Luke, for the slain young ones and the abused women and the children; the recommendations that they had commissioned are ignored by Mr. Hyde. I would

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like to look at the status of women in this society, women of the families that this administration speaks about. I am looking here at the *Initial, second and third periodic report: Trinidad and Tobago, 2002*. It is a report made to the Committee Convention, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women CEDAW.

Mr. Vice-President, it says:

“By its accession to the Convention...the Government of Trinidad and Tobago expressed its commitment to the global struggle to eliminate discrimination faced by women; and the promotion of their enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

In another part of the report it admitted that:

“Women had limited economic power and predominated in the lowest paid and least protected employment sectors. Few women occupied decision-making positions in employment, especially in the private sector, and, despite their educational qualifications, women continue to be underpaid in every sector of employment.”

They have said that this is the status; they have admitted this to the committee in a report. They also went on to say:

“The Government was committed to ensuring that women enjoyed the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health and well-being throughout their lives.”

This is Dr. Jekyll.

What is happening actually, when we look at the statistics and we look at what is happening in this country we see that the most vulnerable among us are those with the lowest per capita income constituting 79 per cent of all households. I got these figures from looking at a Household Budget Survey of Trinidad and Tobago by the CSO and the Labour Force Report 2002.

I just want to share some statistics with you and the honourable Senate. We are looking at the 79 per cent of households which are the lowest per capita monthly income. So we are looking at people like service and shop sale workers who are 10.88 per cent of all households and whose per capita monthly income is \$1,227.26; agriculture and forestry workers comprise 4.43 per cent of the total households and their per capita monthly income is \$847.63; craft and related workers comprise 20.15 per cent of the households and their per capita monthly

income is \$983.62; elementary workers, 25.86 per cent of the households and their per capita monthly income is \$831.14; plant and machine operators comprise 12.09 per cent and their monthly per capita income is \$1,202.61. These classes of workers, the poorest classes of workers, their monthly per capita incomes are the lowest and they comprise 79 per cent of the population.

Sen. Dr. Saith: For what year?

Sen. Dr. J. Kernahan: For 2002. Mr. Vice-President, what I went on to examine is based on the CIDA Report and the fact that we know that they have reported that women are among the lowest paid and so on. I looked at the female headed households; the distribution of female headed households in this country because we know that the most vulnerable families in this country are those headed by females who occupy the lowest strata in the employment sector and in terms of income.

This is what is happening with women across this country—female headed households. In Port of Spain we have 40.54 per cent female headed households; in San Fernando we have 32.67 per cent; in Arima 42.86 per cent; in Chaguanas 26.83 per cent; in Point Fortin—one of the PNM stronghold, PNM till they dead—38.10 per cent female headed households, poorest people in the country, and St. Ann’s 37.84 per cent female headed households. *[Interruption]* This is what is happening with women in this country and this is after five years, over \$100 billion and Government's firm commitment to the international treaties and, every year: to empower people, to eliminate poverty, to see about the vulnerable and so on. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. *[Interruption]*

So what are the other indicators that tell us that Dr. Jekyll is eliminating poverty? I have a report before me called Reuters AlertNet Foundation and it looks at indicators in Trinidad and Tobago and some of the indicators we looked at—when I said rampant inflation I said it advisably because in this document they quoted inflation in 2004 as 12.5 per cent. The World Bank wrote us and said, “no”.

Hon. Senator: What year was that?

Sen. Dr. J. Kernahan: In 2004 and this came from the World Bank data profile tables 2006. The World Bank said that. I did not make that up and Kamla did not make that up, Mr. Vice-President, the World Bank said it. *[Interruption]*

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I had to go to these documents to get the true picture of what is happening in Trinidad and Tobago because these documents that they give us every year are not worth the paper they are written on because all the figures are padded and is a hodgepodge of what they want to portray of their administration. [*Desk thumping*] It is absolutely unbelievable. [*Interruption*] So you cannot depend on their figures to get an idea of what is going on in Trinidad and Tobago. You have to go to the World Bank and go to reputable international sources to get the figures. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Vice-President, the share of income on consumption—[*Interruption*] We were looking at eliminating poverty and when you look at the statistics what you see happening is that the poorest 10 per cent in 2003 earned 2.1 per cent of the income of this country and the richest 10 per cent earned 29.9 per cent in 2003. So this is what is happening, the poor is getting poorer and the rich is getting richer, the income gap is widening, and you can see it.

What you see happening everyday on the streets: the anger, the alienation, the guns, the poverty, the rebelliousness among young people in the most depressed communities, this is the result of it. This is a result of that income gap widening and the increase in poverty, because people are seeing—people talk about the youths and their values and their culture and all that, but they are people too; they want to live. They see, this society encourages and this society is based on a materialistic culture and a culture of consumption.

Mr. Vice-President, who says only the rich want to consume, the poor want to consume too, but if they cannot find the means to consume by legal means all they have to do is to try to consume by illegal means. A young man has said to me that he prefers to live for five years and live bling; bling out nice, have everything he wants and so on, cars, women and so on for five years and then somebody could shoot him; he does not mind, but he refuses to go through a lifetime of poverty. That is the mindset. That is the mindset of young people in this society today. That is why they are living like that. That is why they are doing the things that they are doing. Because the society is a consumeristic, materialistic society [*Interruption*] and you cannot set an example from the top.

Mr. Vice-President, everybody in this society aspires to drive an SUV and to use up 10 million litres of gas per year and we do not care about global warming as other so-called developed countries, because we are aspiring to be a developed country. Yet we expect our children and young people to have a different set of values; we expect them to be poor, to be humble and to stay cool when the whole society is blinging out, practically.

When I look at advertisements for SUVs and so on the TV; they advertise those cars for people who have to travel hundreds of miles in rough terrain and all that. Mr. Vice-President, we buy those cars to go around the Savannah. We live in Cascade and we are going around the Savannah and we buy an SUV to do that because we have gas and we have oil and it is cheap. *[Interruption]* But I am predicting that a lot of those SUVs would be parked up at the side of the road if we do not take stock of what we are doing in this country. So do not blame the young people, blame the values that this society portrays and what happens at the top and the example that they see because everybody wants to live nice and everybody wants to drive an SUV; that is how it is.

Mr. Vice-President, we are talking about poverty alleviation and I am looking at some analyses that were made of what is happening with respect to government programmes on poverty alleviation programmes and so on and I am looking at an article in the *Trinidad Guardian* of Thursday, April 13, 2006; "Poverty survey caught up in bureaucracy 'T&T must diversify'". This was by Asha Javeed and it made some very interesting quotes from Dr. Ralph Henry of Kairi Consultants. *[Interruption]*

12.00 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, in this article, he says that it is very possible and I quote:

"...that inequality has increased and it will mean that there are some people who can spend more and spend conspicuously but I think as well, that the levels of income generally have improved."

This is what I just spoke about. He is saying that there is conspicuous consumption in this society and that has led to this inequality. He says that:

"...the nature of the growth taking place in the oil and gas industries is capital intensive which does not necessarily generate a large number of jobs."

We say that in the Senate every year, ad nauseam. He noted that:

"...the Government has created a number of social programmes, some of which were directed at creating jobs and a number of job training programmes which will create some jobs in certain sectors, but should not be seen as a long-term solution."

Mr. Vice-President, I think he said the same thing that Sen. Mary King was saying when she made her contribution in this honourable Senate. He says:

"Everything we do now is open to international competition so we still have to address those fundamental issues. How do we create a capacity among

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our workers such that they can move into sectors and contribute to sectors that are dynamic in the international economy?”

I suspect very strongly this is what my colleague Sen. Mary King was saying. And he went on to say:

“That essentially is about knowledge and skills and we actually need to do a lot right now in the short term to upgrade our workforce which is severely limited in the skills and knowledge required for competitive industries in the 21st century’...”

“The fact that we have oil and gas and we are getting revenue from it, might mask that fundamental problem’...”

We have.

“He illustrated this by using the example of the construction sector where the job primarily consists of a daylight work shift, compared to a two—or even three-day shift simply because the security situation has threatened the number of people who can be employed in productive work.”

Because he was making the point that:

“The security problem is cutting a hole into our growth and investment potential and this has to be dealt with’...”

Mr. Vice-President, I am glad he made this point because whenever we make those links, the PNM seems confused and amazed. How did you make this link between security, the economy and jobs creation, the fact that people cannot work and cannot function in their societies and in their communities and so on. When you make this link, they say you are talking nonsense. But Dr. Ralph Henry, he made the link and he is saying that unless they deal with that crime situation; unless they take the guns off the street; unless they desist from financing, supporting and harbouring the paramilitary military forces in this country, the economy will suffer.

I am saying, as Dr. Henry has said, that all these make-work programmes are short-term, but I am also saying that in the PSIP, the poverty and social mitigation services got 1.2 per cent of the budget. That is good and they should get more, but the problem is that we have to streamline, rationalize and institutionalize for the delivery of the intended output. We cannot continue like this with 10 million different programmes overlapping, unproductive—people do not even know how to access them. There are institutions, the regional corporations, the municipal

corporations and other institutions that we use, channel the people into these institutions and make sustainable, productive employment for our people, so that we can become competitive internationally. [*Desk thumping*] Is that so difficult? Everybody is saying it. Dr. Jeekyll would say it and would admit certain things, but Mr. Hyde, he has to do what he has to do.

I am saying that in order for these moneys that we spend, millions of dollars in poverty and social alleviation services, it would be better spent, if we have something like a family services centre in each community under the regional corporation and the municipal corporations, where families can access to get in contact with any other government agency. You can get information, you can get help; women, children, unemployed people can access these family service centres, get the information they need, get the help they need and be streamlined into institutionalized organizations which will bring them into productive labour and productive work. What is happening is that all these little schemes and so on are the best kept secret in any village, only the PNM people know about these things; only the village council people and the '*jéfe jéfe*' people and so on; you would not believe the depths to which those people would go to hide information.

Mr. Vice-President, [*Interruption*] no, I am talking about what I know about; I am not making up anything here. In my community, I had made it a point to start to go to village council meetings. They used to be on a Thursday afternoon, so I used to go home and present myself in the village council meetings and sit there. Do you know what happened after a couple of weeks? They changed it to Tuesday evenings. I do not believe in so much coincidence. So this is what is happening. They hide information and it is in a small circle and everybody in the village complains that it is only certain people working right through on the URP gangs; only certain people working right through in the CEPEP gangs; only certain people know about the reforestation project; only certain people know about HYPE and only certain people know about certain things. They keep the information and circulate it in a very tight circle. [*Desk thumping*]

But you know, we do not mind that too much. You know why? Because one of the other phenomena we see in these communities, I have seen with my own two eyes, mother, grandmother and daughter working on the URP gangs. That is the level of the dependency syndrome in which they have people of this country. They keep it right there and because they cannot spread it out, they have to bring in the whole family. So you would find grandmother, mother and just now you would see great-grandchildren working on some of those gangs under the PNM. That is what is happening.

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Mr. Vice-President, one of the other things that the UNC government will do, is to take a serious look at the micro credit institution. Do you know that the Nobel Peace Prize this year was won by one Muhammed Yunus who funded the Grameen Bank, a bank that started off with his lending 40 cents in Bangladesh. Now they make loans to the poor in Bangladesh and they have issued more that \$5 billion in loans to several million borrowers; at the close of 2005, the number of outstanding loans is more than \$4 million. To ensure the repayment, the bank uses a system of solidarity groups and informal groups, mostly females because they feel that the females are the ones who are more responsible and when you help a female, you help the whole family.

The micro credit institution is an important institution. It is a tried and tested institution all over the world and apparently we have paid a lot of lip service to the micro credit programmes we have in Trinidad and Tobago, but they are not moving, they are not functioning. Do you know why? Because it is too politicized. Again, it is only the PNM people know; if they see you are with them—and what is happening is that they are very bureaucratic about it and they want to repossess as soon as you maybe missed a payment. In order to break our people out of the cycle of poverty, we have to create entrepreneurs and we have to give them a chance.

It has been shown in other countries that once you give the poor people a chance, as they said, the poor people do not make joke about repaying because they want to come out of that poverty and they would try, they might fall and they might get back up, but you have to help them, you have to refinance and to be understanding. You have to look at a savings component and encourage them and you have to give them the support they need to come out of that cycle of poverty. Do not have three generations working on a URP gang and say that is the big thing you are doing for the people and everybody happy and going home every Friday evening with a couple hundred dollars. You are keeping our people back. I am like Moses, this morning I am saying to the PNM, Mr. Hyde, let my people go. [*Desk thumping*] Stop keeping them back. Tell Mr. Hyde to stop keeping back our people.

Mr. Vice-President, a UNC government would move to aggressively promote micro entrepreneurs in depressed communities. We would strongly encourage production of local consumption, as well as tradable goods as Sen. Mary King said. You have to depoliticize a programme like that, everything cannot be politics; everything cannot be about power; everything cannot be about staying there for 30 years. This is what is killing this country.

Sen. Mark: That is Sen Yuille-Williams and them.

Sen. Dr. J. Kernahan: Mr. Vice-President, we looked at health because the Minister of Finance spoke about health and about the need to improve the health of the people of this country. I am looking at a document here, Millennium Development Growth Vision 2020, Trinidad and Tobago and it is the 16th meeting of International Corporation Directors of Latin America. This is the report that came out of this meeting, Dr. Jekyll made this report. Dr. Jekyll is the nice doctor, Mr. Hyde is the homicidal maniac. [*Crosstalk*] We are looking at Dr. Jekyll's report:

“Data from the Ministry of Health indicate that AIDS is now the leading cause of death among young adults. It is estimated that there are 17,000 persons affected with the virus, although the figure may be higher because of underreporting. The national prevalence rate for HIV is 2.5 per cent. In the 15 to 19 age group, however, this figure is 7 per cent. The percentage of females infected has increased from zero in 1983 to 37 per cent in 2002. 83 per cent of HIV infected women falling in the age group 16 to 45.”

Mr. Vice-President, it says that in the age group 15 to 24, the number of infected females is higher than that of males.

So the AIDS scenario is horrible and we have seen some attempts to put some money into that area, but I am saying that not enough money is put into that programme. I am saying that programmes, jingles, marches, candle marches would not impact in any significant way on curbing HIV in this country.

The use of antiretroviral drugs and the treatment of AIDS victims is fine and I compliment the Government, that is a good thing, but you have to go to the root cause. Unless you institutionalize sexual and reproductive health in this society, in the schools, in the institutions where young people attend every day and where they can get information on sexual and reproductive health, you are not going to the root cause of this.

The jingles on the radio and the set of money they spend in advertisements so that people can earn money by advertising and so on—and it is so pandemic that we are not stopping. I have seen figures in that same document that I quoted where the prevalence rate has not decreased as has been claimed here. It is stabilized in that document at 2.6 per cent in the overall population, so the prevalence rate is not going down because we are not dealing with the root cause of the problem.

12.15 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, we have allocations; we have \$58.8 million to do programmes which are World Bank assisted; we have the Office of the Prime Minister spending \$3 million on HIV; we have the European Union (EU) funded project of \$10.5 million spent on this programme. But what is the output? Dr. Jekyll is spending all this money, but Mr. Hyde is refusing to deal with the basis of why people are getting AIDS in the first place.

If you have so many cases of unplanned pregnancies and abortion, you know that you are not dealing with AIDS. Once you see young girls getting pregnant and having abortions, you know that you are not dealing with AIDS, because those children are having unprotected sex. A lot of the social workers in this country have said that many of these young girls do not even know how they got pregnant. They do not have the information; they do not have a clue. They just grow up and their biological systems function and they go with the flow.

Sen. Joseph: They do not know how they became pregnant?

Sen. Dr. J. Kernahan: Too many 15- and 16-year-olds in the villages have to leave school because of pregnancy. There was an article in the newspapers recently where they examined this phenomenon. If you have a phenomenon in this country that is rampant, with so many young, teenaged mothers, you know that you are not dealing with AIDS. Incidentally, the fathers are not teenagers; they are always older men; that was one of the points the article made. The same way they would have gotten pregnant, they would have been exposed to the virus. The problem of AIDS is that more funding is needed. We need more focused, more directed funding into institutions.

Sexual health, reproductive rights and education must be fundamental to your approach on AIDS. Now you are "spinning top in mud". You are spending a lot of money; you are walking up and down the place; candlelight vigil every year; our people are getting sick and dying and we are moving onwards.

I want to look a little at the health situation in this country. Just to start off, just to set the stage to what we can expect of the health status in this country, I want to read a paragraph in a document by Dr. Steve Smith who is the President of the Council of the Medical Board of Trinidad and Tobago. It is frightening to me as a citizen, as an ordinary person, to hear somebody who is right up the ladder in terms of health, make an analysis like this:

"In much the same way, the profound deficiencies in the management and capacity of the Ministry of Health and the RHAs, have had their outward

visible signs in the lack of institutional attention to quality and safety, in unacceptably long waiting periods, in medical and non-medical care of indifferent or poor quality, dirty hospitals, inflexible systems, defensive complaints procedures and the list goes on. There continues to exist a shortage of Doctors in the country, the root cause of which weighs more heavily on the side of Doctors leaving these shores for reasons which hinge, for the most part, on the Ministry's historically poor performance in shouldering their statutory responsibility by turning a blind eye to long-existing systemic inefficiencies that continue to plague this country's health sector."

This is totally scary; totally frightening to the layman, because it sends a message to the population that we are in crisis.

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is going all over the place, spending millions of dollars in advertisements, shaking babies' hands, kissing old ladies and opening this and opening that. In the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) they talked about opening more health care facilities in different communities. As the Bible asks, "What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?" I ask: What could it possibly profit this administration to open all these health care facilities when all the doctors are leaving the country, they are dissatisfied and you have no rapport with them? [*Interruption*]

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. W. Mark*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. Dr. J. Kernahan: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President.

As you could well imagine, some of the figures are frightening in terms of our indicators as to how well we are doing in health. In 2002, the life expectancy overall was 71.4 years and in 2003, for some strange reason, it went to 69.9. Infant mortality in 2002 was 17 per 1,000 live births. That is an extremely high figure. That is unacceptably high for a country with all the resources that we have. Child mortality in 2002 and 2003 was 20 per 1,000. Any doctor would tell you, and we have doctors abounding in this Senate and outside, that these figures are unacceptably high.

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For example, we talk so much about Cuba; we import Cuban doctors to look after our children. Do you know what the infant mortality rate in Cuba is? They have reduced it to six and our figure is 17. I think that there are a lot of things this Government could learn from Cuba. Do you know what it has to learn first? To pull yourself up by your own bootstraps and stop looking for help all over the place to do things which you should be doing for yourself. [*Desk thumping*] That is how Cuba developed their society. They have been blockaded for over 45 years; the most illegal and inhumane blockade in the history of the world, and they have been able to come out of that with flying colours, because they looked within themselves.

They do not have any set of oil and gas, but they produce. They work hard and sacrifice, to the extent that they help other countries all over the world to upgrade their health systems and to eradicate poverty and illiteracy. They go so far as to send their soldiers to die in other countries that are fighting for liberation, like they did in South Africa.

Because Cuba has high, good indices and indicators, you feel that you could bring them here and keep them for three years to improve your health sector? That is a short-term programme, as Dr. Ralph Henry said. All these are short-term, make-up schemes. Maybe you need them in the short-term, but in the long-term, you have to motivate your doctors. You cannot have the head of your medical board so disillusioned and desperate, and have doctors leaving this country in droves, after we have spent millions of dollars in taxpayers' money to train them. So much for moving onward.

The budget spoke about the done deal for two aluminium smelter plants, on which this Government insists, against all the voices raised in this country, against the imposition of such a dangerous toxic industry. One, we do not need it. One, we are too small a land mass for this sort of industry. The countries which the Prime Minister quoted as having aluminium smelters have population densities of two and three per kilometre; one per square kilometre. What is our population density? Our density is 269 persons per square kilometre. How can we sustain such toxicity?

In the other countries they have a 100-mile radius buffer zone between the smelter plants and the nearest population. What do we have? We have 100 metres. [*Desk thumping*] What is happening? I have heard the word "mad" used in this Senate to describe different aspects of this budget, over the last few days. I use the word mad because they have gone mad with power, but this proposal, this done deal, for two aluminium smelters in such a small land mass, is

in a situation where you do not have the technical expertise to monitor what these people are doing. We do not have it; the Environmental Management Authority (EMA) has admitted that.

Do you know what is happening? Alcoa is a billion dollar worldwide industry. When they emit excess toxins into the air, water and soils and you catch them, do you know what they do? They pay the fines. No problem to pay a few hundred million dollars in fines; "dat is small ting". There is no way we could control that albatross around our necks, if we are so backward to allow them to come into our country and intoxicate the whole nation health wise: Respiratory problems, the ecosystems, the oceans, the streams; the implications are enormous. [*Crosstalk*]

Under the UNC administration we invited industrialists and international companies to come in and discuss with us what types of industries they would like to bring into this country, foreign direct investment. One of them was Norsk Hydro that came into this country and made its proposal. We did not sign anything; the proposal went nowhere and it stayed right there. [*Desk thumping*] Nothing wrong with talking, inviting and listening. It is when you go to the next step, against total public outcry and say that it is a done deal, it is a different proposition. That is a Mr. Hyde proposition. That is a serious thing.

I want to quote from comments on the environmental impact assessment (EIA) carried out by the Institute of Marine Affairs on behalf of the National Energy Corporation (NEC), in light of the proposal for Alcoa to establish an aluminium smelter plant in Chatham, southern Trinidad. They did an environmental impact assessment and they had some serious reservations. I do not know how this is going through. They have over 13 significant environmental impacts which the NEC has not indicated, in any credible way, that they are able to mitigate. Some of these significant impacts they talk about are relocation and the long-term social and psychological effects on the residents. They talked about vegetation removal; the loss of habitat for local animals; the death of organisms unable to flee or find food; compression of the animal species in the habitats and habitats remaining after site clearance.

Another significant impact they marked was alterations in topography, in landscape; more rapid run off of storm waters into streams, with increase in soil erosion and stream siltation; increased volumes of fresh water flows into near shore waters with effects on salinity, species distribution and food chain organisms in the Gulf of Paria. They talked about a significant effect being the leeching of hydrocarbons; contamination of soils. Another significant one was industrial air emissions; potential effects including emissions from the operating

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smelter that would include carbon monoxide, corrosive oxides, nitrogen and sulfur; heavy metals; alumina dust; fluorides in volatile organic compounds, which can affect surrounding communities in the long-term.

These volatile organic compounds that they are talking about are carcinogenic compounds which would cause cancer to all those unfortunate beings, meaning 1.2 million Trinidadians who would inhale them. They also talked about alterations of temperature, salinity and chemical quality of the receiving bodies. Another significant one was the potential effects on coastal erosion and effects on the stability of the coastline used for shipping activities associated with the smelter. They said that it was going to enhance coastal erosion due to the change in topography of the coastline.

Mr. Vice-President, one of the points made by the anti-smelter activists was that the EIA was not a foolproof document. You see how many significant problems we have. It does not always foresee all the environmental impacts that we would have. So apart from the ones that the scientists, to the best of their ability here in Trinidad and Tobago, are able to foresee, there are unforeseen environmental impacts that we do not know about yet, because we do not have the history of science, data collection and knowledge of the baseline status of Alcoa. So we do not know what will happen.

We are moving into this thing with our two eyes and ears closed and Mr. Hyde is prodding us along, "Done deal; take smelter." One of the points that the anti-smelter activists made was that the environmental impact assessment made for the LNG plant at Point Fortin did not foresee the total erosion of the Clifton Hill Beach in Point Fortin, and it happened. So these are some of the issues that the Institute of Marine Affairs raised.

This is the crux of the matter; they said that contributing factors would include absence of advisory or monitoring boards to reinforce corrective measures if problems arise during and after the establishment of the smelter. They spoke about total dependence on the EMA, which has little resources for monitoring site activities to ensure compliance with environmental rules. They also said that residents were unsure of the skills necessary for employment opportunities in the smelter making it difficult to prepare for such opportunities.

12.30 p.m.

This brings me to the Alutrint smelter. Do you know one of the big propaganda selling points for Alutrint is that people in La Brea will get jobs? "All yuh ain't tired sell mangoes at de side of de road?" "All yuh will get nice

sustainable jobs and ting.” And when one looks at the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for that area, it is horrible in terms of the report and educational levels especially for the males in those areas. Over 90 per cent do not have primary school qualifications and a .00 something have tertiary education. It means that very few of those people are going to qualify for any jobs in that smelter other than sweeping the floors. So this is the big selling point of Alutrint—jobs.

Mr. Vice-President, it says:

“In summary, the construction and operation in Chatham poses many significant risks during the construction phase, and moreso following the construction and operations.

Many of the effects may significantly alter both the environment and the quality of life of residents of the affected and surrounding areas and some of these effects may be permanent.”

This is the report of the Institute of Marine Affairs.

This is downplaying the implications of the smelter you know, Mr. Vice-President. Because as I said before, a hundred mile radius—and we do not even have 100 miles any which way in Trinidad—so that means every single man, woman and child in this country will be affected by the toxic emissions of the smelter plant.

Mr. Vice-President, what was interesting yesterday when Minister Beckles came to this Senate and she rolled out all these lovely plans for water waste and water resource management and so forth, I understood that we have a Water Resource Agency and it was Dr. Jekyll in full flight. But what Mr. Hyde did not tell us was that this same aluminium smelter in Chatham is situated in the apex of the earth formation, one of the largest sources and aquifer which supplies water to the entire south-west peninsula. Mr. Hyde did not tell us that. Dr. Jekyll told us all the nice things and it is up to us to understand what is happening, what Mr. Hyde is actually doing.

They are planning to pollute a major source of water in this country and they talk about digging wells and going all over this country looking for water and this, that, and the other. Who are they trying to fool? What is happening in this country? Nobody is fooled by these gymnastics and gyrations, and twists and turns of Mr. Hyde, Mr. Vice-President.

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The country is fully aware, it is mobilized and do you know what happened to Mr. Hyde? After a while, he used to take this potion to turn, but it overtook his body and he was unable to control the turning. Sometimes he would just get up and he is Mr. Hyde and he did not know how it happened. Do you know what he had to do to get out of that situation? He committed suicide. So I believe that this Government will have to commit political suicide for us to get out of their grips and clutches when the next election is called.

Thank you.

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, we are now going to take the lunch break and return at 1.35 p.m.

12.35 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.35 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Sen. Prof. Kenneth Ramchand: Thank you very much. Mr. Vice-President, before I begin, let me say that the circumstances that have changed the nature of the debate in the Senate are not going to influence me to speak in a partisan way. I think it is more than ever a responsibility of the Independent Senators to say what they really think; regardless of which party thinks we are for them or against them. I want to assure both parties that nothing I say is an attack on any of them in a partisan way. I may attack them, but not out of a party political position, or in an attempt to make one party look better than the other.

Mr. Vice-President, the first part of my contribution has four sections. I begin with a reminder of what a budget statement should do, and with an affirmation that we cannot move onward if we do not learn from our mistakes and failures. But we can only learn from those mistakes and failures if we are willing in the accounting process to acknowledge them.

My second notion in this opening section is that I want to make some comments on the accounting process as it is to be found in the budget statement. I presume that we agree that the budget presentation is in part a self-report and it must start with an account of the extent to which the previous year's targets had been met.

So let us look at the first part, Mr. Vice-President, and I will not go into it in detail. All I can say and people can read the statement to see if it is true, but nowhere in the Budget Statement do we get a detailed and specific account of what was done, what was spent, what were the cost overruns, what was started and not completed, and so on.

The budget statement is very casual about telling us how precisely our money was spent. One gets the impression from it that expenditure is an end in itself. “We budgeted to spend \$38 million, and we have achieved our target, we have spent it.” But this is a very serious matter. Accounting to the nation for money spent is an exercise that should be carried out strictly, systematically, and in specific detail. All governments are bound to report faithfully to the people; and they report, not by grace and favour, but because the people are the employers who gave them a five-year contract and all contractors have an obligation to account to their employers.

The budget statement is very casual about telling us and as I said, that is quite serious. When there is no interest in putting together a proper account, there is no interest in learning how to do better; when there is no passion to account, there is no ambition for lasting development; and when there is no such ambition, there is no belief. No belief in anything. One word sums up what bad accounting signifies and that word is cynicism. When cynicism sets in, everybody expects the worst.

My next subsection is under the title: “Expectations can create Reality.” The budget statement contributes to a sense of unease and instability in the whole society; it spreads a lack of confidence in the future among our citizenry; it feeds into a general cloud of pessimism which everybody recognizes, a pessimism which is already affecting the economy and the social life of our country in horrible ways.

How can a mood affect an economy? It is often said that economics is about expectations, not only expectations based on the facts of demand and supply but also psychological expectations, and that is why in all these economic textbooks we have to read to be able to make a reasonable contribution here, that we come across words like “confidence”, “optimism”, “pessimism” and so forth. Expectations can create reality.

A few weeks ago the gas stations ran out of gas. There was no shortage of gas, but people expected a strike and strike meant shortage, so they rushed to the gas stations and created a shortage. Expectations of a shortage created the reality of a shortage even though the strike did not take place. When the gas stations ran out of supplies, it was not easy to replenish them, it took a few days. National Petroleum (NP) did not have enough working trucks or people and could not do anything until the traffic that was gridlocked around the stations was cleared.

Sometime later in his forceful defence of the Government’s housing programme, I heard the housing Minister use the term “capacity issues” and it came to me that “capacity issues” were very much involved in the gas shortage.

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So I thought again about these gas lines and the paradoxical nature of suffering a gasoline crisis in an energy-rich country.

I wondered at the people's lack of confidence in the ability of the State to get gasoline to them the next day or the day after and I thought, if I were the Government, I would want my citizens to be always confident that supply would meet demand; that their money would be worth tomorrow roughly what it is worth today; that the simple things in life which they enjoy now will not be snatched away suddenly without rhyme or reason and that what they did not get today would still be worth getting tomorrow.

Mr. Vice-President, I disagree with many of my good friends: wage demands are not high because of optimism in the country; they are high because of pessimism. People want it now because they are not sure about tomorrow. When I looked at the faces of those people in the long gas lines, I saw the faces of people in whose collective psyche there was a ruling expectation born out of historical experience and present hardship, the expectation that there is not enough for everybody. Today it was gas; tomorrow it might be something else, but the expectation all around is that there is not enough for everybody.

1.45 p.m.

No gas at the pump in an oil and gas economy. What a paradox; what a symbol. And think of all the other paradoxes that have sprung up over the last year or so: A stock market depression in a booming economy; poor financial results from companies involved directly in the building industry in the midst of a construction boom; tight availability of foreign exchange in the banks at a time of high US dollar reserves; money leaving the country in a manner which cannot be accounted for by imports or capital transactions and in such amounts as to cause the Central Bank Governor great concern, all of this at a time when the TT dollar is theoretically under-valued with respect to the US dollar; full employment and yet pervasive worker dissatisfaction and agitation; massive public spending on the social sector and poverty alleviation and a rising level of crime and violence; an economic boom but no pervading sense of well-being; no optimism among our workers; waning business confidence; pessimism; vows by the Central Bank that they would do their best to conquer these negative things. And everywhere—the phrase is like a piece of sweetbread that I found and I like—capacity issues.

In the next section I want to talk about the stock market. This will lead me, strangely, you might think, to the price of oil. Not long ago we debated in this Senate a Bill to amend the Financial Institutions Act. In my contribution then I explained, for the first time in the Senate, how the confidence in our vibrant stock

market was rattled and then virtually destroyed by the Central Bank's enforcement of the law relating to the investment of pension funds. I referred to the loss of wealth, the cyclone of negative expectations; the pessimism which is now embedded in the psyche of the investment community.

Recently, in the House of Representatives, calculations and miscalculations about party political advantage deprived the nation of a debate between elected Members, but there was just time for Mr. Yetming to make the same case that I had made about the consequences of the regulator's action. The Finance Minister himself seemed to accept what we were saying. He noticed the state of the stock market and he, too, acknowledged its cause. He proposed two solutions. The first was to revise the Central Bank's rule from a strict percentage to a more accommodating and graduated risk-based rule.

As a matter of fact, this is the approach taken by the New Basel Accord in respect of the capital reserve requirements of the banks based on the quality of the loans they give, and this was the approach taken by Britain's Financial Services Authority on September 24, 2001, when a similar situation developed in Europe which threatened to force pension funds to sell down their equities into a declining market. The regulator was amenable to discussion, recognized the realities and adjusted the requirement promptly.

I understand that an attempt is being made to address the problem and that we are moving to work out a risk-based formula. This may take some time, and I repeat my earlier suggestion that the investment of pension funds in equities be looked at, not in terms of current share prices, but in terms of what they cost when they were acquired. So if in 1986, for instance, I bought Republic Bank shares for \$1 and now they are worth \$85, what did I invest? I did not invest the \$85; I invested \$1. So if you want to calculate how much I invested, go back to the original investment. If you do that you would find that you have an interim formula until we work out a more long-term, graduated scheme.

There are a lot of little people who have been affected by this, so I am not just arguing for the fat cats. It is true to say that the little people are sitting ducks. They do not have the strength of the institutional investors; they do not have the other resources and they do not have the time to ride the slump out. So if I have money invested and suddenly I get sick and I want my money, I am in trouble. I cannot wait for the stock market to change or for the new regulations to come about. So the little man who is being encouraged to be an entrepreneur and to invest in the economy, is taking a big hit.

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Understanding the stock market gives us an insight into the price of oil and gas which many people either ignore or never thought about. There is a greater connection between stock markets and commodity prices, including oil and gas, than many people realize. In the same way that stocks and shares have what is known as fundamental value, or an intrinsic value, the same applies to oil. Today, the fundamental value of oil is around US \$45 per barrel. This is from a report by *Société Générale*, a French bank, June 2006.

We also are finding out that oil is no different from any other asset traded on international financial markets. A bubble can develop based on unrealistic expectations which never materialize, and when the truth sinks in, the bubble bursts. The oil market, it seems to me, now meets all the requirements of what is called a bubble. The market psychology is there. The psychology is that the world will remain unstable; that the US administration will continue to taunt Iran into withholding oil supply; that insurgents in Iraq will continue to sabotage oil production; that hurricanes will continue to disrupt oil platforms in the Gulf of Mexico, and that China will continue to consume.

The oil market is governed now not by current considerations of demand and supply, but by these negative expectations about the world, expectations held by the financial speculator industry. Hedge funds investment in energy is today over US \$90 billion, up from US \$3 billion six years ago. In short, financial speculation is affecting the price of oil right now. I know the Finance Minister and his colleagues know what hedge funds are and the implications of their huge investment in oil. Hedge funds were originally designed as mechanisms to mitigate risk, but they have evolved into institutions devoted to pure speculation with no underlying risk mitigation objectives. Hedge funds do not take delivery of the product. They buy and sell derivatives of the products. In the case of oil, they buy a bet that the price of oil next month will be \$90, or \$60 or \$40. These bets themselves influence the price of the commodity. Sometimes I do not know the difference between a hedge fund and a pyramid

I am saying all of this to drive home the point, for it is not true that oil will stay at above \$60 a barrel into the indefinite future. It is not true. In the same way that we sit here assuring ourselves that the price will stay high and we rattle off a list of factors why this must be so, in the oil-consuming countries they assure themselves that the price must fall. They, too, have a list of factors. They know about the new discoveries in the Gulf of Mexico, about the bubblyness of the market, about the inevitability of the high oil price itself, causing a dampening of demand forces; they know of the signs of China's capital infrastructure

programme slowing; they know of the extra investments being made into pumping capacity; they know of the increase in oil stocks during the last year; the imminent coming on stream of new oil fields around the globe; of a growth in demand for oil already slowing; of the increasing popularity in other countries for gas/electric hybrid vehicles; of the example set by Brazil in having most of its vehicles run on domestically produced ethanol.

So they know. They are convinced it has to go down. As the oil price rises, whatever lingering forces of inertia keep these realities from the headlines, from the list of priorities of governments, these inertial forces are being blown away. The economist Freidman has acknowledged that oil prices of over \$100 a barrel would be the best thing for America, in that the implementation of existing energy alternatives would begin in earnest. I am saying that there are forces at work in the world which are going to ensure that the price of oil might return to its fundamental value and since it is not always possible to put on brakes in time, it might even go below its fundamental value before it comes back up to steady itself.

So I note that the Government is basing the budget on a price of \$45. If things change they might alter that next year. But what I would like to propose is that we should revise the estimated price per barrel of oil in the long-term and revise it pessimistically. Stop pretending that the high energy prices are normal; acknowledge that it is a windfall. If you calculate it over a period of 10 years, you would find that the present estimated value for the period of 10 years might be about \$30. Use this to prepare the annual budget. This would show the population and the world that we are serious about long-range planning because we have an agenda to make sure that for the next 10 years no recession shall take place. If you take a step like that, you will bring confidence into the economy and confidence in the people of your country.

2.00 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, as I said, I had to deal with the price of oil because the Minister of Finance said he is confident the price of oil will stay up and that the energy sector will continue to drive everything that we do. The thing that is driving everything that you do is not as stable as we might want to believe.

The second aspect of any budget is that it must declare what it is the Government is going to do in the next year and in the next few years. It must announce its plans and its projects. It must tell you how these plans and projects hang together, coherently. It must tell you we are doing this. It must tell you what it is going to cost. "We are starting at this date and by December 31, we should

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have got to such and such a point.” That is planning! We have to know what are the points you would look at to see if you are making progress. You cannot just tell me that you are going to have eight large state farms. You have to tell me whether they are going to be in Aripo; you have to tell me whether they are going to be in south Trinidad or in central Trinidad. You have to say where they are going to be.

If you make a statement that makes me believe that they are going to be 100 acres in size but you have plans to use 3,000 acres for the state farms, let us know. Why conceal it? I would like the Minister, when he is winding up, to tell us a little more about the state farms. Is it 800 acres, as one would be led to believe, reading the budget statement? Or, is it 3,000 acres? If it is 800 acres, I have to quarrel, because what kind of dent on the food supply would 800 acres make? Have we done any research to find out how many acres we need to work in order to make a significant dent? I do not know if the research has been done because the Government has not told us. We can decide, however, on the sizes of the farm and the numbers of the—

Sen. Dr. Saith: Mr. Vice-President, I am just trying to follow the hon. Senator. Is he expecting the budget speech to have all that information—10 hours of information? Has he got the budget documents—all those big documents with progress—have you got those?

Sen. Prof. K. Ramchand: Yes.

Sen. Dr. Saith: I presume you may be reading them as well?

Sen. Prof. K. Ramchand: Yes, but you know that is another trap. It is so long and fine-printed and the budget debate is—*[Interruption]* At any rate, I would expect that in the budget statement we could get an overview. How much time does it take to tell us about the farms? I suppose it might be able to be found in the yellow books, and I am going to look, and if I do not find them I am going to come back here and make noise.

I will deal with a number of projects at random because that is how they were declared in the budget—a random collection of things to do with no sense of how they interconnect with one another. I will start with agriculture. First of all, I am very happy to see that the Government recognizes that there ought to be a commercial sector in agriculture. Historically it has also been so. The slave plantations had a big commercial sector and a bit for slaves to grow their own

thing in their back gardens. The indenture period had the estates and the small people were growing their little things. That is a pattern that existed in the past, but our opportunity today is to make the commercial sector work not for an overseas interest, but in the interest of people of Trinidad and Tobago. If they carry it out, I will be very happy. I think the recognition of the importance of a commercial sector is crucial.

I am very glad to see that ECIAF is going to be put into an institution where the research and development can take place. There is a recognition that our agriculturists are perhaps not into technology as they should be and so people from the energy sector, who are supposed to be masters of technology, are being brought in to help with agricultural development. [*Interruption*] Well, it should be vice versa. Maybe they should send the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources to run the energy industries. I think it is good to recognize that there is a commercial sector which we have to develop.

Also in the Government's statement is, at least, a verbal recognition of the problem of land use. Of course, I must come back to my hobby horse. Land use is crucial and we need the Planning and Development of Land Act. If we had that there would be no smelter. If we had that we would know for certain which lands were reserved for agriculture.

When I asked the hon. Minister earlier to tell me what acres are reserved for agriculture, I was not trying to embarrass her because I know that the Report of the Special Select Committee to consider and report on a Bill entitled Caroni Limited, et cetera, that Report recommended the need to reserve 90 per cent of the lands of Caroni Limited and Orange Grove for agricultural purposes.

Secondly, the need to designate the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources as the Minister responsible for lands reserved for agriculture. I know that was in the Majority Report and I want to know if anything has been done about it. I made a lot of noise when it came to Parliament because I felt it had not been done. I do not think it is an impertinent question. We have had so many different versions. I want to know if certain lands have been reserved for agriculture and how much? Is there any way to prevent the Government from converting lands reserved for agriculture to other use without coming to Parliament?

Mr. Vice-President, I would now like to make a little plea for cocoa. Cocoa is a very special case in our economy. Our cocoa is known all over the world. I did not see anything about cocoa in the budget statement. The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources is talking about a new variety of cocoa. I

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advise that we must move in a hurry to preserve intellectual property in this. We must register this new variety before other people take it and use it, because Brazil uses our cocoas now.

Year after year, when I come here, I say if I was the Government I would put a few scientists in a room with a hole for water and food and tell them: “Do not come out of there until you show me how to grow the dhal, channa, red beans and peanuts.” Those are commodities that we are importing all the time. Every day when you walk by the streets people are eating doubles, so these are commodities that we have to target. Everybody has a big belly and cholesterol because of peanuts. We should grow our own peanuts. I want to know how to grow it.

I think that the Government's expressed interest in agriculture could show that it is a serious interest. The Government could, after wide consultation, prepare an agriculture development bill similar to the Tourism Development Bill. They should pull together all concessions, incentives and subsidies, define agricultural projects, prioritize and invite people to submit proposals for these projects on the basis that they will receive the same kinds of encouragement that tourism projects get.

Mr. Vice-President, do not tell me that there are a lot of incentives and concessions available. There are lots of incentives and concessions available in about 11 million places. We want it all together in an agriculture development bill.

I move now to aluminium smelter projects. It has been pronounced that there are two projects: Alcoa at Cap-de-ville; Alutrint at Union Industrial Estate, La Brea. The Minister said it is proposed, but it looks to me as if it has been decided. It has been decided in spite of widespread national protest. Never before in the history of our country has a local issue become such a national and international issue—[*Desk thumping*]*—because of the way people from all parts of the country are standing and saying to the Government: “We don't want any smelter!”* [*Desk thumping*] “We don't need any smelter!” “Show us what benefits come to us from smelting here.” If you want to have downstream aluminium industry, import the aluminium. America does not want smelters. England does not want smelters. It is only we who want smelters. What is the benefit?

Mr. Vice-President, I am not making any aspersion, I am just asking for rationality and common sense and for the national interest to prevail. I am not falling into the trap that is set by these people to fight them only on the grounds of environment, although the fact scientifically established that they are going to radically poison the water, Mr. Vice-President, that fact is enough for us to say: No smelter.

Let me make it clear, Mr. Vice-President, I am not against industrialization. I am in favour of industrialization, Mr. Vice-President, especially in an agricultural area—300 acres of prime agricultural land—you will put smelter on that? If you had a Planning and Development of Land Act you could not do that. If you want to have industry there—and we want to have industry down there—let the industries invite the FDIS to come and teach us how to can fish; teach us how to preserve fish; teach us how to preserve fruit. Let them come and put their money there; develop the coconut industry; develop dairy farming; let them put their money and let us have agricultural industries that feed upon the resources of the place. [Desk thumping]

As I said, Mr. Vice-President, I am not against diversification of the economy; I do not want farmers to remain farmers all their lives, if they want to go and can this or bottle this, or preserve this. I am not against that. Those of us who are opposing the smelter are not against industrialization. We are not against diversification; we are against inappropriate land use; we are against the displacement of communities; we are against re-settling people and making them unhappy for the rest of their lives; we are against converting small independent agriculturists into factory workers; [Desk thumping] we are against turning the formerly enslaved and formerly indentured into chattel labour, just one grade above slavery.

2.15 p.m.

So, I want to tell the people of Cedros—I come from Cedros—do not take bribe. You will get a fixed salary, yes; it would be bigger than you usually earn; you are working for a big company; you can get away with minimal duties; you would not have to worry or think, just turn out to work and do what they tell you to do. But that is not sweet. After a few months you will find it is not sweet because you would be surrendering to an assault upon your person-hood, to an assault upon the kind of relationship you have with the land and the place in which you live. So I beg you people of Cedros, do not take bribe. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Vice-President, I want to talk a bit about global warming. It is a fact. The earth is getting warmer and human beings are causing it. There is a very good article I would like to refer every Senator in this House to, the *Technology Review* of July/August 2006 where the work of Mr. Jim Hansen the most respected climate scientist in the world is described with some of the conclusions coming out of unchallengeable scientific work conducted over 30 years:

“Our planet faces a grave threat from global warming and climate change, which are caused largely by emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases generated by human activity...

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Atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide—the most common greenhouse gas—have shot up 32 percent in the last 150 years. Geological evidence and climate science suggest that we are approaching a tipping point beyond which sea levels will rise catastrophically.”

Ask the people of Icacos. According to Hansen:

“temperatures will rise between two and three degrees this century, making Earth as warm as it was about three million years ago, when the seas were between 15 and 35 meters higher than they are today.”

Mr. Vice-President, when this temperature rise takes place, even a rise of one degree, many major cities and the homes of half a billion people will be flooded out, and this sea level rise could take place in a matter of decades. Go to Greenland and Antarctica you would see the process has begun. The first metre in rise would obliterate New Orleans and force tens of millions of people in Bangladesh to emigrate. It will flood the rice-growing deltas throughout Asia and many other places, its effect on agriculture will be to make the food supply even more perilous.

Mr. Vice-President, I do not see anything in the budget statement that recognizes the invasion of land by the sea that has happened and would happen further, the increasing frequency of natural disasters, floods, hurricane, tidal waves. I see nothing in the budget for disaster preparedness relating to global warming; that disaster preparedness would have to do not only with mitigating the consequences, but you would have to find out how are we going to grow food when the place gets flooded out. How are we going to live under these conditions? Are we thinking about it? Are we planning for it in the long term?

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. Mc Kenzie*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. Prof. K. Ramchand: Thank you very much. So our problem is how to slow down the emission of carbon dioxide and we have to budget resources, energy efficiency, and we have to think, as I have been urging in this Parliament to think since 1995, of alternative energies. Barbados has thought about alternative energies.

The other day I was suggesting that if we want to have a CSME with partners who have economic strength the best thing we could do for them is to put money into their developing solar energy to free them of the burden upon their economies that is caused by high fuel prices—people laughed. We have to do it too. I do not see why we are not spending money in solar energy and solar energy research.

I would be so pleased, although I do like the thing that is happening on the docks, this Toronto Skyline that we are getting on the docks, if it were decided that those constructions would be fitted with solar energy so they could cool themselves and do everything they want from electricity through the sun. When the hurricane comes and the electricity supply goes solar energy is there. We really have to think about mitigation and we have to budget for it. I cannot go into more details but I hope the point is taken, but we have not in the budget looked at global warming and any of the consequences of global warming and the kinds of things we have to plan to do.

Mr. Vice-President, the Rapid Rail Project and the water taxis. The Rapid Rail Project is sometimes called a monorail. I do not know what a monorail is. I do not even know what a rapid rail is. It is not a system. It is two lines. Are we trying to re-institute a railway? If that is so, I applaud it. But when I see we are getting one line from San Fernando to Port of Spain and one line from Sangre Grande to Port of Spain, and I am told it will serve two-thirds of Trinidad's population, I want to flip. Two-thirds of the population being helped to go to Port of Spain everyday. It seems to me that the thinking here is that Port of Spain is the centre of the world and we have no intention to decentralize and we want to maintain the old colonial pattern of everything heading to the capital to ship overseas.

A major problem in this country is Port of Spain, the ghettos around Port of Spain. I am not against urbanization but one cannot have one urban centre where every Tom, Dick and Harry is going and living in a shack and coming to lock your neck. [*Interruption*] That would move the Red House too. The Red House would be a national museum. So we have the line to San Fernando, the line from Sangre Grande and we have the interchange. So everything is transferring people into Port of Spain, and I am very sorry to see that the Government is thinking about re-instituting the railway system and it would appear we have foreign consultants advising us, who are doing everything, design/build/maintain and they do not know the history of our country, do not know the history of the development of our country and do not understand the role that the old railway system played in linking communities in our country. The old railway system

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linked communities and that is what we should want to do. Bring back the railway and if you want to do it starting with these lines into Port of Spain, go ahead, but I hope you find the money very quickly to do some more lateral lines.

I do not have the time to go into all the implications of developing the regions of our country appropriately. If you want to stop the traffic problems, create urban centres in all the regions of our country. If you want to develop the education system, have a system of schools in each region of our country; if you want to reform the Constitution and have proper government, go to the regions of the country. We have a wonderful model—Tobago.

I need about eight regional houses of assemblies with the same responsibilities to deal with their regions that the Tobago House of Assembly has for Tobago, and if you do that you could solve crime, you could solve unemployment; you could solve part of the problem of economic development; you will be recreating communities, all kinds of things. This is the key. I look at the draft Constitution and I do not see anything in it about decentralization and the development of the regions.

When monorail or whatever it is comes up the Churchill Roosevelt Highway is it going to dive under the interchange or is it going to climb up over the interchange? I am trying to think about it. It looks very jokey when I think about it so I hope some scientist or obehman could describe it to me better one of these days.

I was saying that one of the unfortunate things about the plans declared in the budget is that they are just separate sets of plans, and it is true within transportation. We are hearing about the water taxis. The very name is stupid. What you want to do is to develop a system of transport around the island creating five or six different ports which would be hubs of activities, hubs of trade and so forth. The water taxi is part of the mentality that one is taking a cab to Port of Spain and there is no consideration in the plans about how you integrate and relate the roads, the water system and the railway system. I have no overall sense of transportation and communication issues having been thought about in macro terms. These foreign fellows will build these two lines for us to go to town, and if you miss the train, take a water taxi.

Mr. Vice-President, I am running out of time but I will communicate what I have to say about education to the hon. Minister. I do have a lot I would like to say but since my time is running out—I wanted to talk about inflation as well but I will get my time.

I want to close with something that has relevance to development and education which are themes in the budget.

2.30 p.m.

I will read the opening paragraph of an address that I delivered recently to the Governors General and Presidents of the Caricom region. I was asked to speak about education and development and this is what I said:

“My first response to the theme was that one was being asked to think about how education might contribute to personal development.

Incidentally, I do not think this is a luxurious question for I am drifting more and more to the view that the barbarity of the so-called developed nations, those nations whose developmental goals have been achieved, the internal sadness of these countries and their vicious foreign and trade policies can only be accounted for by their failures in personal and human development, sometimes called spiritual growth.

Looking at the moot presented to me it became obvious that the focus was not on education, as the exciting liberator of human potential and creativity, but education invested in as a means of achieving the goals set by policy makers for the development of a particular society at a particular time.”

My thesis to the Presidents and Governors General was that the developmental goals of our country are not sufficiently informed by ideals and values that come out of a proper education. A proper education is being watered down and prostituted by the economist developmental goals that education is forced to serve. It means that developmental goals have to check themselves and education has to check itself.

I will end with two quotations. One from 1792, from a great thinker called Wilhelm von Humboldt. That is what von Humboldt says about the aim of education:

“The aim of education is the highest and most harmonious cultivation of man’s faculties into one whole. This is the true end of man and for this, freedom is an indispensable condition. Only a regime of freedom can provide the manifoldness of situations, the variety of circumstances which experiments in living and learning from one another about how to live can take place. All moral culture springs solely and immediately from the inner life of the soul and can only be stimulated in human nature and never produced by external and artificial contrivance.

Whatever does not spring from a man’s free choice or is only the result of instruction and guidance and examination does not enter into his very being,

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but remains alien to his true nature. He does not perform it through these human energies but merely with mechanical exactness.”

Two hundred years later, Bertrand Russell talking about the aims of education said:

“The aim of education is to give a sense of the value of things other than domination, to help create wise citizens of a free community, to encourage a combination of citizenship with liberty individual creativeness—which means that—”

This is very important.

“...we regard a child as a gardener regards a young tree, as something with an intrinsic nature which would develop into an admirable form given proper soil and air light.”

I am glad to end with the agricultural image. I am trying to say that our developmental goals need to be refined and our education system needs to look into itself and go back to the old established human-centred purposes of education and not be misled by these economic goals and pressures that are put upon them.

Thank you.

The Minister of Education (Sen. The Hon. Hazel Manning): Mr. Vice-President, I am pleased to rise to join in this debate on the Appropriation Bill (Budget). I start by congratulating the Minister of Finance for presenting a budget which deepens the reform process of this country and what is happening in many ministries as we as a whole move onwards to Vision 2020. The budget calls for a stronger economy and effective and efficient delivery of public service and the public services identified with education, health, housing, social services and national security.

At the Ministry of Education we have responded to the call to reform and we did this from 2001 when this Government assumed office. We had to take note of the deficit of the Education White Paper 1993—2003 which had not been implemented by the previous administration. We declared that education was everybody’s business. We called on the public to come on board to assist to reform the sector. I want to report that the landscape today is very different from what it was five years ago.

I say to Sen. Prof. Ramchand that today's presentation talks about the landscape and exactly how you ended your discourse on nurturing, caring and looking after our children. Our philosophy is based on Dr. Gardener's philosophy that all our children can learn. We just have to find out how. If we can nurture, take care and till that soil we would be able to release that potential that we would find in every one of our children. When I talk reform, I do not want to talk about the Jekyll and Hyde drama. Reform does not call for drama, violence, evil, confusion and quarrel. [*Desk thumping*] I want to talk about a peaceful approach to development because there is more to peace than the absence of war. There is the chance in that peace to develop, to nurture, to produce good fruit, to cultivate and as our last Senator talked, to nurture land, in this case, to nurture and restructure the education landscape.

Let me tell you what the Ministry of Education has been doing since 2002 to today. We have shifted from a highly centralized system to one in which schools and their communities are very much involved in decision making. We now have a programme of school-based management in the system. All government secondary schools now have local school boards and we have begun to roll out a similar structure down to primary and early childhood centres. Within a month's time we will be opening the doors of our first early childhood centre and putting in place the first local school board at that level. When we talk about local school boards, we talk about the involvement of the community that is very much engaged in the development of the school.

Over the last five years there has also been a major change in the curriculum, again, talking about the release of the potential of the child and what Sen. King lamented yesterday. It is the fact that we did not seem to be creating innovative and creative people anymore. In 2003, the new national curriculum was placed in the school system. That curriculum spoke to the development of a creative and innovative citizen. We identified five traditional subjects, but more importantly, we identified three non-traditional subjects that are compulsory. They are visual and performing arts, physical education and technology education. Every secondary school must do these subjects because we feel that at the end of the day, this curriculum must be able to produce a child who is a critical thinker, problem solver, who is articulate and very much involved in the aesthetics and environment, a leader, a good citizen and involved in the technology of the day. Very slowly, we are moving with that process. It is three years, 2003—2006. Hopefully, in the next two or three years as those students leave school we would see the difference that they would make in the society.

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The new educational landscape is defined by three major approaches. The Ministry of Education is research driven. Whatever we do we gather the data; do the analysis and we stay focused and targeted. We have also looked at policy setting and policy implementation. We are not all over the place. We collect the data; write the policy; produce the implementation plan and project manage. That is how we operate. Then, we communicate. We are out there talking to all our stakeholders. There is a communications outreach and connection with our stakeholders. Our major reform policies have been built on research, whether we are talking about early childhood care, primary school, tertiary or adult education, student behaviour or performance, teacher education or school construction.

2.45 p.m.

We have used these two key strategies of outreach and public connect. We have shared with the public and we have listened to the feedback from over 700 schools, large numbers of PTAs, relevant partners, TTUTA—we meet with TTUTA almost every week—our stakeholders, staff, teachers, principals' associations, children, the community and the general public.

I am glad that Sen. Boldon is here so that he will hear that we do not live in a cocoon, develop policies and ignore our children. After five years we are now at the point where the new education landscape is one that is increasingly defined by a shift towards a well-defined quality agenda, a serious approach to education and one that talks about inclusion of everyone.

With respect to a quality agenda, there are two draft documents—two Green Papers that were laid here in the Parliament—and we are now having public consultations—one containing standards for the operation of all schools—and I am sure you will remember the Khalifa Logan issue—that standards document came out of that issue; and the other talks about quality education in general. Soon we will have the results of the public consultations and, hopefully, establish a quality assurance unit to implement our drive to standards and quality.

With respect to seamlessness, the Ministry's system is talking about a smooth fit and flow from early childhood care right through to primary, secondary, tertiary and on to lifelong learning. Whether we are talking about curriculum articulation or a consistent instructional strategy right through the system, we are talking about compatible management, organizational structures, national guidelines and policies. Right through the system we are talking about the creation of a national model to support our young people.

With respect to inclusiveness, the research shows that there are over 16 per cent or 25,000 and more children in our school system with special needs and that this number is increasing. Funding is now being provided for registered special schools, which include two government-run schools, 10 government-assisted schools and 21 private special schools. Just early this month, Mr. Vice-President, we provided over \$4 million to six of those private schools as they achieved standards that made them acceptable for funding.

We have also been mainstreaming our differently-abled students. We have been providing textbooks; we have been providing special schools for those who are visually impaired, those who cannot hear very well and those who are physically not well. In addition, the special education section of the Students Support Services Division—that is a new division we have put in place—has hired over 24 special education teachers and they are now in 60 primary schools. [*Desk thumping*] So, through a collaborative effort with the Ministry of Health, 90 per cent of infants in Year One and Year Two of the education system have been screened for hearing difficulties.

A special education council has been appointed recently, headed by an eminent pediatrician, Dr. David Bratt. The council members have embarked on writing a new policy for special and inclusive education. We believe that all our children can learn and, therefore, in the Ministry of Education we are committed and dedicated to doing everything to ensure that all our children learn.

Mr. Vice-President, let me highlight some of the key achievements in this educational landscape of nurturing and care; not one of Jekyll and Hyde, confusion, drama, bacchanal and death wish, but one of peace and calm as we nurture our children. At the early childhood level, a number of 3- to 4-year-old children benefit from the early childhood care and education system that is in place to support them. The number of children in the system moved from 7,000 in 2000 to roughly 8,500 today at a cost of \$23 million per year, but by the year 2010, it is expected that this figure would more than double because we intend to ensure that over 600 early childhood centres are built. We have to support the sector.

We have increased the salaries of early childhood teachers by 160 per cent between the years 2000 and 2006. They were being paid below minimum wage and we have trained over 2,178 caregivers spread across all of Trinidad and Tobago.

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There is now a national policy on early childhood care and education, a policy based on research, consultation and on an improved management structure and delivery of the early childhood supervision and curriculum; a system that includes an administrator and a staff of three teachers teaching in a system to support 50 students. The Ministry of Education continues to work in partnership with religious bodies and other accredited agencies in the early childhood sector.

For the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, there is a national curriculum guide for the early childhood sector. Cabinet has approved this curriculum guide to be implemented in this fiscal and academic year. You see, Mr. Vice-President, this sector is really very important to this Government because it is one of the pillars that this Government is using to eradicate poverty, the poverty that the hon. Senator on the other side spent all morning talking about.

In supporting the early childhood sector, we are determined to support the mothers, the fathers, the family unit and the community wherein that early childhood centre is placed. We are determined to place our first set of early childhood centres in socio-economic areas that are in need; areas that leave much to be desired. We are determined to train our early childhood teachers and principals, administrators and volunteer teams and give them a mandate to assist in the alleviation of poverty in those areas.

At the primary level, the primary school pupil teacher ratio now stands at 17 students to one teacher. The national average, Mr. Vice-President, is 20:1 for infants and 25:1 for Standards 1 to 5 and this is the national average agreed to with TTUTA. If we apply this national average of 25:1, the school system is overstaffed by 128 teachers, but they are there and they are supporting our system and our children at the primary level.

The Ministry of Education has increased the classroom space. The classroom space factored from approximately 13 square feet per pupil in 2000 and that classroom space is now 16 square feet per pupil. Again, conditions are better.

Continuous assessment has also been formalized in the primary sector as the national tests for Standards 1 and 3 in language and math have now become standard setting mechanisms for assessing students. Our students are now assessed in four categories—advanced proficiency, proficiency, basic and below basic. You see, Mr. Vice-President, we are putting a continuous assessment programme in the school system to keep monitoring our children, to collect the data, to understand why they are failing and when we find out why to put support

systems in place to ensure that things are better. This goes right through the primary system—Standards 1 and 3, Standard 5, Secondary Examination Assessment (SEA) and Form 3 in the secondary system where there is a new assessment programme called the National Certificate Secondary Examination.

The percentage of students in categories proficiency and advanced proficiency rose from 47.8 per cent in the year 2004 to 53.9 per cent in the year 2005.

3.00 p.m.

This year, the data is now being assessed. It is saying to us, Mr. Vice-President, that over the last two years, 2004 and 2005, our children are starting to do better. As we monitor them, we are seeing slight improvements.

With national testing analysis and remediation in place, we are seeing improvement in the performance of the Secondary Assessment Examination. Results are showing that the number of students scoring 70 per cent or more has increased from 84 per cent in 2002, to 91 per cent in 2005.

The Ministry of Education is now turning its attention to international benchmarking. We are doing a little better, but we still want to know how good we are when we measure ourselves against the rest of the world. We must remember that this is a global village and that our children are being asked to go out there and take their places on the world stage.

This year, 4,000 9-year-old public primary school pupils participated in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study known as PIRLS. We have not received the results as yet. Sometime next year we would. This study examines reading literacy behaviours and attitudes and, hopefully, we will be doing this on an annual basis.

We have also signed up with the Programme for International Student Assessment called PISA, to benchmark our children at the secondary level. We need to know how well we are doing against the rest of the world. The Government has invested a significant amount of funding in the primary school sector, which comprises 446 primary schools, 124 government primary schools and 322, or 72 per cent, are denominational schools. The personnel operating cost and capital cost of these schools are as follows: With respect to personnel cost, the Government pays the salaries and NIS for teachers and clerical staff in all schools. The board receives a grant to cover the cost of janitorial services, and NIS for this category of worker.

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With respect to the operating cost, the Government meets the full cost of government schools and provides a grant to denominational schools to cover electricity and minor repairs to upkeep the physical infrastructure of the schools. The Ministry pays for water, sewerage, furniture and equipment replacement, textbooks, meals, security, computerization and the Internet bills.

With respect to capital cost, the Government funds fully the construction of its schools. Denominational schools receive 75 per cent of construction or refurbishment cost, except for schools falling under the joint management programme, which is funded 100 per cent by Government.

Discussions are now being held with the denominational boards, as we formalize this relationship; and in time to come, hopefully, very shortly, we will be able to sign a Memorandum of Agreement with the denominational boards.

Discussions are also being held with the Comptroller of Accounts in the context of school-based management to provide a financial grant to primary schools; maybe a redeemable imprest or petty cash for primary schools and to establish sub-accounting units at district offices, as we decentralize and ensure that the schools are doing business in their districts. They do not have to come all the way to Port of Spain, Sen. Prof. Ramchand.

I turn to what is happening at secondary level. In 2001, Trinidad and Tobago achieved universal secondary education. I want to ask you at what quality? When I assumed office, there were several instances where secondary schools were being conducted in substandard educational facilities. I am sure you would remember; on top of rum shops, next to rum shops, in rum shops, under rum shops, and in many cases, in learning environments that were totally unacceptable. [*Interruption*]

I will tell you what happened to those 7,000—Small wonder then. Those students were venting their frustration in ways that sent shockwaves throughout this country. Every Monday morning when one opened the newspapers, the Ministry of Education was making the headlines. I am sure you can throw your mind back to 2001/2002. Again, the Ministry of Education got to the task and, with a combination of research, policy setting, policy implementation, planning and communication, we were able to intervene and make a difference. [*Desk thumping*] The indiscipline in the school system has improved considerably. When last did we make the headlines? If you look through the newspapers over the last three years or so, you would not see what you saw in that first year when we took up office.

A research study was commissioned and, based on its findings, we began to ask the people of this country to come on board. We kept saying education is everybody's business. Help us help children who have been placed in such situations. The people in the country responded and a number of programmes were done jointly with a number of NGOs.

For example, there was Project Peace; a programme designed to encourage students to display a range of appropriate behaviours. That took place and is still taking place. Training in mediation and peer counselling and conflict resolution is taking place. Almost annually we go out and do it. There are mediation projects and conflict resolution. Together we had a special project that talked about positive values, self-esteem and peaceful peer relationships among students; not Jekyll and Hyde and drama and confusion; but peace, growth and development.

There is a driver responsibility education project. That is a project that I particularly like. This project is done with a car company and a private driving academy firm, in an effort to promote responsible driving among secondary school students; the drivers of tomorrow. Too many young people get behind the car wheel and do not know what to do and too many of them lose their lives. We have gone into the school system and started a driver responsibility education project.

We also have an out-of-school suspension project for students who are at risk. We take them out of school for a time, counsel them and then place them back into the school system. We had a pre-carnival preparation programme with some well-known artistes, and drama workshops to encourage students to celebrate carnival in an appropriate way, drug free.

We had a project that has taken off; a homework centre project, catering particularly to junior secondary school students. We have, within the last year or two, established 12 homework centres: six with the Human Development Foundation, which is an NGO; and we work jointly with them; and two with the National Parent Teachers' Association. We gave the National Parent Teachers' Association a subvention and we have asked them to apply some of that money to the establishment of homework centres and they have done two. Approximately 140 students have been provided with educational support.

The Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs managed four homework centres as part of its Retirees Adolescent Partnership Programme. A total of 12 models have been set up, while we are attempting, in the next academic year to establish at least three centres in each educational district, to serve a cluster of schools.

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A model design for homework centers has been developed by the Human Development Foundation with the assistance of the IDB. We have a model and that is the model we are using.

The hon. Minister of Finance has called on businesses to establish homework centres at the workplace. The Ministry of Education welcomes this call, and already we have been receiving numerous requests from communities to help set up homework centres. The Ministry of Education will proceed to satisfy the demands as much as we could. We will continue to collaborate with our private sector partners and we will go ahead, because this is really a very important programme.

Then we have the Site-based Alternative Education Project, out of which we have had our technology education programme. That technology education programme has rolled out to be an even bigger programme. It is now lodged in the school system, and soon we will be having, by 2007, the first CXC Examination in technology education, where students can graduate from the secondary school system as carpenters, masons, et cetera. Reports from principals, teachers, parents and students testify to the success of these programmes, where over 108,000 of our students have participated in these activities.

Mr. Vice-President, yesterday the hon. Senator from the opposite Bench spent a long time describing how Government had done nothing for the children of this country. As he talked, I was wondering where he was all the time. The problems he described are not new problems. Those problems have been with us for a long while. They were with us when they were in Government, but they did nothing.

Now, for the first time, in the history of this country, this Government has begun to tackle the psychosocial problems that are affecting the children in our schools today.

3.15 p.m.

The Ministry of Education has established a Student Support Services Division in the year 2004. The division is charged with implementing a comprehensive system of support services on a phased basis, for over a 10-year period from the year 2003 to the year 2013; starting at the primary school level and moving on to the secondary schools and special schools.

During 2005 and 2006 the staff of the Student Support Services Division expanded from 45 to 138 to look after 237,611 primary and secondary school children who are now in the system. Mr. Vice-President, the staff consists of, for the first time in this country, school social workers; school guidance officers who are now being placed at the primary level; special education teachers; diagnostic and prescriptive specialists; and schools psychologists and, yet, they have the gall to ask what is happening with our children. [*Desk thumping*]

These staff members provide psychosocial support in guidance and counselling; process referral; diagnostic testing; special and inclusive education; parent education; substance abuse; HIV/AIDS; drug abuse; and the list goes on and on. Over the next three years, it is expected that this staff will expand to over 300 as we touch every school in our country; over 700 primary and secondary schools.

The Student Support Services Division supports services in 58 primary schools; 40 secondary schools; guidance and counselling services are delivered at 55 schools out of the 130 secondary schools; an additional 70 schools receive indirect services such as consultation and information sessions and counselling on referral; 20,000 students of Form I to Form IV have received guidance sessions; 6,000 parents have participated; 2,787 students were referred for diagnosis and strategies were implemented to increase their learning.

Mr. Vice-President, this is very important. A Literacy and Remedial Unit has been established in the ministry to focus on remediation work for students who score less than 30 per cent in the Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA). The initial phase of this programme was held in July and August of this year, and catered for approximately 2,400 students. They spent the vacation period doing reading literacy, numeracy and receiving psychosocial support for attitude behaviour change. This massive initiative for improving students' behaviour was necessary, because students have to maximize the benefits of schooling.

In addition, there are other reforms taking place in the secondary school system. The teacher-pupil ratio has moved from 21 students to one teacher in the year 2000 to 17 students to one teacher in the year 2006.

The overall performance at the Caribbean Secondary Examination Certificate (CXC) has improved as students gaining full certificate rose from 6,544 in the year 2000, to 7,617 in the year 2006 which is an increase of 16.4 per cent over five years.

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Sixth Form enrolment increased from 7,917 in the year 2001 to just over 10,000 in the year 2006. The projected target is 25,000 by the year 2015. Mr. Vice-President, through you, I want to respond to Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie who has asked us to slow down on the Sixth Form programme and to say to her that our research is saying to us that we need to do it; we need to do it especially since CAPE is now talking about non-traditional subjects.

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Minister has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. H. Manning: Mr. Vice-President, thank you very much, also to my colleagues and those on the other side. The recurrent expenditure for the secondary education level—this is really very important to us. This particular piece of information has really helped the ministry in looking at it and wondering if we are getting value for money. In the year 2000, we spent \$8,000 per child and in the year 2006, we are now spending \$14,000 per pupil, per year.

The recurrent expenditure has gone from \$1 billion to \$2.5 billion in the year 2006. Capital expenditure has increased from \$208 million to \$552 million in the year 2006. The expenditure provides facilities for all our school children. We have gone into a system—when we got there, a lot of work was not done in the school system. We have found it necessary to upgrade the infrastructure; to purchase furniture and equipment for schools that were without furniture and equipment; to ensure that there is a suitable teaching and learning environment; to ensure that our teachers were well qualified; and to improve the curriculum so that there would be improved test scores and examination passes at both the primary and secondary levels.

We are determined to create an innovative and a creative citizen; a citizen who is a problem solver, a critical thinker, a team player, appreciative of their esthetics, a person who could guide his own personal development and be a good citizen. But we have had challenges and just to mention a few of the challenges, we have had a challenge as we move to de-shift the system; we have had challenges with school construction; we have had challenges with providing and producing quality teachers; and we have been holding the challenges by the neck to ensure that we succeed.

Mr. Vice-President, with respect to de-shifting, when I got there in 2002—in the other House, I heard people saying that they de-shifted schools—what I met was not de-shifting. De-shifting is not merely stopping students from going to school half day and sending them to a school full-time and saying that you have de-shifted a school. It involves conversion of the twin senior comprehensive school. So, if you are de-shifting Marabella Junior Secondary School, you would also have to convert Marabella Senior Comprehensive School, because that is how they were built 40 years ago. They were built as twin schools; feeding one into the other. That was not happening. They just stopped one school and left the other as is.

When I assumed office, what I found was a weak and deficient attempt at de-shifting. We had to go out into the schools. Mr. Vice-President, the Senator on the other side talked about travelling 70,000 miles, but he cannot start to visit schools as yet. There are 700 schools, and to be able to clear up some of the things that happened in the year before, we had to go out into almost every school and engage the staff rooms and talk to principals and get them on board to work with us to ensure that a lot of what we wanted implemented, was taking place.

In schools purported to have been de-shifted, we found principals complaining about de-shifting being done in name only. We had to pause in some instances and fix the plight of the teachers and students in that school before we moved on, but we have started. De-shifting talks about the physical plant and we have started to fix the plant. When we talk about de-shifting, we are talking about new curriculum; we are talking about making sure that the non-traditional subjects are in place; that there are optional curriculum choices for the students; and we have to make sure that the staff is well trained, because we now need new staff in the school system to teach Forms IV and V or to teach Forms I and III in the senior comprehensive schools; and we have to talk about new equipment in the schools because we are talking about new subjects.

As we moved to de-shift the schools, we have been able to de-shift and convert, at this point in time, 15 schools between the years 2003 and 2006: Marabella Junior Secondary School; Siparia Junior Secondary School; Carapichaima Junior Secondary School; Aranguez Junior Secondary School, Five Rivers Junior Secondary School, Sangre Grande Junior Secondary School, San Fernando East Junior Secondary School, Williamsville Junior Secondary School and Point Fortin Junior Secondary School. We have also been able to convert Marabella Senior Comprehensive School; Siparia Senior Comprehensive School, Carapichaima Senior Comprehensive, Arima Senior Comprehensive School,

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Pleasantville Senior Comprehensive School and Union Claxton Bay Senior Comprehensive School. Mr. Vice-President, the result is that 77 per cent of our students today are now benefiting from full-day secondary schools. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Mr. Vice-President, where are we today? Over the period 2002 to 2006, the drop-out rate of the school population has moved from 1.0 per cent to 0.7 per cent [*Desk thumping*]

Where construction is concerned, we have completed the working drawings and we have started the tendering procedures for the upgrade and construction of these junior secondary schools. We have also completed the final designs and we have begun the tendering for the upgrade and construction of the senior comprehensive schools. We are going to continue with the upgrade of schools in this fiscal year 2006 to 2007.

Where construction and upgrade are concerned, we have completed 889 rehabilitation and upgrade projects over the years 2002 to 2006. We have put equipment in 279 schools at an expenditure of over \$1 billion in the last five years. We have shifted our responsibilities for construction and upgrade to Education Facilities Company.

Let me talk a little about construction for early childhood care centres. In another place, there was a boast that 35 early childhood centres were built, an average of seven early childhood centres per year, and that they repaired 17 of the 152 existing centres. Mr. Vice-President, there has been no research; no plan. This was really done in a *vaille que vaille* way. I have already put on record in this Senate what the World Bank has said about the early childhood centres that were built by the other side. The fact is that over 90 per cent of these centres that they have built and that they are boasting about have to be replaced and rebuilt, because they do not meet the OSHA requirement.

3.30 p.m.

The centres that we are building are constructed to international standards—that is why they fuss so much; they meet the OSHA requirements; they are to be sanitized twice annually in accordance; they meet the requirements for earthquake codes; they meet the requirements for hurricanes and tornadoes; they meet the requirements of the modern curriculum, complete with computers and the sites are secure with preventative maintenance very much in mind.

At the primary level, we have been given the task to rebuild over 20 primary schools. Contracts have been awarded and foundation works have begun; St. Paul's Anglican, Icacos Government, La Sieva RC. Working drawings have been completed and tendering has commenced for the following schools: Tranquility, Arima New, Paramin, Arima West, Fanny Village, Cap-de-ville Government and Brasso Seco RC. Final designs have been completed for a number of schools governed by the denominational boards: The Maracas SDA, Rousillac, Lengua and Harmony Hall Presbyterian, Penal Rock Road, Belmont Boys, Mon Repos, St. Mary's Government. We are currently in the process of tendering for the preparation of designs for other schools.

At the secondary level, the Ministry has completed all designs, working drawings and tender documents for 13 junior secondary schools, 16 senior comprehensive schools and 29 projects are ready for construction. The design of the remaining 14 secondary schools are expected to be completed by March 2007.

In addition, the Ministry of Education is right now building 142 pre-engineered classrooms for schools that are now being de-shifted. We have completed the ARCON building on Alexandra Street. This was a hole left by the other side; left in the grounds of the Ministry of Education for the last so many years. The new Ministry of Education headquarters is now under construction and we are about to alleviate the horrible overcrowding problems that now attend the staff of the Ministry of Education.

Sen. Mark: Thank you very much, Hazel. We shall keep our eyes open.

Sen. The Hon. H. Manning: Mr. Vice-President, I know I have only two minutes so I want to talk about our exam results today. Because of all that we are doing the success of our students continues to excite and to motivate us. In spite of the many negatives we hear from the other side, our students continue to excel in so many ways. Because of all that we have done the results of this year's external examination is a case in point. Forty-seven students from Trinidad and Tobago were among 250 recognized places worldwide at the GCE A levels. [*Desk thumping*]

As we move from Cambridge to CAPE, because that is what we are doing, five students were recognized for excellence in performance in the 2006 CAPE examination in the Caribbean. One student received the top award, the Dr. Irvin Award for the most outstanding performance in CAPE. [*Desk thumping*] They have only now begun. Our annual scholarships have increased from 256; that is what we gave last year; because our students have done so well we now have 272 scholarships for our students this year.

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Through you again, Mr. Vice-President, I would like to say to Sen. King that a large number of those students getting scholarships got scholarships based on math and science. We are pleased that approximately 77 per cent of the secondary schools with sixth form classes have adopted CAPE; it is a more relevant examination. It is project-based, it is research-based; it is designed for the world of work. By the year 2008, CAPE is expected to be undertaken by all secondary schools in this country with sixth form classes.

Finally, we continue to focus on curriculum vision and implementation with priority being given to literacy, English language, mathematics, technology education. At the primary level, we continue to develop the music programmes in schools—and our music festival this year would have shown you that—by the provision of instruments for pan, symphonics and other programmes, and by the training of teachers and support of vacation camps we will continue to do that to ensure that our schools are doing well in our music programme.

There is no turning back; the education landscape of our country has changed; student behaviour is improving, so too student performance. Principals, teachers, students and parents now have the opportunity to work together for the holistic development of this nation's children, as they find themselves on school boards and they work hard on those school boards. The major partners and stakeholders give continuous input into the private sector and they are becoming more and more involved. Research is ongoing; funding is available; the physical infrastructure is being upgraded. It is up to us all to embrace the opportunity to make a difference for future generations. And so, education, I stoutly maintain, is everybody's business.

I want to thank all those who worked hard and long with us over the past five years. I want to especially thank my staff at the Ministry of Education led by Permanent Secretary Jack and her executive team. [*Desk thumping*] I call on the Members of the other side, especially the Members of the other side; I call on the national community to join with this Government to deepen their involvement and commitment to making our education system more relevant and more responsive to building a better nation.

Thank you very much.

The Attorney General (Sen. The Hon. John Jeremie): Mr. Vice-President, I rise this afternoon to speak on not simply the numbers which are contained in the fiscal package for the service of Trinidad and Tobago presented by the hon. Minister of Finance, in respect of the Ministry of the Attorney General, but also of the contribution to the national life, our social fabric and discipline in Trinidad

and Tobago that the Ministry has made in the stormy years to date, and will make with God's help in the turbulent year which is to come.

Many of my predecessors who have spoken in a debate such as this, have usually done so to account for the expenditure of the sums appropriated by Parliament in the previous year, and to point the way forward in relation to spending priorities in the year ahead. I intend to stick to that tradition, but the Ministry of the Attorney General is also in the position this year to contribute to the Government's revenues in a direct and quantifiable sense. That is a role never before associated with a Ministry like that of the Attorney General which essentially at its core provides services to other ministries and the public at large.

The fact that the ministry is in this unique position, that of contributing in direct terms to Government revenue, has absolutely nothing to do with me. It has instead everything to do with the circumstances which we inherited when we took office.

When I took the oath almost three years ago, I pledged as my predecessors have all done since Independence, to do right by all manner of citizens without fear or ill will. I took that oath with a sense of pride, but also a sense of humility. I wish to contribute to the national good and in particular, to introduce the concepts of right and wrong in the conduct of public life and the nation as a whole.

In the three turbulent years that I have been in office that covenant has been tested, but I have not regretted for one second, the choice which I have made. I would not have exchanged the challenges which I have faced for anything else. I have been made to feel comfortable and I have been encouraged by the support of the Prime Minister and each and every single Member of his Cabinet, here and in the other place, who I am proud to call colleagues.

Mr. Vice-President, I knew then that difficult times were ahead; I set a very simple personal goal. That goal was consistent with and identical to the high standards of principle and transparency, which the Government had set itself after a period of systemic corruption. Between the years 1995 to 2000, and in particular, between the years 1998 to 2000, this country experienced what we can only describe as a series of questionable, little or no value added ventures in the energy sector; in the arrangements for the supply of water; in the arrangements for the generation of power; in the construction of our national airport; in the paving of our roads and in many state corporations which can only be described today in the light of what is now known to be what I call inter-generational crimes.

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Now, I call those things inter-generational crimes because although they are perpetrated by individuals who are here today with us, they affect generations yet unborn; our children and their children are affected. There were allegations then that wrongdoing reached to the highest office in the land, the office of the then Prime Minister. The challenge of conscience and principle was to attempt to apply the rule of law; that ideal that we are all equal before the law to all Trinidad and Tobago.

This Government met a wilderness, a wild west of corruption in 2001. Corruption is the abuse of any public office or office of trust for private gain. It affects every single one of us in a tangible way. Corruption imposes an indirect tax on citizens; it entails high economic and social cost and results in the reduction of public revenues. It retards investment and economic growth and weakens the rule of law. It could only have been the almighty that intervened to collapse this wild west in 2000. It would be remembered that the Government fell then, not in an election, but in historic circumstances when the then Attorney General felt that he had had too much of the corruption which we saw.

3.45 p.m.

I want here and today to publicly congratulate him on his courage and to dispel from the national memory what has been repeated time and time again by my friends opposite. For they say that they were robbed of office by us on this side. The records cannot lie. Our history will show for all time—

Sen. Mark: Get the affidavit.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie:—that it was corruption and former Attorney General, Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj—[*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Mark: Abu Bakr. What the records will show. [*Crosstalk*] [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: The records will show for all time that it was—

[*Mr. Vice-President pounds gavel.*]

—corruption and former Attorney General, Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj that did them in.

Hon. Senator: Exactly.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: Every man here corrupt.

Sen. Mark: He sold out to BWIA to—[*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: Mr. Vice-President, at the meeting of the G8 countries in Gleneagles in July 2005—

Sen. Mark: FCB, write off.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie:—it was stated that millennium development goals cannot be achieved, particularly the eradication of poverty and disease, unless developing countries rid themselves of corrupt regimes and establish effective strategies to combat corruption. How then, does it lie in their mouths to speak about poverty rates which they created and ran up to 35 per cent and which today stand at 17 per cent?

The Lord Chancellor wrote in the foreword to the United Kingdom Draft Corruption Bill in 2003 that:

“Corruption worldwide weakens democracies, harms economies, impedes sustainable development and can undermine respect—”

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, we have not had this type of behaviour for the day, and I just ask you to be mature enough to understand. [*Interruption*]

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh, you are going to have your chance to do all of that for a full hour if you like. Sen. Mark, if you are interested in having that done, let Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh be prepared to do it. Please do not interrupt.

Sen. Mark: Why should I not interrupt?

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. [*Interruption*]
The Lord Chancellor wrote in the foreword to the United Kingdom Draft Corruption Bill in 2003 that:

“Corruption worldwide weakens democracies, harms economies, impedes sustainable development and can undermine respect for human rights by supporting corrupt governments with widespread consequences.”

The World Bank has acknowledged that the cost of corruption is a major obstacle to reducing poverty, inequality and infant mortality [*Interruption*] in emerging economies. World Bank research shows that countries which tackle corruption are able to improve the rule of law and can increase their national incomes by as much as four times in the long term. Child mortality can also fall by as much as 75 per cent.

Mr. Vice-President, simply by dealing with corruption, the economy has grown. If Members on this side steal, we punish them. [*Interruption*] No one is above the law. [*Desk thumping*] That simple fact releases resources into the economy. [*Interruption*]

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Mr. Vice-President, not millions but billions of dollars have been lost in this economy. [*Interruption*] I have, myself, seen the tracks of the money. We are looking not at millions of dollars but billions of dollars.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: Mr. Vice-President, I stand on a point of order.

Hon. Senator: What is the point of order?

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: The Attorney General is privy....

Hon. Senator: What is your point of order?

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: What is the Standing Order there?

Sen. Mark: You go ahead and make your point.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: The Attorney General is quoting from issues in which he, himself, is involved in the court of law and there are certain matters before the court of law which are *sub judice* and he has said that he has seen for himself information. [*Interruption*] So therefore, we are asking that the Attorney General desist from dealing with information before the courts of law because they are *sub judice* at the moment. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. AG, if there are matters that you are dealing with that, in fact, are before the court and pending a judgment, please desist from it.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: Mr. Vice-President, I am well aware of the Standing Orders and I have not referred to any matter which is before any court.

Sen. Joseph: Or anybody, or identified anybody. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: Mr. Vice-President, we are looking not at millions but billions of dollars in cash, incentives waived, in bribes paid. And so, if we spend today billions of dollars to improve health, the standard of living and national security, that is money which need not automatically derive from oil and gas, it may come simply from the fact that we on this side adhere to principles of good governance and the highest respect for the rule of law. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, it is a fundamental principle of public office that public officials are expected to serve the public honestly, impartially and disinterestedly. Officials entrusted with public power receive that power not for their benefit but for the benefit of the people. [*Interruption*] So when in the estimates you see that we spent \$20 million in the Office of the Attorney General on investigating corruption, that is money well spent, and I will tell you why in a minute.

Mr. Vice-President, something is coming and they know. They are staring down the barrel of a gun this afternoon. *[Interruption]* Offices of trust include politicians, judicial officers, public servants, officers of the armed forces, police officers, officials of service providers for or on behalf of the government and executive offices. *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Vice-President pounds gavel.]

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, I wish to draw the attention of the Senate to the fact that I have requested sober and mature behaviour in this Senate, any further disruptions of the nature, I am going to have to deal with seriously.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: Mr. Vice-President, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is mindful of the fact that corruption is both a symptom and outcome of poor governance. The rule of law principle is designed to provide discipline in government and discipline in society. In short, it is designed to ensure that Government is subject to law. No wild west here! The aim is a harmonious community whose laws and government would progress from just and purposeful arrangements.

Mr. Vice-President, think about this. One of our former colleagues, independent Senator Prof. John Spence is on record as saying that crime as a problem will not be solved overnight. I say the reason for that is simple. The problem did not appear overnight. And I want this nation to remember that crime at the level of the leadership of a nation will be reflected in crime throughout the nation. If you set that example at the leadership level then you must expect it from those who follow us. *[Desk thumping]*

We suffer today because we have had a lack of leadership and order at the top. That is the most benign interpretation that I could put to the fact that a criminal convict held the reins of power in this country.

Sen. Mark: Excuse me, Mr. Vice-President. On a point of order.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: Mr. Vice-President, therefore must be—

Sen. Mark: Mr. Vice-President, on a point of order!

Sen. Joseph: What is the point of order?

Mr. Vice-President: Get to the point of order, please.

Sen. Mark: I want to refer you to Standing Order 35(5) and it says:

“No Senator shall impute improper motives to any Member of either Chamber. ”

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He is saying that the leadership of this country who he is referring to is a convicted criminal. He is talking about Mr. Basdeo Panday, a former Prime Minister who is still a Member of Parliament and under the Standing Orders it is totally inconceivable for an attorney general to be referring to this and violating Standing Order 35(5).

I call on you, Sir, to ask him to withdraw that statement.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: We had a similar incident yesterday.

Sen. Mark: Do you remember what I told “Stretch” yesterday; same thing!

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh! Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh, please! Please! Hon. Senators, I have listened to all that is being said. I paid particular attention when the first point of order was made and I have not heard the charge that you are laying coming out. Please, Sen. Mark! [*Interruption*]

The Attorney General said, if crime exists at the highest level in the land those beneath will—[*Interruption*]

I would like to ask the Attorney General in the circumstances, please do not point fingers at any individual. Please do not name any individual and certainly do not make any references to any individual who might be a Member of this Senate or another House.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, all that I will say is that I know the Standing Orders and that I did not intend to breach them and that I did not breach them, as you have correctly ruled.

There must be consequences for that. When the leadership fails, there must be consequences for that. At the very least, it must create a culture of indiscipline. Ultimately, that lack of discipline must lead to criminal activity. And if today we are sowing those seeds then we can only tackle them by a steadfast and courageous will in each of us, particularly us as leaders, to do right by our people.

Mr. Vice-President, this is the crisis which saw the Government come to power in the elections of 2001. While my previous focus in the three years past has been on facilitating enquiry, in the next financial year my focus will be on punishment and recovery. Beginning today, [*Interruption*] the focus will be on collecting [*Interruption*] and returning the money stolen from the people of Trinidad and Tobago and on punishing those who have stolen the money.

The change of focus from enquiry and prosecution is led by one factor, it is the success of the Ministry in those areas, enquiry and prosecution in the year past. We have already made a start on restitution and punishment. Over the last

year, the Ministry of the Attorney General, in fulfilment of its constitutional mandate recruited and paid for premier counsel who led the first successful prosecution in a corruption-related matter of a senior politician in Trinidad and Tobago. And if it is said that all that we focus on is talk that is—

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. Joseph: What is “senior politician”?

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: So whom is he referring to? [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. Mark: He is referring to Basdeo Panday!

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: The matter is before the court. The matter is before the Appeal Court. [*Crosstalk*] How can the Attorney General be so derelict and irresponsible, going back into a matter that is before the court, Mr. Vice-President? It is before the Appeal Court.

Sen. Dr. Kernahan: But if the Prime Minister could say he is going to lock up people—[*Crosstalk*]

Sen. Mark: The matter is before the court.

Sen. Joseph: What matter? [*Crosstalk*]

4.00 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Jeremie, I would like to suggest to you that because of the kind of emotion attached to whatever interpretation there is, for your references, you do not make them as you do.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: Mr. Vice-President, I do not know about—

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh, I would like to suggest to you, for the last time that you make note of all that you are saying and you are free to talk about it. You have one hour. If you want to spend your hour talking about that, then go ahead, as long as you do not breach the Standing Orders.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: Thank you—

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh, am I going to have your cooperation? Am I going to have your cooperation?

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: Full respect, Sir.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, the truth often hurts. If it is said that all that we focus on is talk, that is a result, successful prosecution. I am not talking about any—I am trying to keep within the Standing

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Orders and to keep within the strictures which you have placed on me, not to hurt people's emotions. That is a challenge, but I can promise to keep within the Standing Orders. After due process in a court of law, that convicted politician was fined and ordered to pay \$1.6—

Sen. Mark: Mr. Vice-President, on a point of order. He is talking about a convicted politician; he is talking about Mr. Basdeo Panday. His matter is before the Court of Appeal, and he is a Member of Parliament. There are Standing Orders that say you cannot impute improper motives. His matter is under appeal, and he is saying that he is a convicted criminal. Mr. Vice-President, I quote the Standing Orders and I ask you to rule on this matter for the second time, Sir.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark, I have considered it and I have listened, and the Attorney General did not impute improper motives. Sen. Jeremie, I would like to suggest to you, again, because of the emotional nature of the approach you are using, I ask you to temper what you are saying, please.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, again. Will I get injury time? The point is that, I am simply trying my best to report, as it is my duty to the nation of Trinidad and Tobago, in respect of moneys which the people of Trinidad and Tobago have spent, okay. That is my duty. It is my role and once I keep within the Standing Orders, then as I understand it, I am fine. I do not wish to hurt anyone's feelings. I love all of them, but such is life.

Mr. Vice President, in the FWOil matter, I am tallying up the work that we have been doing and the benefits that we have gained—\$1.6 million so far—millions, we have not reached billions as yet, we are getting there. In the FWOil matter, another questionable undertaking which took place during the period that I refer to, as the wild west, the people stood to lose US \$150 million. Because of certain restrictions in the Arbitration Agreement, we have been unable to say, before today, what I am about to explain.

This matter had the potential to bring significant financial damage to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, damages in the amount of US \$150 million, that is, US \$1 billion; TT \$1000 million was sought by FWOil. We no longer have to worry about it because the State has emerged victorious in the arbitration proceedings. But, the allegation of corruption was against highly placed persons in the service of the State and in positions of trust and confidence at the relevant time. That is to say, persons on behalf of the Ministry, argued successfully and in spite of the act of state doctrine, which would say that the actions of one minister, would carry over to bind the State because it is one State, the State ought not to be

held liable, even in the face of evidence that a named government minister, under the former administration was accused of blocking the project for his own personal interest. It was alleged that the Minister acting in his own self-interest and without board approval had inserted the final paragraph in a letter—the letter withdrawing the award from FWOil to advance his own pecuniary interest. FWOil then did the logical thing; they sued the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is now a historical fact that under our stewardship this claim was successfully resisted. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, I add \$1 billion to the tally, so I am now at TT \$1.16 billion. Similarly, amid widespread allegations of fraud and corruption in the procurement of the Water Services Agreement between the State and Desalcott, the State commenced an investigation into alleged fraud and corruption—alleged, I am not saying anything—in relation to the validity of the WASA agreement. That investigation is also now complete, and the first round of criminal charges has now been laid in respect of that matter. I can say no more on that matter and should say no more on that matter at this time, that would be to go contrary to the Standing Orders, and I would not do such a thing.

On August 23, 2006, however, the State initiated civil, proceedings seeking relief in respect of that fraud because we have discovered, by experience, that criminal proceedings and civil proceedings launched alongside are invaluable, if aggressive tools in the fight against corruption.

Sen. Mark: Mr. Vice-President, on a point of order. Those are matters, as the hon. Attorney General said, which are before the court. Why are we using the privilege of Parliament when something is sub judice? [*Desk thumping*] He has now indicated that the matters are before the court, Sir.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: Mr. Vice-President, I said at one point, I would go no further and I went no further. Now in respect of a strategy, I speak of civil and criminal proceedings being launched at the same time. It is a matter of strategy; it has worked well for us and I make no apology for it. Now, if successful, taxpayers stand to save some \$175 million every year for the next 20 years. I am not good with those sorts of figures, but I think that amounts to some \$350 million or \$3.5 billion as a best case scenario; so that the tally goes up to TT \$4.65 billion.

Mr. Vice-President, I am coming to a matter of real interest to my friends opposite. The Airports Authority has now finally terminated its service contract with Calmaquip. Over the past five years—I must be allowed to say this—

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taxpayers have spent more than TT \$140,977,922.40 in payments to Calmaquip under an alleged contract. I say that this afternoon in the Senate—

Sen. Mark: Mr. Vice-President, on a point of order. This matter is before the court, Calmaquip and again, we believe—

Mr. Vice-President: Is that matter before the court, Mr. Attorney General.?

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: Mr. Vice-President, I am reporting on the payment by taxpayers under a contract. This matter is not before the court. It is not before the court.

Mr. Vice-President: Please proceed.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: Mr. Vice-President, I want the nation and the people of this country to know now, let this word go out to every citizen of this country at this hour, that the Government of the United States of America has conducted its own criminal investigation into the Piarco matter. That investigation is now completed as far as the Piarco Airport is concerned. No one can say that tiny Trinidad and Tobago told the Government of the United States of America to launch a criminal prosecution. No one can say that we influenced the system of justice in the United States of America, but, before they speak of innocence and guilt, I want to report on a matter which they should be happy about this afternoon. It is a matter which they should be happy about.

I have the distinct pleasure this afternoon to bring some closure to this matter of fraud in the construction of the Piarco Airport. In the *United States v Raul Gutierrez, Eduardo Hillman-Waller, Rene Diaz de Villegas, Armando Paz, Richard Lacle, and Calmaquip Engineering Corporation*, I have been advised by the Assistant United States Attorney that each and every one of these accused persons has agreed to plead guilty in the United States and even as we speak are cooperating with law enforcement in Trinidad and Tobago with the one exception—

Sen. Mark: Mr. Vice-President, we call on the Attorney General to withdraw the statement. He has indicated this matter is before the court. No closure has been brought to it; the matter is before the court. Why is he using his power in a matter that is sub judice? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark!

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: Mr. Vice-President, if I may? This is not a matter before—I said the United States of America versus X, Y and Z. First of all, it is not a matter before our courts; and secondly, I am announcing what the Members should be happy about, which is a plea agreement. If I plead guilty to a matter, it is not before the court.

4.15 p.m.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: Mr. Vice-President, I stand on a point of order. The Attorney General is referring to matters before the local and international courts. The names of Gutierrez and all these persons from Calmaquip are before this court and the American court; so the hon. Attorney General is wrong. He himself knows the laws of Trinidad and Tobago and since he knows the laws and disrespects his own laws, something is very sad in the State of Trinidad and Tobago; this is why we are seeing anarchy in this country. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. Montano: Mr. Vice-President, if I may, Standing Order 35(2) says it very clearly, that no matter can be referred to, if it is before the court, in such a way as to prejudice the interest of the parties. It does not say that you cannot refer to it. What the speaker must not do is to speak in such a way as to prejudice the interest of the parties. A few months ago, [*Crosstalk*] we had an entire debate on an issue that was before the courts in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Crosstalk*] [*Mr. Vice-President pounds the gavel*]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark!

Sen. Mark: The Attorney General is out of order.

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, I have listened and the first question I asked was whether the matter was before the courts in this jurisdiction. I have no clear knowledge as to—[*Interruption*] Sen. Mark! The Standing Orders do not say if the matter is before the court in Trinidad and Tobago or in the international court. It says, "before the court". The Attorney General has told us the outcome of the matter. I would like you to proceed, please.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President.

The citizens of Trinidad and Tobago should be happy that we have had guilty pleas from all these persons. [*Interruption*]

Sen. Mark: Mr. Vice-President, he is again violating your ruling.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: Those pleas should be entered into in the next week, because they have not yet been sworn. [*Interruption*] At this time, details cannot be stated. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Vice-President: Could you just move on from there.

Sen. Mark: Go and have a press conference!

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: Details of the plea agreements cannot be stated. *[Interruption]* *[Crosstalk]* Two of the accused, Raoul Gutierrez—*[Interruption]* *[Sen. Mark rises]*

Sen. Mark: Mr. Vice-President, he continues to violate your ruling.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark! Sen. Mark! Hon. Attorney General, please, proceed past that matter, kindly. You have reported the outcome; I would like you to proceed, please.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President.

I have said nothing and propose to say nothing more on that matter, beyond to report on the result of it. That is what I did this afternoon. I think that all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago should be proud of that.

I would like to express my gratitude, and this, of course, I am allowed to do, to the Attorney General of the United States, Alberto Gonzalez, my colleague, who has provided steadfast leadership in this matter, and to the EUSA agent, Richard Gregoire, who has been tenacious in his resolve in this matter.

This reveals that the Government is not simply paying lip service to international best practice laws. This is not talk; it is results, commitment and resolve. The Government is living by these norms and enforcing them without fear, favour, affection or ill will and without political party affiliation. One law for all: rich or poor, big or small.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: Is the same law for you.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: As Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago and as a Member of Government, I am entrusted with the duty to ensure that the expectations of the public, as they relate to the exercise of power of officials, are realized. I also have a duty to ensure that national development is not undermined by corruption.

To that end, the Government has prosecuted the corrupt with vigour; without regard to class, race, or political affiliation. Our record on this speaks for itself. *[Interruption]*

Sen. Mark: Do you have a Land Rover, PBZ? *[Sen. Mark raises document]*

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: All the assets which I own, I have paid for with my own hard-earned money.

Sen. Joseph: Do not respond to him.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: I did not, as Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh did, have to answer to the courts on a criminal matter involving the use of a car. [Interruption]

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: Mr. Vice-President, he has gone down a dangerous path and I want to get your protection here this afternoon. [Mr. Vice-President rises] He is now—[Interruption]

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, I am on my feet.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: Thank you.

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, I am on my feet.

Hon. Senators, since yesterday I asked for maturity in this Senate. There was a situation where a Senator on this side spoke about a matter that a Senator on this side was accused of raising. I asked for maturity and we proceeded very calmly. Sen. Mark, you are now flashing something and you do not call it imputing improper motives; desist from that. It is the response to that, that you are upset about.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh, I am asking for us to observe that the Standing Orders state that when a Member is contributing, we should allow that contribution to go on. If we do that in a mature manner, then we will not have these problems. I am asking for the crosstalk to be cut down, cut out and I am asking that you do not disturb, so that nobody would have to respond in the matter that he or she would feel to respond. I am asking also for the Attorney General to proceed and not get into any crosstalk with the Senators on this side, in order to protect Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, for your words of wisdom. [Laughter]

I am coming to the end of my contribution. [Crosstalk] My colleagues are saying that I should spend some more time. [Crosstalk] [Laughter] [Interruption]

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, the speaking time of the Attorney General has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to. [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: Mr. Vice-President, I would feel hurt, under normal circumstances, because I moved an extension of his time yesterday, 15 minutes extension, but the truth is painful. [*Laughter*]

My contribution cannot be complete without a reference of the other branch of the State. I have spoken about the Executive and the Legislative branches. [*Interruption*]

Sen. Mark: We got a bounty hunter for you, boy.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie: We must remember that there are three branches of government. In relation to the Judiciary, our involvement in the defence of the administration of justice has had to be measured by our respect for the separation of powers. We have been criticized by those who do not understand that judicial independence is important for precisely the same reason that the Judiciary itself is important. An independent Judiciary is all that we seek, for if a Judiciary cannot be relied upon to decide cases impartially and according to the law, not based on external pressures and influences, its role is distorted and public confidence is undermined. When this occurs, all is lost.

In democratic societies, an independent and stable Judiciary contributes to the equitable and stable balance of power between and among the government, the individual and society. It protects the rights of the individual and preserves the security of the person and the right of property. When considered in the context of the Government's wider purpose, it is clear that judicial independence cannot mean a lack of accountability.

Constitutional safeguards which facilitate judicial independence can strengthen the resolve of a judicial officer in the proper exercise of his adjudicative function, but such safeguards cannot be regarded as a substitute for personal integrity or a hedge of protection to the corrupt. I say no more on this matter, but that we cannot in this nation afford a broken branch of government.

I am delighted to have had this opportunity to speak in support of the budget. All things being equal, a general election is due and I hold office by virtue of appointment and not election. While I have put a preliminary figure of \$5 billion to our efforts in support of the national good, I must confess that our core function in the Ministry of the Attorney General is the delivery of an intangible good.

I choose to describe it in the imagery of John Winthrop, not because he was a Puritan—the leader of the party opposite, in the other place, described the budget as being puritanical—but because he described the rule of law principle to which our Government has committed itself steadfastly and without regard for consequences in accurate imagery.

When Winthrop spoke of the task of assembling a government he said that we must always consider that we should be as a city upon a hill; that the eyes of all people were upon us. Mr. Vice-President, 300 years later, Kennedy said that this meant that our government, in every branch, must be as a city upon a hill constructed and inhabited by men aware of their great trust and responsibilities.

That task is ultimately the task of a just government; a government which acts consistently in obedience to the rule of law principle. That is the intangible good which the Ministry of the Attorney General has the onerous responsibility to discharge; to ensure that every branch of our Government: legislative, Executive and judicial, should be a beacon to all who look to us.

Thank you, Mr. Vice-President.

Mr. Vice-President: We shall now take the tea break and return at 5.00 p.m. to continue the debate.

4.29 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.01 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Sen. Wayne Munro: Good evening, Mr. Vice-President, I rise in this honourable Senate to make my contribution to a document that was presented in the other place whose title the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Budget Statement presented by the Hon. Patrick Manning, Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, 2007 Vision 2020: Moving Onwards... Dot, dot, dot; three dots to increase prices.

We on this side have a caucus; we come together and go through different areas before we make our contributions. The reason is that we want to be logical in our approach, we also stick to the topic at hand, but permit me, Mr. Vice-President, I also need your protection.

Yesterday, when I came into this Senate a number of persons from the other side approached me and said: Sen. Munro, three plus one is four, you are sitting on seat No. 4 and they told me that four represents dead man. They went further to say that two individuals who sat on that seat have gone on to the great beyond.

This morning I came very early, I am a person who believes in probability, I like probability, and I removed the seat and it is now on the other side. It is a choice between 25, 24, 23, or number 22.

Sen. Abdul-Hamid: “Yuh is a obeah man?”

Sen. W. Munro: Mr. Vice-President, all I can say is that the chair is now on that side. [*Laughter*] And statistically, the probability that a person sitting on that chair now is one, that is the probability. With reference to the probability that there is somebody sitting on that seat now, after hearing the contribution of the hon. Sen. John Jeremie, I see why that probability now is one after that contribution. The reason is that he claimed that if the head is bad, everything is wrong—which is true. If you have a fish and the fish head is rotten, it indicates that the whole body of the fish is not good. He is also concerned about the issue about fighting criminal elements in the society which is good, a novel achievement.

I am asking the head who made that contribution—I am going to be relevant and intact—what about the transfer of BWIA to Edward Acker & Associates? What about the FCB write-off of customer debt, Mr. Vice-President? What about the La Brea Industrial Complex? These are also issues in the public domain that need to be addressed. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, I am not going to talk about other areas like Project Pride, I am not going there. I am not going to talk about the sale of National Fisheries, I am not going to talk about the sale of Farrell House Hotel because I want to be relevant and to the point, so I am not going there.

Where will I go? I will talk first in passing in terms of an observation, and in life it is good to observe things. From things you observe you can get some values from them. One of the observations I made was by Sen. The Hon. Christine Sahadeo. She spoke about having statistical qualities in calculating statistics and right away, that peaked my curiosity because recently I ran an Anohar analysis, and I am sure she is familiar with that analysis. It is a statistical technique, and with that technique, I tested a null hypothesis of non-performance and an alternative hypothesis of performance and after that test the p-value was very high. So therefore, it means that we go with the h-notes in our country. [*Desk thumping*] I am not showing off, we went to the h-notes, which I will prove in a while. I want to meet her at her level, as she indicated she is the statistical guru and knows about statistics.

I know she is bright and for those who are good at mathematics, I will define the PNM policies as a matrix and non-matrix and if I have a non-matrix and multiply it by another matrix I will get back a non-matrix, a zero matrix. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Vice-President, I am not straying, I am sticking to the point. As an observation, I would like to talk about the contribution of Sen. The Hon. Hazel Manning. A very, very good contribution, but while she was making her contribution do you know what I observed, Mr. Vice-President? I calculated the number of times persons on that side pounded the desk in support of her contribution—10 times, and two persons out of 12 give her that support: the hon. Sen. Chin Lee and the hon. Minister. If I am looking at frequencies and probabilities it says something. On this side we have a caucus and we support our members on this side. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, permit me to continue under your protection.

Sen. Kangaloo: You cannot ask for protection when you are throwing stones.

Sen. W. Munro: Mr. Vice-President, the main objective of the budget presentation is to develop a non-energy economy. Before I continue, I would like to ask if there is an error at that point. When you say a non-energy economy is it a typographical error by this administration? I need clarification. You are to develop a non-energy economy? Any economist will tell you it is an error.

Through you, Mr. Vice-President, it is either the non-energy sector and if the objective of the Government is to develop the non-energy economy, Trinidad and Tobago is known as the energy economy and at the start of the document, as a declared objective to run this country there is an error. It should read: to develop the non-energy sector, using the revenues from the oil sector to develop the non-energy sector, not the non-energy economy. That is point number one. There are several cases which I went through and I pulled out a number of errors to that particular document.

I support the view of Sen. Mary King who in this same place made a statement that the quality of information from that side is left to be questioned. [*Desk thumping*] Because the saddest thing is that there are people watching on television, there are children who are preparing for the SEA examination, and persons doing CAPE via A levels and what have you, and seeing an error like this will know something is wrong. So the person who allowed the hon. Prime Minister to present that information should be disciplined because it is a disgrace, not only to this Senate, but the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Notwithstanding that, Mr. Vice-President, the main object in the budget presentation is to develop a non-energy economy/sector—until the adjustment comes—that is diversified. The non-energy economy/sector, dynamically, internationally competitive, the non-energy economy, one capable of generating self-sustained growth, a non-energy economy with high quality jobs in the non-energy economy and improved service to all the population.

The document goes on to state that once these objectives are realized there would be the nurturing of a caring society. These objectives, there is an error up there, but caring society. Notwithstanding that, I am going to continue and to move away from that point because I do not want to be repetitious in nature. The Government ensures that:

1. poverty is rapidly reduced and eliminated;
2. the creation of strong families with high moral and ethical values that all our citizens will have access to affordable housing.

It continues to say first-class health care that enables them to live healthier lifestyles and of supporting the vulnerable in our society.

Mr. Vice-President, if I look at policy and objectives, it is important before you do a critical analysis of the objectives that were just stated you must know what they mean. I cannot produce a debate on policies or objectives just stated without knowing the meaning behind each of them.

An economy that is diversified. When one talks about a diversified economy, it is one that is dependent, not only on one source, but on a number of sources for its survival in terms of revenue generation.

The non-energy economy is internationally competitive. To be internationally competitive, one must be able to stand on its own on the international scene. One must be able to provide a good commodity, be it oil or services, not crime that will stand out in the national scenario.

The non-energy economy, one capable of generating self-sustained growth. When one talks about self-sustained growth, one talks about an economy that is able to grow over time, to grow along what is called a knife-edged growth path. Once there are fluctuations in the economy, the booms and slumps once able to travel up a growth pathway as overtime and national income increase where there is equity for all.

5.15 p.m.

The non-energy economy with high quality jobs, employing a large number of persons in the different industries and improving the service to all the population—if I am improving service to all the population it means that all sections across the board, at this juncture, must be able to deliver a particular package of service up to international standards, that all would be acceptable in the eyes of the international community.

After going through a definition now of what these parameters are, one should go and look at the budget in a critical way to see what this budget has in it for the poor man on the street. Upon a close examination of the budget presented, it reveals that the PNM Government has abandoned its responsibility for improving the lives of the people living in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] They do not care about the poor! They do not care about the underprivileged! They do not care about you, me, nobody in this country and I have facts to prove it, straight from the documents which I will pull in a while.

The question that poor people on the street are asking is this: Will the budget cause prices of food to rise in this country? The answer is what? Yes, it will. I will prove it. I have the documents all here. The implementation of a Manning budget will cause prices to increase across the board for all commodities in Trinidad and Tobago. I will prove it. The Government policy to issue smart cards to some members of the community is not fair. Why is it not fair? Because a large number of persons in the country are experiencing hardship as a result of rising prices and only a limited number of persons are being issued the smart card. All in this country are facing rising prices of foodstuff and only some are receiving smart cards in the economy.

There is a perception on that side—not an economic perception—that the issuing of a smart card will cause prices to fall in this country. That is wrong. I will prove it. I have it all here. If you issue a smart card, that will not cause the prices to fall in the economy. [*Interruption*] I am coming to you in a while; give me a chance. However, since the perception is not realistic, the issuing of a smart card for food will not prevent prices from increasing. With the rate of price increases in this country under the PNM administration, the immediate impact is that the smart card will lose its value.

I ask the question: Will the PNM Government issue a smarter card that will be able to rise at a rate that is faster than the prices in the country? Will there be a smarter card, one that will grow with prices in the economy? Or is it one that is

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just smart and constant? [*Desk thumping*] If the smart card is supposed to be smart and prices are increasing across the board in Trinidad and Tobago, the card is not smart. Why? Because the value of the card is not increasing over time. But if you have a smarter card, it means that as the price goes up, the poor person in this country is able to maintain a particular basket of goods and services. The reason is that the Government cannot control inflation in this country.

I turn to the document. The document itself says that—and I am quoting directly. Please permit me. It says, in the other place:

“I am sure that the nation will appreciate”—

Mr. Vice-President: Is that the *Hansard*?

Sen. W. Munro: I am quoting from the budget speech at page 7:

“I am sure that the nation will appreciate that one of the major challenges we face has been controlling inflation.”

It is an admission; it is a challenge—one of those challenges. It would also indicate there are a number of other challenges that the PNM Government is not able to address in this country. It goes on:

“We have targeted an inflation rate of 7 per cent but keeping inflation below this target has been difficult and the rate has risen to 9 per cent, year on year, as at the end of August.”

This statement simply states two things: One, that in addition to not being able to control inflation and thereby cater to the poor in Trinidad and Tobago whose prices are increasing daily and are suffering because of these prices, there is one problem. There is the admission that it is one of the major challenges. There are other challenges and these challenges are affecting the poor man on the street and someone must talk on behalf of the poor man. [*Desk thumping*]

The Government identified some of the causes of inflation. The document goes on to talk about the “lagging agricultural output”. Lagging agricultural output means that there is a time trajectory in place or a cobweb-type of analysis. In a nutshell it means that if I plant today, I am not going to get my output tomorrow. There is a time period within which I plant and the product will be available sometime in the future. So they are saying that the cause of inflation is lagging agricultural output. Once you have lagging agricultural output, it means that there is a shortage on the market. It impacts on the supply side. It is a simple demand and supply analysis. With a shortage, the supply would shift to the left, causing high prices.

The other rationale given is that reduced imports from other Caribbean countries are causing the shortage. A third factor has been higher cost of imports increasing. It says further:

“As a result, reducing inflation is a major priority in the coming year.”

Under this administration, year after year after year, they come to this honourable Senate and say that reducing inflation is a major priority in the coming year. It is the same thing year after year. The poor is getting fed up of those statements over and over. Why? It is not impacting positively on the poor. However, the Government is neglecting a major factor that is causing prices to rise in Trinidad and Tobago. I will explain.

The Government is creating inflation via what you call inflationary tendencies. When the Government goes on the air and announces that it will put measures in place to curb the prices of rental accommodation, soon after that the economy experiences increases in the price of rental accommodation. It is forcing prices up via expectations and the non-action on the part of the PNM Government. When the Government goes on the air and announces that it is putting measures in place to control the price of construction material, we see that the cost of construction material increases overnight—expectations again.

Since the price of gasoline is expected to increase this year, will the Government issue a smarter card for all motorists? A major cause of increased prices in Trinidad and Tobago is the implementation of incorrect government policies. These incorrect government policies do more harm than good for the poor of this country. It is a PNM government that stated that it did not know that increases in the price of gasoline would cause prices to increase in this country. It did not know that. It is a PNM government that claimed it did not know that shutting down the sugar industry would mean that the poor would have to pay more for imported sugar in this country. To date we see that the country is unable to meet its EU quota on the international market, resulting from the closure of Caroni. It is a PNM government that claimed it did not know that limiting the licence for quarrying would cause the cost of construction material to increase in this country. It did not know. What it knows, I do not know.

Where is the care for the poor and the underprivileged by the PNM Government in this budget? The PNM Government does not understand the relationship that exists between economic variables and what policies to implement to tackle prices in Trinidad and Tobago. The poor are faced with increased prices because they are neglected by this PNM administration. In other words, all of us, including the poor,

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will suffer under the PNM administration because the Government cannot understand the effects of cause and effect and its impact on economic variables in this country. Can the PNM Government truly say that it is seeking to improve the lives of people in Trinidad and Tobago? The answer is no.

I now turn to the other issue which is health care. Yesterday at a graduation ceremony an eminent businessman stated that health care and inflation are two issues that are not addressed in this country by that administration. Today, in this honourable Senate, I agreed with the hon. Sen. Sahadeo. She said at 11.30 in this Senate: "We already have a stressed health system." Check the *Hansard*. It is written down. She said so: "We already have a stressed health system."

Sen. Enill: What is the point you are making?

Sen. W. Munro: The point is this: Health is regarded as a fundamental right, and a social need for health improvement results from the intrinsic part which health plays in developing the human being and society as a whole. [*Desk thumping*]

In this regard, the efficiency of resource use in the health sector remains a critical concern, because the poor people are being affected by the poor health system that that administration is running right now. [*Desk thumping*] The PNM administration must realize that the promotion of health care is a public concern. This stems from the fact that the awareness of the need to raise health standards partly from the fact that in the component of the socio-economic fabric, the quality of life means that it could impact upon improving the human resource and thereby improving the national income, the economic development of a country. [*Desk thumping*]

Health care can generally be regarded as a merit good. A merit good is a social good that should be available to all. If individuals are left alone to purchase health services in this country, they might not consume socially desirable amounts or the price may be so high that the poor man may not be able to afford such commodities. Health can be categorized in three groups: Primary health care, secondary health care or tertiary health care. In the case of primary health care, it deals with basic cuts and bruises, preventative measures. You have the secondary health care facilities which require, let us say, simple hospitalization, and the tertiary health care facilities require major surgeries and operations and such like. In the area of primary, secondary and tertiary health care the PNM has failed the country in all aspects. [*Desk thumping*]

5.30 p.m.

Permit me to look at experiences from other countries. A review of the experiences in the delivery of the health care package in countries like Cuba and China has shown that it costs the government less to prevent communicable diseases than in administrating them. In the case of Trinidad and Tobago there are a number of problems in the health care system. In passing I will mention them. For a poor person, the health centres are not distributed equitably across the country. This means that patients will have to travel long distances before they access levels of health care from that institution. At these health centres a ceiling is placed on the number of health patients who can receive a particular health care package at a particular time. Patients who go to the public health care system are often referred to the general hospitals, since at the other public health institutions are shortages of either drugs or some diagnostic equipment.

I go now to Government's policy in terms of the budget relevant to the point. The Government stated in its presentation that the Government will institute measures to curtail the importation of foreign used vehicles. To solve the problem of traffic congestion the PNM Government is proposing instituting measures to curtail the importation of used vehicles. This policy of reducing the choice of the poor man to own a vehicle is a step backward. [*Desk thumping*] This would mean that the poor would be prevented from owning an asset that can be used as a form of safety to transport their loved ones, as opposed to being exposed to the risk of crime in this country at junctions in taxis and maxi-taxis. Taking away the choice from the poor man by denying him from owning a car as a safety method is actually putting the poor man in a disadvantaged position. The policy of reducing the ownership by the poor is leaving the poor vulnerable to elements of crime in this country.

Additionally, when a poor person owns a vehicle it means that he or she can use this vehicle as a form of collateral at a financial institution, in which they can purchase some consumer durables. When I say consumer durables I mean what? He can use it as collateral to purchase some form of consumer durables to make life happy for himself and his family. Former Caroni workers cannot do that. All they have is a piece of paper. To what extent can they go to the bank with that piece of paper to transact business to get collateral loans to purchase things for their families? I question that. Heads of Government's policies of car importation would enable the poor to remain poor.

One should also consider the increase in unemployment that will result from the closure of a number of foreign used businesses in Trinidad and Tobago across the board. The foreign used car market, Minister of Education, contributes to the education of the young and the poor. These foreign used cars institutions act as institutions of learning, where some young people are exposed to training in auto mechanics, auto body works and auto electrical works and such like, just to name a few of the contributions in the area of training that these foreign used cars institutions provide to the development of the human resource in this country. It is sad to say that all would be lost under the PNM policy to reduce the importation of cars.

To date, a number of individuals from other Caribbean countries come to Trinidad and Tobago to purchase parts. Where is the Caribbean unity? Such parts would either be in short supply or their prices would be very high. Where is the Caribbean unity? The ban on cars in Trinidad and Tobago would increase the cost of car parts. Simple economics. You ban it, you would increase the cost. Supply reduced, price goes up, normal demand supply analysis.

A taxi driver who is faced with high prices for parts would pass the high price of those parts on to the travelling public. This would mean that the public would have to pay more for transport in this country. The result is that there would be a spill-over effect in terms of the impact it would have on all cost related items in Trinidad and Tobago. I expect the Minister of Finance to come to this country and population and make the statement that he did not know that banning cars would cause the prices of all items to increase in Trinidad and Tobago. There is a cause and effect relationship between government's policy, implementation and final results.

We in the UNC know that relationship. What does the budget say about the level of future employment or unemployment in this country and the issue of employment creation in this country? I am quoting from the article.

We have chosen to pursue the option of creating a new national entity using as a base a restructured BWIA: Caribbean Airways.

Government's policy to change the ownership of BWIA, putting it simply will mean hardship to those who will be retrenched. Persons who would be retrenched have families. These families would suffer given that they would not be able to provide for their families in the future. It is a hard thing to come home to a family and you have been retrenched from BWIA. What about the families and businesses that depend on the individuals working at BWIA? In economics there is something called a negative multiplier effect which means that one person

unemployed, will spill over to a large number of persons unemployed in the country. In Trinidad and Tobago the multiplier is high. Why? Because of the interrelationship between the variables within our economy. Once you have a high propensity to consume the value of the multiplier would be high. Once you are over the margin of propensity you consume is equal to the multiplier. It means that there is a high margin of propensity to consume and therefore, there is a big multiplier effect in the economy.

Hon. Senator: [*Inaudible*] [*Laughter*]

Sen. W. Munro: If I use advanced LM analysis which looks at the money supply market and the money demand market, on one hand, I have the goods market and within it I am looking at investment and saving in the economy. The combination of investment and saving—I am answering your question, Sir? The combination of investment and saving is the real side of the economy. There exists a monetary side to the economy that deals with money supply and also money demand. That is at the Masters level now, Sir. I hope I am up at your level. [*Laughter*] Money supply, and money demand. Then, the equilibrium in the markets would drive prices up in the economy because of the distortion that would exist in the country. Is that high enough for you? [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, I was responding to the hon. Sen. Abdul-Hamid who is trying to test my abilities in economics. I can also offer them economic advice if they would like that. Some consultancy services at minimum cost. I could if they want. [*Interruption*] Additionally—Mr. Vice-President, I need your protection. I need your protection. I need your protection. I need your protection. I am being disturbed.

Additionally, the retrenchment would result from the outsourcing of air travel activities. To date, as we speak, there has been the outsourcing of one factor, accounting. Soon there would be the outsourcing of the airport consumer services, then the call-in centre. The downscaling of activities within BWIA will cause additional unemployment in this country. A former breadwinner from BWIA out of a job would mean that persons and organizations that depended on that breadwinner would be placed at a disadvantage in this country and not improving the life of the person.

The PNM Government is ensuring that they are entering a number of chapters. One chapter, close Caroni; next chapter, close BWIA. I assure you that at the next general election the people in Trinidad and Tobago will close the chapter on the PNM administration. [*Laughter and desk thumping*] Mr. Vice-President, I am

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new to this thing. I am new to this thing. I am new to this thing, Mr. Vice-President. Protect me again. Protect me, Mr. Vice-President. I am new to this thing. I am the youngest in the House. Protect me, Mr. Vice-President. I need protection from the PNM wolves. Protect me, Mr. Vice- President. I need your protection, Mr. Vice-President.

The crime rates, the hon. Dr. Lenny Saith said that he cannot protect me from the crime rate. Why in periods of plenty in this country people are experiencing tremendous hardship, suffering and mental anguish? Why? Improving the lives of citizens requires improving the level of safety by reducing the level of crime. The UNC knows how to manage crime. We know how to manage the crime. We managed crime with less money. [*Interruption*] I do not want to go in this course of direction.

Every night I see this big white elephant flying overhead. The big white elephant has no eyes. Why? One eye in the sky is in Port of Spain and the other eye in the sky is yet to be found. How could it fight crime?

5.45 p.m.

[*Interruption*]

Mr. Vice-President, I do not want to go there, I am saving that for the political debates. Crime is not important to the PNM Government since a comprehensive policy on crime was not stated in the budget presentation. It means that on the part of the Government's inaction and no statement on crime at the point, when the nation was listening, that they were marginalizing crime in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

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. W. Mark*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. W. Munro: Mr. Vice-President, I thank you and all Senators for extending my speaking time.

I am now moving on to a more sober area. I am looking at an international travel advisory dated October 18, 2006. That is when?

Sen. Joseph: Today.

Sen. W. Munro: Hon. Martin Joseph, are you sure that is today? This travel advisory, Mr. Vice-President, states:

“Tourists should be aware that there is increased levels of violent crime, especially kidnapping and shooting in Trinidad and Tobago.”

[*Interruption*] He said today.

Sen. Joseph: Mr. Vice-President, let me clarify. Let the Senator indicate when that advisory was issued, and not when he took it off the Internet. [*Interruption*] It was issued today?

Sen. W. Munro: Mr. Vice-President, it was updated October 17, 2006. It was updated last night and it came today, so it is recent! It went on to say:

“The British nationals have been victims of recent violent attacks, particularly in Tobago where law enforcement is weak.”

What impact will this have on the tourist industry? If you ask me an opinion, I would say the best Minister of National Security we have ever had, under that administration, was the hon. Sen. Chin Lee. [*Laughter*] He was very good. [*Desk thumping*] They cannot touch him.

Mr. Vice-President, this is to the hon. Sen. Chin Lee. A theoretical contribution; clear and high on theory—[*Interruption*] I use another word for the Senators on that side. I would say it was a laptop analysis. Probably the hon. Senator needs to leave his laptop at home and visit Fort George. I carried a number of visitors to Fort George and the conditions and facilities at that location are deplorable and the road is horrible, for a national asset in Trinidad and Tobago. In my view, it is one of the best sites in the world and I have travelled. To know that something as beautiful and lovely as that has been neglected—By whom? The PNM administration.

During the contribution of Sen. Chin Lee yesterday—Mr. Vice-President, I want to clarify something because there was a little misunderstanding and I want to clear the air for the record. While he was presenting his information I got a sense of *deja vu*; I heard it before. [*Laughter*] I immediately called to the efficient staff of this Parliament and asked them to pull for me his speech he gave on the last occasion he was in the Senate. Mr. Vice-President, I was able to follow word-by-word:

“That website was one of the most visited sites in Trinidad and Tobago.”

Mr. Vice-President, I followed word-for-word. Then I reached a nice part, a part I could not follow because he was actually adding to it—I want to give support—and he mentioned the purchase of two boats—

Hon. Senator: Jet skis.

Sen. W. Munro: Two jet skis, I stand corrected. He said jet skis, two this, two that. Then I said: “but the twos are not here; twos, twos.” Then he said: “No, I am not—Are you saying that I am talking—” I said: “No, no, no, I am picking up from you that it is not here and I heard “two, by two, by two.” “Two of this was purchased.” The purpose of finding out why the numbers were purchased was to determine how much was to be allocated for Trinidad and how much for Tobago. It was clarified afterwards when it was stated that all the items were purchased for Trinidad.

In terms of his contribution, he levelled an assault on our Political Leader, Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. In that attack that he levelled against her, I think he made—[*Interruption*] Mr. Vice-President, I do not want to respond. In the other place they were looking to call out the dead from among the living and the dead was not there. This is the living; let the living talk! [*Laughter*] You wanted the dead to talk down there; up here is the living; leave the living let them talk.

Mr. Vice-President, on page 233 of the *Draft Estimates 2007*, Item Nos. 62 and 66, as well as on pages 62 and 66, you would realize that the Leader of the Opposition was talking about the cumulative travel to the ministry and the entertainment allowance allocated to that particular Ministry. I needed to clear the air on that for the record.

Sen. Chin Lee: Mr. Vice-President, on a point of order, I was reading directly from the speech and it said that she said: “For travel it was \$60 million.” I was correcting what she said. She said I was a high-flying Minister. The only thing I sought to do was to correct that it was \$650,000 that was allocated for travel. You might be reading something wrong as well.

Sen. W. Munro: The purpose of the statement is the cumulative. You are a high flier; your ministry is a high flier. The ministry is a high flier and the aspect allocated to the ministry is a high flying ministry. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Vice-President, we on this side will not support a budget that is a basket of inflationary measures that will impact negatively on the poor. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Senators: That is it? That is it?

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Hon. Jarrette Narine): Mr. Vice-President, it is my pleasure to be here today to speak about the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. I was supposed to speak about the ministry last week, in another place, but because of a fiasco by the Opposition—

Hon. Senators: Which one?

Hon. J. Narine: All two. Both! [*Laughter*] Sen. Munro really said that they have caucus, but I do not know if they keep the caucus with the Upper House and the Lower House separated. I know when we have caucus, it is the legislative group and we keep for everybody from the Upper House and the Lower House. If you had kept your caucus, we would have debated all of last week.

You will recall last week Monday, Mr. Vice-President, that after round one, round two and round three, and the Opposition was under pressure—a lot of blows—in the fourth round, when the bell rang, they sat in their corners and threw in the towel. That is what caused the debate to stop.

If someone on the Back Bench did not want to speak, certainly, someone on the Front Bench should have spoken. To say that you have caucus and yours is better than ours—I do not think you have any caucus.

I would like to congratulate the Minister of Finance at this time and to indicate that it was an excellent budget presentation. From what I have been hearing from the other place and from here, for the last two and a half days, is simply that there is nothing to be said in this budget about the funds that have been provided for the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources.

I can tell you, Mr. Vice-President, that we will be spending \$1.7 billion in the following year. As I make my contribution I will indicate to you how we arrived at that figure.

I would also like to say that Sen. Munro went all over the place. I stopped counting when he touched on all the ministries with 100 different topics. He went from mining sand at Tapaná, to transport, to foreign-used vehicles. I do not know what was happening. I wrote here that he spoke for an entire hour, honestly, and said very little about anything. I recall that his Political Leader in the other place did the same thing in replying to the budget. [*Desk thumping*] Probably, something in the UNC is rubbing off on him. I understand that.

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As a matter of fact, everything he tried to explain there was no logic behind it and if my Political Leader had a Senator like him, I am certain my colleagues on this side would say what type of logic that he was speaking about. We have a favourite expression on our side when your logic does not keep in sync with what you are saying; they say that is a different type of logic. I would not say that in this Senate.

6.00 p.m.

I would indicate to the Senator when he spoke about economics, that he belongs to a political organization; the UNC's economics I recall was the Trinity dollar. Do you remember the UNC's economics? Minister Humphrey wanted to print money and name it the "Trinity" dollar. So I do not know if he was talking about that type of economics, and certainly Sen. Mark would recall that, because he was one of his colleagues at that time. A Minister who said we should print money and call it "Trinity" dollar. As a matter of fact, he got so confused that he said even his colleagues on that side know how to deal with criminals and criminal activities.

Mr. Vice-President, every year on October 16, Trinidad and Tobago joins with more than 150 countries throughout the world to celebrate World Food Day. This day marks the anniversary of the founding of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), in 1945. The FAO recently reported that over 854 million people around the world remain undernourished. We are very fortunate in Trinidad and Tobago.

The theme of this year's Food Day was "Investing in Agriculture for Food Security" and I can tell you the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources celebrated World Food Day last Friday with a market at the Ministry. We know we would have to put markets in this area; people love to shop in the big groceries. The market was sold out in two hours. All the farmers who came from the country districts were sold out in two hours, right in the car park in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. So I was very pleased with that.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources has adopted for its theme epitome, "Investing in Agriculture for Food Security. The physical measures outlined in budget 2007 aimed at revitalizing our domestic agriculture and improving national food security could not have come at a more appropriate time. I am confident that the people of Trinidad and Tobago have celebrated

World Food Day 2006, with a very clear understanding that their Government is committed to the revitalization of agriculture and food security for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Yes, there are challenges, and I heard Senators on the other side saying we should know what is happening, and we should have a plan and so forth.

Mr. Vice-President, during the last ten years the agricultural sector has experienced many serious challenges, and we are not hiding our heads in the sand. These challenges provide significant constraints to agricultural development which restricts the sector's competitiveness and even compromises its food security. The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources identified the more important of these challenges that constrained domestic agricultural development as follows.

I say that because during the UNC era, there were about four or five agriculture ministers and one would recall that one minister said that the Ministry was a bhagi and pumpkin ministry. That affected the Ministry's performance for a number of years because the people in the Ministry felt offended that a minister could tell the national community and the world, that he has a bhagi and pumpkin ministry. So one would recall what happened at that time.

But, in identifying those areas:

1. Inadequate and deteriorating agricultural infrastructure including access roads, bridges, drains and irrigation channels.
2. High incidence of praedial larceny which discouraged investment in agriculture.
3. Inadequate access to agricultural lands and poor land tenure arrangements.
4. Limited financing and inadequate levels of new investments in agriculture.
5. An ageing farmer population and lack of youth involvement in agriculture.
6. The existence of outdated and inefficient agricultural health and food safety systems.
7. Inadequate levels of research and development in agriculture.
8. Limited skills and quality human resource available within the sector.
9. Low levels of technology in the agricultural sector.

10. The chronic shortage of farm labour.
11. Government's support for non-viable institutions.

And Caroni was one of those institutions.

The Government supported Caroni (1975) Limited during 1995—2001 at the expense of the rest of the agricultural sector. Mr. Vice-President, you will agree with me when I say that in 1993 the Government wrote off \$2 billion in debt for Caroni (1975) Limited. By 2003, Caroni (1975) Limited created a further debt of over \$5 billion. Caroni (1975) Limited subventions deficit recorded between 1996 and 2003 were as follows: 1996—1997, \$175 million; 1997—1998, \$246 million; 1998—1999, \$305 million; 1999—2000, \$349 million; 2000—2001, \$367 million; 2001—2002, \$418 million and, of course, the goodly Senator would not be here because on the last occasion he could not get up and run, he had to stay in his seat, 2003, \$597 million respectively.

Caroni (1975) Limited was producing cane at over \$400 per tonne but was purchasing cane from the farmers at \$1.70. I would like to say at this time when the farmers are saying that the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources is responsible for sugarcane price, he is not responsible. The law is, the miller that is now SMCL, is responsible for setting the price of sugarcane. We have given them an incentive of \$10 per tonne to make it \$180 in 2004 but they would tell the national community since 2000 they have not had an increase in price per tonne for cane. I am saying it is the miller and the law says it is the miller. But everybody is so confused that they are saying it is the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources is not responsible for SMCL. SMCL is now the miller and I will come to that further down.

In addition, Caroni (1975) Limited was subsidizing the sale of sugar on the world market and one will understand that when we speak about producing 40,000 metric tons of sugar; we supplied that the first year. We supplied 40,000 metric tons the second year; we supplied 35,000 metric tons recently but Caroni (1975) Limited has always been buying sugar on the world market to supply the deficit in Trinidad. That sugar that Caroni (1975) Limited was paying so much money to produce was sent to the European Union. We now know that 39 per cent would be taken off because we got preferential treatment, 39 per cent less in three years' time. So that it is no longer viable for the entire Caribbean, the African and the Pacific countries to produce sugar. That happened because Australia and Brazil had raised objections to the preferential treatment that we were getting for sugar. That is now history.

When we talk about the closure of Caroni (1975) Limited, we mean the closure of Caroni (1975) Limited. If we have to downstream the industry and to maintain that industry—the adaptation strategy is completed, we are dealing with it, there are three options. Whatsoever options we use I can tell you at this present time the smart farmers have already left sugar and they are divesting their fields into other crops like cassava, bananas, plantain and so forth. I visited Jagroop Trace in South two weeks ago and I will tell you that the entire area where they used to produce cane, they are now producing other crops.

The operations that were non-viable to Caroni (1975) Limited meant that the State was denied access to critical resources of agriculture, land, labour and funds for food production and the goodly Senator said that the workers went home.

I am certain that my colleague in the Ministry of Finance, Sen. the Hon. Christine Sahadeo, must have told this Senate on many occasions the type of treatment that was given out by the PNM Government to Caroni (1975) Limited workers. They got up to 50 per cent enhancement on their VSEP. Their pension plans were correct because they owed a lot of money. Caroni (1975) Limited was collecting the workers' money and never paid NIS; they never paid it to the insurance companies, they never paid anything. The PNM Government had to correct all of that.

The training for Caroni (1975) Limited, workers. Twenty-five million dollars went into training for Caroni (1975) Limited workers. It never happened before in this country. Some of them took 10 and 12 training courses and certainly, they did not want to train how to plant sugarcane. They were trained in welding and other things that were more viable jobs.

Two years ago when I went to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources I can tell you all unions, Direct Delivery Farmers, and others—I have letters from them asking me to import labour to help them in the sugar industry. They were not getting anybody. The 10,000 persons that went home, that they were spreading propaganda about and saying that we put 10,000 persons on the breadline, not one single person was around to cut sugarcane. They were asking us to bring people from Guyana, legally that is, because one would know they do come illegally—and bring people from Grenada and all these areas. I was telling them yes, but Agriculture will recommend that you speak to the Ministry of National Security on this matter. They kept saying that the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources does not want to bring labour. That is

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not my portfolio. I am going to bring people into this country because the Ministry of National Security has its part to play. If it is through Caricom that we have to bring persons to help us out in the labour market, we certainly will do that, and we have already started doing that in certain classifications.

When one talks about Caroni (1975) Limited workers and about foreign-used cars and one cannot own foreign-used cars again—60,000 foreign-used cars came into this country—or registered used cars in the last year. We went from PBX right down to PCC, so it was six totalled 10,000 each equal 60,000 vehicles. Where are you going to put those vehicles, on the same roads? There is need for a gestation period to correct that situation. That cannot happen overnight. When we talk about the Caroni situation, it was only Caroni (1975) Limited that was getting the money from the Treasury. Nothing was given for access roads in agriculture, drains, flood control, irrigation, training, praedial larceny, marketing, nothing; nothing for local food production. All funding went to Caroni (1975) Limited, 100 per cent so that for 20—25 years one would have realized the deterioration of the situation in this country.

I have a picture and you would be amazed. [*Picture shown*] I am certain this one is Cunjal. The top picture, there is no road, and the bottom picture is where we are fixing roads at the present time. I heard somebody from the Lower House saying last night that we fixed 14 kilometres of roads and I am boasting about that. I would go on to tell you how many roads we did in the last year.

6.15 p.m.

When this Government assumed office in 2002, we set about the task of revitalizing, modernizing and redeveloping the domestic agricultural sector which this administration met in a state of total neglect. If anybody from the Opposition says that I built 14 roads last year, I did 14 more roads than they did in six years. Not a single road in agriculture was done; nothing in irrigation. Our first task was to tackle the more important challenges and constraints that restricted the growth and development in the sector.

In this regard, we have had some major successes during the period 2002—2006. Meanwhile, we continue to work towards addressing the outstanding challenges and constraints to the development and modernization of the agricultural sector. Our key objective was to re-establish the platform for agricultural development in this country, which unfortunately was allowed to deteriorate during the previous six years.

We pursued that agenda by investing more in agricultural research, land distribution and the development and maintenance of agricultural infrastructure. This Government has given priority to the introduction of new and advanced technology and to improving the quality of human capital employed in the sector. I wish to remind this honourable Senate that our major goal in agriculture is to advance the food security of Trinidad and Tobago. Our mission is to make adequate quantities of food available to the population of Trinidad and Tobago at prices that we can afford.

I heard Sen. Prof. Deosaran's contribution yesterday and only this morning I got the *Green Vine*, the monthly report from NAMDEVCO. I want to agree with him when he said that the supermarkets are holding this population to ransom. We have taken out most of the import duties and VAT from the basic foodstuffs, but prices keep going up. I would like to indicate to you our latest—and this is October month—wholesale prices at Macoya Market. I join with you and say that the middlemen in agriculture are holding the people of Trinidad and Tobago to ransom.

I have a farmer in the Sangre Grande area that sells, to a large chain of supermarkets, breadfruit at \$1.50 a pound and when I went to the grocery at Westmoorings, I saw breadfruit packaged at \$18 a pound. I say no more.

Sen. Seetahal, S.C.: It is \$28 for one.

Hon. J. Narine: For one? That is \$5 in the country, not too far off. They could go to the place where they could get the foodstuff and wait until the Tunapuna Market is ready to close so that the farmers cannot carry back their produce and they actually give it at a lower cost. That is a trick in the trade that everybody does. Some of our people stay by the bars until 10 o'clock when the markets are being closed then buy the farmers' products very cheaply, but they complain about foreign prices and local prices.

I would like to indicate to you a few things. I do not want to waste my time. These are this week's wholesale prices:

Carrots	\$5.29 per kilogramme
Cassava	\$2.20 per kilogramme
Common yam	\$3.30 per kilogramme
Imported yam	\$11.00 per kilogramme
Dasheen	\$5.50 per kilogramme

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I want to go down to celery, which is \$10 a bundle; chives, \$18 a bundle because of weather conditions. I am not going to hide anything. Agricultural prices fluctuate. Grocery prices on imported foods—have you ever heard about fluctuating prices for rice and flour? The prices keep going up and no matter what we do they will keep going up. We have no control over that. We can take off all the taxes.

Lettuce (small)	\$1 a head
Lettuce (medium)	\$2 a head
Lettuce (large)	\$3 a head

I would like to indicate—again agreeing with Sen. Prof. Deosaran—that the middlemen go to the Macoya Market. One of them is always on television “bad talking” the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. He has never put a pepper plant in the ground. He is from Curepe. He is a research officer in NUFF. I am certain that you buy from him. His prices are good because he buys it cheaply. He still sells at \$6 when he buys at \$2 a pound and he did not put any fertilizers into that. He did not put any labour into that, so he is making three times the amount of money than the farmers have made. That is our problem in this country. Our population needs to be educated, but that is another thing to do.

I want to indicate about regional exports of fresh agricultural produce to Barbados—

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Public Administration and Information and Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith): Mr. Vice-President, I beg to move that the debate on this Bill continues until the conclusion of the contributions of this Minister, Sen. Angela Cropper, Sen. The Hon. Mustapha Abdul-Hamid, Sen. Parvatee Anmolsingh-Mahabir and Sen. The Hon. Christine Kangeloo.

Question put and agreed to.

APPROPRIATION BILL (BUDGET)

Hon. J. Narine: Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. I just wanted to indicate that our exports to Barbados, Antigua and Barbuda for the month of September are 68,431 kilogrammes. In August, it was 128,000 kilogrammes of pumpkin, watermelon, pineapple, cabbage and other vegetables that we exported to this same market. [*Desk thumping*] Hot peppers at the Miami Terminal

Market, Trinidad and Tobago mixed, yellow and green, were selling at \$15 to \$17 per 8-pound box. At the New York Terminal Market, we were selling at US \$20 to US \$22 per 8-pound box.

It is interesting to note that at the New York Terminal Market, Trinidad and Tobago pumpkin was selling at US \$14 to US \$15 per 50-pound bag, while Panama was \$10 to \$14 and Costa Rica \$13.50 to \$16. So, Trinidad and Tobago was on top of the market in pumpkin in New York, but many people do not know how much we export.

Last year, when we had the bad weather conditions throughout the Caribbean, our exports to them went up by 39 per cent and that was shocking to people. It was also shocking to people on radio when I was interviewed and told them that our rice production had doubled. They said they were not getting the rice and I told them that the Lotus label is local rice. When you buy Lotus in the grocery, you buy local rice produced by our farmers. A number of persons do not know that and we need to educate the public.

In this respect, Mr. Vice-President, I ask your indulgence to outline a few of the many achievements of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources over the last few years. One of our achievements in the agricultural sector is the improvement of the acreage of agricultural lands under production. The Ministry has approved more than 900 standard agricultural leases, apart from the 7,249 Caroni leases. We are just speaking about mainstream agriculture comprising over 6,000 acres of land and agricultural state lands.

You will recall, Mr. Vice-President, that I indicated years ago, when I went to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, that when I checked the records, the United National Congress (UNC) government was doing an average of about 14 leases per year. They did not care about that; they were fighting one another, with one fellow saying “bhaji and pumpkin” ministry and did not care about the people. There was no Commissioner of State Lands at that time you will recall.

I would like to say something here that is very instructive because there is a splinter group from the main opposition which formed a political organization a couple weeks ago called COP. The political leader, next morning, came to my office because he had an appointment—he had written to me the week before and I gave him an appointment. He spoke to the media after and said that we had a good meeting. Do you know what the meeting was about—and I need to say this here today? He came to represent the Streatham Lodge farmers. Do you know

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why? Streatham Lodge has grade one lands in Trinidad. On the East-West Corridor they are the best lands. Over the years his constituents have built homes on those lands. They are no longer agricultural lands.

So at one time they say that we are taking good agricultural lands and putting it into housing—and many people try to run that *mauvais langue* and propaganda—but they encourage their people to build houses on the lands and now he is coming to tell me we must regularize those squatters who have built houses on those lands. Inconsistent! Speaking with forked tongue! On the one hand, they are saying that we are putting the lands into houses and on the other hand they are representing an area where most of the agricultural lands have gone into housing and they are making representation now, behind closed doors, to regularize the people and give them the plots as residential plots. I will say no more, but I have much more to say when the bell rings. I am certain I will come back and meet my colleague, Sen. Mark, sitting in that chair in that same place.

Mr. Vice-President, you will recall that we had a vibrant rice industry at Caroni at one time. Over 4,000 acres of Caroni rice lands were leased to Nariva rice farmers and CRATT, the Caribbean Rice Association of Trinidad and Tobago, who brought it under rice production. However, between 1994 and 1995, rice production was 25,000 tonnes, when we were in office, and by 2001, it had decreased to less than 2,000 tonnes. Of course, we know the reason. I do not want to hide it. We had problems with the Nariva Swamp area, a protected area. However, the production went down and no lands were given to the rice farmers.

Since we have introduced this 4,000 acres of Caroni lands—probably I am starting to answer where Caroni lands are going. Four thousand acres went to the rice farmers. Those were the rice lands. By 2005, we had doubled production. We are now over 4,000 tonnes and recent discussions with CRATT and the Nariva farmers revealed that this year we will double production because they have the technology, better seed materials, et cetera. They visited Japan and Guyana and they have been involved in the industry for so long that they are now able to take that little parcel of land and mass produce rice with better varieties.

6.30 p.m.

With respect to the former Caroni (1975) Limited workers, to date, a field identification exercise has been completed in respect of 6,516 plots of the 7,247 plots allocated to the former VSEP workers of Caroni (1975) Limited. Of this amount, an estimated 3,824 or 58.6 per cent has assumed responsibility for their respective plots, of which 382 have begun cultivation.

I do not know if you would tell me that this is a court matter because I heard something about this matter being in court, but we are working to give the two-acre plots to the workers and very soon we will be doing the first handover. I will come to that in time.

To date, approximately 2,500 former employees have been registered as farmers. They are bona fide farmers. This process is ongoing and the total infrastructure development cost for these agricultural estates is approximately \$590 million. That is what we will have to spend to put the 7,249 two-acre plots. It is not simply putting people on land. Later down, I will speak about that.

Improvements to the agriculture infrastructure: Agricultural Access Roads: During the period under review, over 230 kilometres of access roads were developed. These roads benefited over 3,000 farmers and made available approximately 33,500 acres of agricultural lands for active production. I want to read some of the roads because I know that Sen. Munro was at a meeting recently and they were giving false information and propaganda. I think it was a misprint in the newspapers. Let me indicate to you the phase one programme for the last fiscal year. We did these roads in Fishing Pond and Manzanilla, Harris Road, Comparo Road, and De Gannes Trace, Manzanilla. In Cumuto we had Roop Trace Extension, Geerach Trace, Sookoo Trace Extension, Boundial Singh Branch Trace, De Gannes and Jawahir and San Antonio; Corban Trace, Gutapajaro and Boundial Singh Trace. We did Chenneny in Cumana/Toco and Grand Fond No. 1, Grand Fond No. 2 which is in Sans Souci. We did 10 kilometres of road in that area. We did Wade Road, Lawrence Jones Road, and Euroze Road, Biche. Those three were done. We did David Toby Road, Chin Chin/Mc Nair.

On the second phase programme we had Lalaja Road off the Blanchisseuse Road and Labaja Road, which is 8 kilometres and more. Logan Road in Manzanilla was also completed. We did Sin Verguenza Extension Road, Cumuto; Ramatally Road, Caroni, Ramsaran Road, Charee Trace; Line Road, off Warren Road, Caroni; Rodney Road, Rodney Trace, Sankar Trace; Bancroft Road in the Tabaquite area; John-Williams Road No. 1, John-Williams Road No. 2, John-Williams Branch Road; Navarro Road, Guenaporie Bridge; Mc Carthy Road; Cunjal in south Trinidad; Pinda Road, Rio Claro; and five roads in Rio Claro. Cunjal Road and Jagroop Road were part of a networking of six roads. I know that my time is going quickly but I mentioned these roads because I heard it was said that I did 14 roads and that I am boasting about roads. I said to myself that if I did one road, I did more than what the UNC did for six years. The truth is

that these roads were part of phase one and phase two of the Land and Water Division. We have the north and south regions.

The Member of Parliament for St. Augustine will tell you that inside the Macoya project we did four roads and a bridge for him in Balgobin Trace. He has always been asking for this in Parliament. It is completed.

Water management, irrigation and flood control activities—A number of activities related to water management, flood control and irrigation infrastructure were implemented.

Activities under this programme also include:

- construction and maintenance of more than 248 farm ponds, 135 sluice gates and related infrastructure were constructed;
- the establishment of irrigation works and desilting and cleaning of 16.2 kilometres of drains and irrigation channels.

I have a listing of them with me. You will be surprised to know how much work was done in the Plum Mitan Food Crop Project and Kernahan Food Crop Project, which is nearer to Ortoire Village. We have done construction of farm ponds, upgrading of existing farm ponds and upgrading and cleaning of drainage.

I am certain that you would have observed that there is not much complaint about flooding and people not getting cheques. While we are working a system of insurance for farmers in this country, it is difficult because the risk in agriculture is too high. Once we put in the Mamoral Dam and do the other drainage projects that we are supposed to do—you would recall that we did the Trinidad sluice gate down at Oropouche. We did 2 kilometres of embankment. It would take five years to desalinate that area because they had left it undone for 10 years. The situation is that the area has to be desalinated but we are almost there. Additional lands are coming into production.

The objectives under the water management programme are to:

- conduct infrastructure works to reduce the incidents of flooding;
- establish irrigation infrastructure, to increase the area of farmland under irrigation, so that agricultural production could be all year round.

We have rain-fed agriculture. We do agriculture for six months in most of the country.

Addressing the ageing farmer population—We know about YAPA. We have trained 7,596 youths at present and 360 went on to the phase two programme, which is a 9-month training programme in computer skills, management, et cetera.

Tracing the YAPA students—Over 50 per cent of the YAPA students from the 360 are already involved in agriculture. Some of them have gone on to university and ECIAF to do the diploma and degree programmes. I know of one student who is at a Venezuelan university doing a BSc in agriculture. I also know that there are many other students who are willing to go to COSTAATT to start the agriculture degree. We have made an impact on the 17—25 age group. You would recall that the average age of a farmer in Trinidad and Tobago is 60 years old. I am certain that Sen. Prof. Ramchand knows that. We have the young people from age 17—25 doing this type of training in 25 different areas.

I was at Mon Repos Community Centre. I heard somebody say that a community centre is a little thing with a toilet. They should look at the Mon Repos Community Centre. It is a modern structure for the community. They are using the facility for different types of activities. The young people there were making power point presentations at that graduation. Approximately 40 students graduated and each area made power point presentations.

We need to look at the landscaping industry. My assessment is that it is worth over \$40 million. No real surveys were done. I have been asking our people to do a survey. Landscaping has money. The young people are now producing and selling plants. We have trained them in landscaping so that they can go and make Trinidad and Tobago beautiful. I am looking forward to the day that we would call Trinidad and Tobago a garden paradise, where there would be trees all along the highways and byways and be able to look at flowers in the countryside. CEPEP is doing a good job but I think that they should start putting down plants to beautify Trinidad. Tobago is well done because the people always had that culture. We do not have that. We cut down the trees.

In some areas you would realize—[*Interruption*] I came from agriculture. After 41 years I became the Minister. I started in agriculture and I love horticulture. I know the names of all the plants.

Improving financing and promoting new investment in agriculture—Since 2002, the Government has been investing increasing amounts of funds in the agriculture sector.

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During the previous administration, most of the government's subventions were allocated to Caroni (1975) Limited. Very little funds remained available for the development of agriculture in the mainstream agriculture. This partly contributed to the deterioration of agriculture, which was considered to be Caroni (1975) Limited.

Between 2002—2006 investments in agriculture increased from \$250 million to \$538 million, an increase of 233 per cent. They said that this Government does not care about agriculture. We care about agriculture more than any other government that has ever faced the public of Trinidad and Tobago.

Investments in the development of access roads during that period was \$150 million, with \$72 million being invested in 2006; the last fiscal year. The investments for flood control activities for the period exceeds \$32 million. Over \$65 million was invested in support of sugarcane farmers in 2006. These investments covered subsidies, maintenance, access roads, cranes, the provision of transport, fertilizers and froghopper. That \$65 million that I am speaking about is recorded here. The subsidy of \$10 on a tonne of sugar cane cost the Government \$5.112 million. The maintenance of access roads cost \$6.172 million. There was the payment of \$10 per tonne for external area scales. We paid them to manage the scales at \$2.731 million. We operated 14 scales and that was the sugar industry team.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. J. Narine: Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. I can go on and on. There was an incentive of \$5 per tonne on cane delivered directly to the factory. We are paying for 57 per cent of the fertilizers used in the sugarcane industry. [*Interruption*] We have subsidized the cane farmers with \$65 million.

Sen. Seetahal, S.C.: Thank you. I hear what you are saying about sugarcane. I have an immediate interest in other types of agriculture such as citrus, cocoa and bananas. I have found, from my personal experience, that it is very difficult to access the incentives, the 20 per cent or 10 per cent up to \$10,000. I tried one

year and for three years I never got any because the paperwork kept coming back. None of the farmers I know in Tamana where I have my estate were able to access that. What are you doing? Are there any plans to do anything about that?

Hon. J. Narine: What I do know is that there is a system. First of all you need to have a farmer's badge. Then you need to go to the office and say that you are going to purchase this and they will ask for the invoice orders. If you are having problems contact me. My time is important this evening.

We are subsidizing 57 per cent. We also provide 100 per cent froghopper control and 100 tonnes disease-free seed material for planting at the cost of \$178,000.

6.45 p.m.

Sen. King: Thank you, Mr. Minister. You did not mention a very serious issue in the agricultural sector which is predial larceny. It is a very major problem. I wonder if you would give it a little attention for us, please.

Hon. J. Narine: If I am given the privilege, I will come to that matter. I am coming to that, but I hope that I will get some injury time. Apart from the \$180 per tonne for cane, the entire subsidy works out to be \$128.21 on every tonne. That is what we have subsidized the cane farmers with. So, it is about \$300 per tonne that cane farmers get.

Mr. Vice-President, \$74 million has been invested so far for the preparation of the 50-acre estate. I would like to address Sen. Prof. Ramchand at this time, because of the situation where many people—including shadow Ministers of people, who cannot win an election and want to come in Parliament—are talking about 77,000 acres of land, and what we are doing with the 77,000 acres of land. The propaganda machinery is outside there working against the PNM, but the time has not come yet, because we have this to tell you.

Mr. Vice-President, of the 76,608 acres, the sugarcane cultivation that we had with tenants is 11,861; the citrus at Todd's Road and La Gloria—Todds Road is 10,098 acres; La Gloria, 1,879 acres and that is only part of it. The livestock and dairy operations at Mon Jaloux, Mora Valley, La Gloria and Windsor Park and Picton is 4,167 acres. The rice project, as I said, was 4,000 acres. Sen. Prof. Ramchand, I am going to give you a copy of this.

The total acreage engaged in agriculture is 45,849 acres. Residual agricultural land for distribution to the national community is 18,996 which will go to the VSEP workers. So, 64,845.9 acres will remain in agriculture.

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With respect to other land use, you had SILWC—that is the Sugar Welfare people who built houses for some of its workers and so on—is 1,279 acres. You have the National Housing Authority (NHA) and the Land Settlement Agency (LSA). NHA is 925 acres and LSA is 493 acres. You have VSEP lots; and you have drainage. You also have the situation where Caroni (1975) Limited had over 150 recreation grounds. These grounds have now been handed over to local government and other enterprises for maintenance. All these are lands that were occupied.

There are also areas where you have roads, drainage, recreation grounds, churches, schools, temples, community centres and so forth. All of those lands were given out by Caroni (1975) Limited before. So, when people go around saying that we have 77,000 acres of land and what we are doing with it, they are just fooling the nation. I think we have an educated population now and they are going to listen when we talk, and we have had the privilege to do so.

The first thing that we did with the agricultural plots—you are a university person. We grade lands from one to seven which is class lands. Prof. Ahamad did it. Lands from one to four are classified as good agricultural lands; and grades five, six and seven are not good agricultural lands. Caroni (1975) Limited does not have any grade one lands. They have from grades two to seven.

We have identified 17 areas. We did the soil, and we went and identified those areas like Orange Grove, Waterloo, Caroni, Jerningham, Felicity, La Gloria, Exchange, Reform, La Fortune, Edinburgh, Petit Morne, Cedar Hill, Montserrat and Waterloo. The whole 17 areas are here. The amount of lands to be developed there is 18,475. I can tell you that after that the soil samples will direct the new farmers as to what type of plants to use in those areas—whether they should plant cassava, tomato and so forth. We have done all of that, but people are going in the court and saying that we did not do anything. That did not happen overnight.

To survey 20,000 acres of land is not an easy job in Trinidad. To put infrastructure with roads and communal ponds and so forth is not an easy task. So, when you are finished spending over \$1 billion—it is \$519 million—and you put roads, drainage, communal ponds, and irrigation systems and so forth, they went to court to say that we have not given out any lands yet. People are planting.

We have a legal situation where we have to put a group of persons to do the lease. Presently, we are working on the first 100, and we are going to continue working. I am certain that every VSEP worker in Caroni (1975) Limited—once PNM say so; it is so. We are going to do it; we have credibility. [*Desk thumping*]

There are other persons who came into the government and they have no credibility. Once the Prime Minister announces something here in a budget, put your pot on fire, Mr. Manning and the PNM is going to make sure that we deliver. [*Desk thumping*] That is our promise. This year is delivery year for agriculture.

So, most of these areas have started. Orange Grove has started; Waterloo has started; and Jerningham has started and that is 650 plots. That has started in this third quarter, and it will be finished by the first quarter of next year. The whole bar chart is here. You may have a look at it after. As I said, we are working towards getting the plots and these lands out to Caroni (1975) Limited workers.

With respect to the National Agribusiness Development Programme (NADP) there is \$56 million. We have the National Agribusiness Development Programme (NADP) and they have sent something here for me. I do not think that I will have much time to read it. The National Agribusiness Development Programme is going to bring 2,500 acres of land on stream for people in central Trinidad and the former Caroni (1975) Limited VSEP workers who will now get into that organization called the Trinidad and Tobago Agribusiness Association (TTABA), which is working toward agro processing and food processing, so that the gluts on the market will be taken up. This is what we are doing. We are not leaving the small farmers by the wayside, and when the large farmers and medium farmers come to overproduce and cause our small farmers, family farms, to go out of existence. We are not going to do that.

Sen. Dr. Kernahan: I have a question.

Sen. King: Questions? Could we have the answers, please?

Hon. J. Narine: Mr. Vice-President, am I getting an extension of time? I have seven minutes.

Sen. Dr. Kernahan: Mr. Vice-President, through you, the Trinidad and Tobago Agribusiness Association (TTABA), is it a private company or is it a joint enterprise?

Hon. J. Narine: It is private, government and other enterprises coming together with the help of the Government to start off this industry. We are going to have another day when I am going to talk about that. My time is limited. Mr. Vice-President, \$74 million has been invested so far in the preparation of agricultural plots, and that is for the two-acre plots.

The Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) has received over \$50 million to inject into the ADB. We have the cocoa revitalizer loan; the Grow-Safe loan and the Youth Window. You do not have to mortgage your property and so forth. The

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ADB is giving you a period of about six months, in certain cases, where if you have a loan you will not pay until you start getting production, so they would waive the interest payment for that period.

You also have the gestation period for cocoa. If you plant cocoa this year—we have produced 600,000 cocoa plants every year for the last three years, since I am there, and we were producing 300,000 before. When those cocoa plants come on stream, maybe I may not be here, because it takes five to six years for cocoa to produce. The gestation period is a longer period.

Significant investments were made in fisheries. We are talking about the Moruga Fishing Facilities, \$90 million. The Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago (UdeCott) has started phase one of that project—\$15 million to do the survey, the development plans and so forth, and \$75 million will go toward the first phase of the project.

We have also been taking care of NAFSA and the avian influenza. We have gone to Cabinet with this matter and we have a plan of action. We are prepared for avian influenza outbreak in Trinidad. We have been monitoring the situation. We have trained our officers and the Poultry Surveillance Unit is working quite well.

Mr. Vice-President, with respect to the increase in agriculture research and development in 2006, an allocation of \$10 million was made for the improvement in research and development capabilities in the sector. Some research and development activities introduced were germ plasm conservation, and the production of high quality planting materials including cocoa and other selected vegetables and food crops. Centeno is working on harder plants, better plants and disease resistant plants.

The establishment of the Fisheries Monitoring Surveillance and Enforcement Unit was done, and we recently launched that project. We also have the Tobago Black Belly Sheep Semen Project where the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has approved this programme. Trinidad and Tobago will join only three other countries in exporting semen from the Tobago Black Belly Sheep into the United States of America. The other countries are Australia, New Zealand and Canada. We are world class; we are first class; and we are moving towards Vision 2020, but we are going to be there long before that. I can assure you of that. [*Desk thumping*] We are going to stay in Government for the longest while.

Sen. Prof. Ramchand: Mr. Vice-President, I really want to get in a question before closing time, so that the Minister could answer it after closing time. I am very grateful to the Minister for the information he has provided. I have three

questions, and one of them has to do with his response to the suggestion that perhaps the time has come for us to prepare an agricultural development bill which will bring together all the incentives and subsidies and so forth to define the agricultural projects that we want to invite people to get involved in. Secondly, is it true that some prime acres of Orange Grove land are being given over to a university campus?

Hon. J. Narine: With respect to the first question, the agricultural sector policy is being done and, at this present time, it is before Cabinet. We are going to lay it in the House as a Green Paper very soon for public discussion. So, we are working towards that. We have a fisheries policy and a land administration policy that we are reviving at the present time. We already have those policies there, but they are outdated, so we are trying to update those policies and bring them to you here in the Parliament.

The other question has to do with lands at Orange Grove. Orange Grove lands went to former VSEP workers of Caroni (1975) Limited. The Orange Gove land is being used for agriculture.

Sen. Prof. Ramchand: And none has been allocated to the University of the West Indies for an extension of the UWI campus?

Hon. J. Narine: If it is for UWI, it is for research. It will not be for housing. I can tell you that. We have sweet potatoes, cassava, pumpkin, golden apple, pawpaw, hot peppers, herbs, water coconuts, rabbits and tilapia.

The tilapia industry has started off with \$1.3 million. I talked about the Moruga Fishing Complex; the YAPA students; and the farm schools. Every month we train people at all the different stations in the counties by a full page advertisement in the newspaper.

7.00 p.m.

Some of the real farmers were not coming; you have people who wanted to introduce themselves in agriculture coming there; we did not have a problem with that. What we did is, we have field schools and we go directly to where they are. We have a little compound where we worked directly with the farmers on the field, and for the schools and so on we have a 20-seater bus with video cameras that you go; they sit in the environment of an air-conditioned bus and look on and they are lectured to for days on end. That is a programme that I am very much interested in.

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We are moving on; we have the incentives programme, machinery and equipment; water incentives; then we go on to soil conservation incentives, that is if you rehabilitate lands and so, you have incentives for that; land preparation incentives; drainage incentives; citrus incentives and when you rehabilitate land for cocoa or citrus, we pay you for that and it is up to 20 per cent, up to the cost of \$2,000 a hectare. So that it means for every hectare you get 20 per cent of what you have spent. The Agriculture Incentive Programme goes on to many other areas like cocoa and coffee.

I would like to deal with a situation quickly, what Sen. Prof. Ramchand had raised about the 100-acre parcels. We have identified those areas: Monjalo, 300 acres; Orange Grove, 100 acres; Caroni, 100 acres; Jerningham, 100 acres; Edinburgh, 100 acres; Picton, 1,000 acres; La Gloria, 980 acres; Aripo, 488 acres; you know Aripo grassland, that will remain for livestock and somebody was talking about that; it would remain for livestock; those are livestock lands. So it is a matter of 3,128 acres and we are starting with ten and Tucker Valley is the area that the Cubans will go to and we want to have organic farming in that area, so that we will reduce and teach our people not to use the amount of chemicals they are using and make food safe in Trinidad.

When I am finished with agriculture we are going to brand Trinidad as the food basket of the Caribbean, but branded as having safe food; non-chemical.
[*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, it was my pleasure being here, I should have had a little more time because I have a lot more to say, but there would be other forums for doing so.

I thank you. May God bless you.

Sen. Angela Cropper: Mr. Vice-President, thank you. The 2007 budget offers a lot to comment on because of what it says but also because of what it does not say. By now, of course, a lot of that commentary has been made and by now, as usual, I must try to make a contribution that is not repetitious of what has gone before and still try to bring a little incremental value to the debate, so-called.

I therefore wish to comment less directly on the measures that are outlined in the budget and more on the budget process; the budget as an instrument; the approach to planning for development in the country; the character of the society that the Government envisions, to which its instruments of planning, policy,

legislation, regulation and management are supposedly aligned; and the cumulative outcome of those as reflected in the condition of the society which they serve; a sort of meta analysis if you wish.

I will, of course, make reference to several of the proposals in the budget as I go along, but these will be merely to try and illustrate the points I wish to bring to the discussion, as I am painfully aware of the futility of this exercise in terms of affecting anything that is already contained in the 2007 budget. I can however, Mr. Vice-President, and I do live in hope in the future we might move to some more effective way of conducting the people's business and of accounting for our stewardship. And I hope to contribute to that future.

There are many ideas for making such a move that are available within contemporary discourse about planning, policy and processes for development, if the Government were amenable to ideas and inputs that do not originate in the Cabinet room.

The first observation I wish to make is about the character of the budget itself. As usual, we have been presented with a budget listing a menu of measures, but without good sense of how these relate to what went before or what is to come next. In my own thinking and in my own practice, I liken a budget to a slice of bread, it bears a structural and organic relationship to the slice that preceded it, to the one that is next to be made, and it is indicative of the composition of the whole loaf. It is an instrument for apportioning resources and capacities; for prioritizing; for helping us to avoid biting off more than we can chew in any planning period.

Last night Sen. Seetahal, S.C. provided a good illustration, in my view, of the need to situate a budget in the context of what has been proposed before and to have some accounting thereof; with evidence of continuity, or explanation of departure from that, where that needs to occur.

Admittedly, this deficiency is not just a result of the lack of our concern for accountability, which characterizes the governance system here in Trinidad and Tobago. I think it is also because of the limitations of a budget itself as an instrument for reflection, for assessment and for planning. So the Government may wish to make use in future of a medium-term policy framework and a rolling plan which might take its bearings from the Vision 2020 insofar as we have that already as a long term framework, in which considerable public resources have been invested; a more strategic overview than is currently provided in the budget as a document.

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I must say though, Mr. Vice-President, in this context that the array of documents presented by the Government as background to and in support of the budget is very welcome and I think it is a step in the right direction. Collectively they give us a lot more to go on than the budget document itself and that is as it should be. They do however, in my view, tend to reflect a somewhat one-sided picture of the reality that is Trinidad and Tobago today and of the cumulative impact of the performance of the Government over the last four years; at least as we citizens experience it in our daily lives.

I wish to comment on the retrospective document entitled "Government at your Service: Highlights of Achievements, Vision 2020 Moving Onward". I think this gives us a very detailed account of all the things that have been achieved but nothing about what has not. The presentation of the Prime Minister tells us how rapidly GDP has risen, but he is silent about how human well-being has declined. We are told that we have full employment or we are on the verge of it, but we know we have created few livelihoods. We are assured about the outlook for the continuing prosperity of the country, but we do not explore the paradoxes of that prosperity which confront citizens everyday. Sen. Prof. Ramchand has earlier today provided some examples of these paradoxes; I do not need to repeat them here; I am sure we are all very familiar with them.

I must say though that I feel very encouraged that this document starts with the phrase "Government at your Service". I believe if that is sincerely felt and consciously expressed and if it reflects the philosophy of the Government, then perhaps we may have the possibility of a revolution in this country in the way in which Government interprets its functions, its duties and its relationship to the population as a whole, at whose service it exists.

I believe that if we measure the performance of the economy by the indicators of dissatisfaction of the population as distinct from being measured by the job satisfaction of the Prime Minister, we are likely to conclude differently about how the economy and the society are poised for "moving onward." I believe we are likely to be moved instead to explore why our efforts to date are not having the desired results. What must we do differently and how might we do it differently? Instead, we have a budget that proposes more of the same—have money will spend; another year, a different exercise; another set of declarations; stewardship accounted for by level of spending instead of by results and outcome in terms of well-being of the population.

As I was thinking about this budget it reminded me of a joke that used to be told about a previous Prime Minister: he was caricatured as saying: “The country is on the brink of a precipice, we must take a giant step forward.”

In the light of that, I make a second observation. It is about the futility of this process of parliamentary debate in which we are engaged. Here we have Ministers coming to account for their stewardship and presumably also to respond to the various questions and points of view that have been raised in the debate by others who are not Ministers, but we have a system of rostering where we go back and forth between a different questioner and a different answerer; the commentators and those responsible for responding to those comments, are completely out of sync; the process contributes to the incoherence, certainly in my mind, about what we are doing here and what we are about in the country. I can only imagine what it is doing to the citizens who are viewing this process day after day, night after night.

Moreover, our approach to the explanation of what we have done and what we intend to do is defensive rather than explanatory to the people of the country. It admits of no possibility of error; it is closed to any prospect of change; it is an exercise in futility.

So, with your permission, Mr. Vice-President, I would like to address a plea directly to the Leader of Government Business in the Senate, and I wonder Minister Saith, if we could not, with all the intellectual endowment that we have, in this Chamber and in this country, find a way of evolving a system and a set of practices and procedures which are more amenable to the function that we are trying to do here in Parliament, on behalf of the people of the country, and find a more appropriate way for us to analyze a budget, discuss it, represent what we feel it undertakes on behalf of the people and how it reflects our own interest, and get something that makes a lot more sense, not only to ourselves as participants in this Chamber, in this little arena, but also to the people of the country in terms of what we are doing and where we are going.

So I would, with very great respect, leave that suggestion with you because I think there is no necessity for us to be so imprisoned by the practices and procedures which we have inherited from the past.

Sen. Dr. Saith: While I am thinking about it perhaps you could also think; perhaps one way was to have everybody on that side speak and then have the Members of the Government respond.

Sen. Joseph: Then it is no longer a debate.

Sen. Dr. Saith: Then it is no longer a debate.

Sen. A. Cropper: Then it is no longer what? A debate? Thank you very much for responding and so positively, Minister Saith. I think that that would probably make more of a debate. As an example, I would like very much to pose some questions to the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, he has spoken and left. I would like to pose some questions, some issues and address some concerns to the Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment; she has spoken and she has left. I think we could make a better sense of our engagement and the time that we use here in the public interest.

Sen. Dr. Saith: I take your point, because I would like to pose some questions to Sen. Prof. Deosaran but he has spoken and left and to Sen. Seetahal, S.C. but she has spoken and left, and to Sen. Mark, but he has spoken and left. So, yes, it is something that we could think about.

7.15 p.m.

Sen. A. Cropper: Well, perhaps since it is a mutual dilemma we may be able to actually address it as an issue and make some progress on that front, so, thank you, Mr. Vice-President.

My third observation is about the principles and characteristics of the economy and society which the Prime Minister has set out for the country and which are meant to be reflected in the budget: The Government has adopted people-centred social initiatives with the focus on principles of dignity, equity, participation, empowerment, a sustainable development path and a caring society.

I applaud the Prime Minister for doing so. I support all those principles. In my whole professional life in development policy and practice I have sought to contribute to these locally, regionally and globally. They reflect the kind of place and the kind of country in which I would wish to live. Having those principles reflect the character of the society will of course take time. But such principles need, as well, to guide us in our actions, in our attitudes and in our behaviour; not only as private individuals but especially as public officers and as public servants of the people of the country.

My further observations on the budget will take their bearing from these guiding principles. These are the criteria that I will use and I will assess the budget in an indicative way on its own terms, not on my own; on its own criteria, not on my own.

About the only thing, as I recall, that the Government admits is worrying is inflation. It is indeed worrying as it threatens to negate all the transfers that the 2007 budget itself makes and perhaps some preceding ones.

Some weeks ago in this Chamber we debated the motion to increase the ceiling for treasury bills available to the Central Bank as a means of mopping up excess liquidity in the system. Sen. Enill in presenting that Motion conceded that inflation had got out of hand. I supported that motion. I said I thought it was judicious monetary policy; but that inflation also required a whole package of other measures, including fiscal measures. I pointed out then that in analyzing the causes of inflation in the economy that the Minister had made no mention of the Government's own Public Sector Investment Programme as a source of that inflation. Nor did he address the point in his closing comments.

It would seem to me, Mr. Vice-President, that the Government has simply turned its face to that fact as evidenced in the overall thrust of the budget and in the contributions of every Minister who has contributed here in this Chamber to date. For example, Minister Rowley argued that construction costs always rise; that to delay is to be unwise; without at the same time analyzing the contribution of the present construction programme to the inflationary situation.

He defended the Government's housing programme. I applaud him for doing that. I personally have no objection in principle to the Government's housing programme; I see that as trying to satisfy a basic need for the less advantaged in the society. What I would do is give it a clearer priority however, in allocating money and materials from the system. But I think that there are many other construction projects that are questionable on their merits and that are certainly unnecessary as a priority, when the fallout of their cumulative effect is considered—in terms of absorptive capacity, in terms of scarcities of materials, in terms of inflationary pressures, in terms of disruption of orderly progress in the society, in terms of pressures on the overcrowded roads, when all of those things are considered.

Minister Rowley also said that basically you cannot do anything about inflation, that there are only one or two ways in which you can deal with it. He was followed immediately after by Sen. Montano who said that there are many ways to deal with inflation. The Government says it is at 9 per cent and the target is 7 per cent, but we will not achieve that target, simply by declaring that inflation will be brought down in budget year 2007 to 7 per cent; nor can we wait to see

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what happens as the Prime Minister proposes, Mr. Vice-President. That approach seems to me not to reflect any concern about equity or the characteristic of a caring society. Sen. King had argued that inflation in the food basket is not led by supply considerations largely, but by mark-ups in the merchandizing sector and Sen. Seetahal, S.C. has spoken about the need to rein in the profiteering that is rampant in the economy.

All of these things need addressing as a package of measures to this very high priority problem which we are experiencing. And so we might have seen some attempt at a more systemic analysis of the underlying causes of the current inflationary pressures and a package of proposals to address this as a phenomenon, a very complex one yes, and therefore we have to find some measures and some approaches that are less simplistic in the approach to its solution, whether they comprise the one or two of Minister Rowley or the many of Sen. Montano.

Sen. Prof. Deosaran spoke about how the problems that we are experiencing are systemic in nature. That means they call for a systemic analysis and for systemic solutions. Yet the approach of the Government as reflected in the budget and in the analyses, such as we have had, is to address the issues in the usual linear sectoral and simplistic way. The single strategy in the budget for example addressed to inflation are the announcements about agriculture. So let us look at agriculture.

In my contribution to the debate, again, about raising the ceiling for treasury bills, I said that if the Government was serious about doing something about inflation—Sen. Enill having made the point that the largest contributor to the inflationary trend was the cost of locally produced food—it would put agriculture in competent hands.

I did not on that occasion elaborate on that statement but, Mr. Vice-President, if the pronouncements of the hon. Minister of Agriculture or his performance here this evening for that matter, are taken as reflecting the Government's understanding of the complexity of agriculture and its conceptualization of what needs to be done for agriculture itself, let alone when it is set up as the major sector and the major measure to contribute to reduction of inflation, then I think we are indeed set for a long haul; and perhaps the breadbasket or food-basket of the Caribbean that the Minister envisages will be a mirage. After decades of policies that have systematically led to the decline of the agricultural sector in the country, the 2007 budget proposes a series of measures, seemingly in the hope that we might reverse that pattern in one year. At the same time, we have not been given an accounting—unless Minister Sahadeo give it this morning which, I

unfortunately missed—of how the Caroni resettlement arrangements were working, how far they had advanced; except we learn from the Minister of Agriculture that 382 plots had begun cultivation. How those are likely to address the inflationary problem and the food scarcity, to the extent that that is analyzed as the source of the problem, we are no wiser.

Mr. Vice-President, I cannot help noting the irony of breaking up state lands into small plots which we spoke about at the time we debated the Caroni Resettlement Bill, questioning whether those two-acre plots were going to be viable; whether we could get the infrastructure in place, the training in place, the sensitization; whether we can go through the process of converting workers into farmers in a short period of time in order to achieve the objectives for which that settlement was being justified. So I cannot help commenting on the irony of having done that, and now, two years later, seeing the need to look at farm size, to have large agricultural holdings and possibly the need to amalgamate some holdings in order to create viable farm size.

Presumably, these plans will be carried out in the context of the National Physical Development Plan which is the law of the country, but which is respected more in its breach than in its application by the Government. I cannot help also commenting on the irony of relying on agriculture as the main plank for reducing inflation, while planning to put Tucker Valley under housing; the last remaining fertile valley in the western part of the Northern Range—just when we might need it most, we decide to surrender that as well. Even so, that seems to be now inconsistent with what the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources has just said, that Tucker Valley is going to be used for organic farming. Presumably now we have changed from housing. It is not really dissimilar from saying that we will give \$100 more to the senior citizens grant and then overnight changing that by adding another \$100 more—just when one had thought that a budgetary exercise was one which was well thought out, very rigorous in its planning and in its calculations—we could so whimsically make another measure overnight. We went last week to a consultation in Chaguaramas about the housing plan for Tucker Valley, this week we hear Tucker Valley is to be used for organic agriculture.

I think we are entitled to have more coherence in Government's policies than that. I think we are entitled to see some more coordinated approach to the thinking and the conceptualization of the issue on the policies and the planning for it than we are seeing now.

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Again, I think one of the basic problems is we still persist, despite our understanding now about the nature of development, the complexity of that, the way it is inter-sectoral, interdisciplinary, we still persist in trying to address these issues through narrow sectoral lines of analysis, responsibility and undertaking. With such an approach, objectives are sometimes conflicting. I think we really need to pause in the country and see how we can overcome and cut across those limitations—inherited limitations of public administration systems that no longer serve the nature of our modern society and the objectives that we are trying to achieve.

Mr. Vice-President, I have often said at the global level in my work and on behalf of small island developing states that they can be seen as, treated as, used as, thought of as, and managed as laboratories where we can really get it together. Trinidad and Tobago is a little village of a place by global standards. We have the opportunity here to get it right and to get it together; we have the capacities to do so and we have the revenues now to do so. And yet we still do not take the opportunity to approach our analysis, our understanding, our measures and our responses in a different way. We seem not to be able to learn from reflecting on our own past experience and sometimes, I have to say, I wonder what is the nature of the discourse that takes place in the Cabinet room, or indeed, is there any discourse at all; because I do not see a reflection of that coming together of different Ministries and different responsibilities in the nature of the solutions that are proposed to the country.

Our agriculturalists and agricultural planners have long lamented the shortsightedness of converting the fertile valleys of the Northern Range to housing settlements. Food insecurity has been foreseeable here for a long time. For decades it has been repeatedly pointed out that agriculture was not sustainable given the policies we had. It has also repeatedly been pointed out that agriculture is an important part of our tradition, our history, our culture, our skill-base, our livelihoods and our means of sustaining ourselves in the long term, long after the energy revenues will have dried up. Our approach to all of that can hardly qualify as putting agriculture or the economy on a sustainable basis.

7.30 p.m.

I think, however, that it is encouraging that we are recognizing the importance of agriculture. One must look for the gem in the eye of the toad. But the approach that we now have, the inconsistencies in directions amongst the various ministries and sectors, cannot be the way in which we establish agriculture on a sustainable basis.

Mr. Vice-President, an objective of food security for the nation, especially if agriculture is also expected to produce a rapid response to the inflation in the cost of local food items, would involve concerted action on many fronts. It would certainly involve at a minimum, the Ministry of Planning and Development; the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources; the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education; the Ministry of Trade and Industry; the Ministry of Finance, for the fiscal measures that are required; the Ministry of Education for educating consumers about the expenditure choices they make and the impact of those choices; the Ministry of Works and Transport and so on.

And so I suggest, if reliance on agriculture is going to be the main plank of our response and our approach to the inflationary situation, that maybe we should have a response more commensurate with the urgency of this situation. Perhaps we should consider an inter-sectoral committee; an inter-ministerial committee with specific objectives and time lines for delivery; a results reoriented approach, not an allocations approach. It should be collaborative, inter-sectoral, interdisciplinary; with the required packaging of all the institutional measures that are needed to facilitate and to support such an objective.

Mr. Vice-President, the decline of agriculture partly accounts for the flight to the city—where services are centralized; where resources are concentrated; where opportunities are expected; and where options may be more diverse. We see this globally. These are the driving forces that are putting pressure on our urban services; our urban space; housing space; transportation services and recreational spaces. But all of this was foreseeable. We did not urbanize in 2006, and our transportation problem as it exists now, did not really occur only in 2006. Nor did it occur, I might say, only because we have had a recent high increase in the number of foreign-used vehicles in the country. All of this was foreseeable. For decades, we have expected and we have anticipated the effects of the centralization of government and of government's service delivery.

Government's solution to the transportation problem is a rapid rail transit system; Sen. Prof. Ramchand has already spoken in detail about that and characterized it in a certain way. Minister Imbert has defended the decision about the rapid rail transit system. I have no position in principle against this or for this. I would have liked to be able to assess and consider the proposal in light of the transportation study, the draft of which the Minister waved at us yesterday, or in light of the feasibility study, the results of which apparently exist, but not for us who are supposed to make comments on the budget and to analyze it on behalf of the country.

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I share Sen. Prof. Deosaran's disposition towards travel by train. I think it is a very civilized way to travel. You can relax; you can read; you can sleep; you can think; you can work; you can look out the window; somebody else has the responsibility to get you from A to B; it is more efficient; there are less emissions per capita for taking people from place A to place B, and so on. But, I do not feel that I can support or not support a proposal like this based on my personal preference, because it is not my interpretation that I am here to advance my personal preferences. I am here to assess the proposals on the basis of the analyses that have been done, in the context of what we have, the sense that we make of it, and our ideas, our thinking and our imagination, about the solutions that might be available that we can address to the problem.

Minister Imbert castigated the Association of Professional Engineers and the Manufacturers Association for the figures used in their analysis and the resistance they have to the proposal, but he did not at any time deal with the Government's approach to information. It is like getting water out of stone. Repeatedly, we have seen in this Chamber, the way in which questions posed to the Government for information are interpreted in such a very strict and narrow way, that you are not any wiser when you have had the information. That can hardly be consistent with the principles of participation or empowerment.

Then, Minister Imbert told us, and it was said also in the budget, that this rapid rail system is expected to come into being in the year 2011. Why do we have to have such an all-or-nothing approach? Admittedly, there are a few other measures in the budget about how we might deal with the traffic situation and the transportation problem, and I think these are a good indication that some innovative thinking is taking place. But they are very few, and I believe that there are many more possibilities that we can call into play to address the problem, while we are waiting for 2011 and a rapid rail transit system to become available.

Mr. Vice-President, the whole process of urbanization which I have described is leading to an underclass in our society. Sen. Prof. Deosaran made mention of that in his contribution. And so it brings me to look a little bit at our approach to poverty and to poverty elimination, eradication in the country. I think it is really time that we examine how to approach poverty eradication, other than by handouts and welfare programmes, which leave their recipients as marginalized as they were before without means or without hope of lifting themselves out of that condition. In the Survey of Living Conditions in the budget, we are told that the

survey is “expected to produce current data on poverty within Trinidad and Tobago to enable a more targeted approach to poverty reduction”—I would really like to say and see “poverty eradication.” This survey, it goes on to say, will be finalized in 2006.

Mr. Vice-President, I support this as a way in which we should be assessing the situation on the ground; as a way of informing policy formulation and expenditure outlays, providing that the results of the survey are made available to the public and are not hidden away as not being the people's business and providing we act on them in a more innovative way than we have to date. But, I would like also to see Government apply this method to other areas that require our attention. For example, the transportation survey and feasibility study to which I earlier referred, should be the basis upon which proposals are formulated and justified. Somehow, we seem to have the conclusions, made the decisions, made the proposals even before the draft of the transportation survey is put out for public comment and before anyone else, except the inner circles of the Government have had access to the results of the feasibility study.

Perhaps we should also do a survey of the physical conditions of public schools and the teaching capacities available as the basis upon which a prioritized approach to meeting the needs of the school system should be made. In other words, policy should be formulated on the basis of good assessment. It is where we should always begin, as we have heard earlier today from the Minister of Education. At my last count, there were about 75 welfare or public assistance programmes that are on the books, or maybe they are actually alive and kicking, offered by the Government.

While this may indicate a caring Government, a caring society, I ask, with what result? What are the trends in the condition of the beneficiaries of these programmes; what progress are they making to lift themselves out of poverty; how are we empowering them through these programmes; how do we ever know which ones are effective and which are not; which ones to continue, and which not; which ones to invest more in, and which not? Altogether, is our approach to poverty eradication going to be effective, if we do not create assets for those household and communities, and if we persist in mounting very marginal programmes while the engine of the economy drives on, creating in its wake greater inequity and greater poverty as it moves along.

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So, that brings me to education. We cannot say with confidence that the education system is helping to bridge that gap with the speed and the urgency which is required. The Minister of Education could verify or clarify, whether it is correct that about 30 per cent of our citizens are falling through the cracks of the education system, especially as she has pointed out that it is the Ministry's practice to collect and analyze the data. And, if I may address this directly to the Minister of Education, I think we await with great concern and great interest, the analysis that she mentioned that she has undertaken, of why there is such a large fallout from the education system.

I congratulated the Minister of Education after her contribution, but I also commiserated with her about the great challenges that still remain in education, as this is a tough nut to crack. I believe that it is the most difficult sector to turn around in any society and I commend to the Minister of Education a report of a Caricom Task Force on the Future of Education which was commissioned by me in 1998 when I was working for the Caricom Secretariat, and which was intended to look at how we might start to reposition and reorient the education systems of the Caribbean to prepare them and prepare the people for the 21st Century. The report is somewhere languishing on the shelves of our Ministry of Education, and the ministries of education of all the Caribbean Community Countries.

It takes a whole generation to turn around an education system. We can do health or agriculture or telecommunication much more quickly, but for education we need a 20 year span to plan, to think, to orient, to articulate in the way in which the Minister was saying. So I do not think that we can expect the kind of output, the kind of outcome, the kind of results from the education system, in the immediate way that we might need, in order to bridge that gap of inequity in skills, training, learning and literacy and so on.

7.45 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, the Minister of Education may wish to consider a very special, urgent, concentrated, focused, targeted programme for the 30 per cent falling through the system—I believe that they are our most urgent need—in order to avoid expanding the underclass of people in the society and in order to give such persons options other than joining the underworld of drugs, crime and violence. [*Interruption*]

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. Mc Kenzie*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. A. Cropper: Mr. Vice-President, I thank you and I thank Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie.

I would like to just go on to talk a little about the environment, because quite apart from the education system, as a whole, we have to be concerned about how we are educating ourselves to pursue sustainable development that we hear so much about. There is a lot of rhetoric and a lot of references to this. It is integral to our development, but I think we have to pursue it, not as environment for development, but environment in development.

Here we have had a history of disappointment, despite the amenability and the interest of the Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment. It is sobering to realize that the only environmental policy that has been approved in this administration over the last four years has been the revised environmental policy. We are talking about it a lot; it was referred to in the budget. There are major principles embedded in that. There are drafts of various pieces of legislation submitted by the EMA to give effect to those principles; all of them are languishing somewhere in the system.

The Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment cited several of them yesterday. Perhaps the Attorney General may want to tell us about their status. For example, the Beverage Container Bill, which provides for deposits and refunds and which would help in dealing with the massive solid waste disposal problem we have in the country, which the Minister admitted; which would help in avoiding the blockage of drains; in avoiding flooding in the city and reducing the requirements for the infrastructure for floods and the size of that allocation in the budget.

For example, the Water Pollution Rules; the Air Pollution Rules; all these are somewhere in the queue for years now, having been submitted by the Environmental Management Authority (EMA). For example, the amendments to the Motor Vehicles and Road Transportation Act, which would establish standards for motor vehicles emissions, are languishing somewhere. For example the Mining and Minerals Act of 2000; repeatedly we hear that it is still awaiting amendments to be made, and so the good enough becomes hostage to the perfect and we cannot deliver the perfect so we trundle along with an economy that is just out of hand without all these regulatory frameworks in place; without an adequate

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institutional framework, without standards, regulations or monitoring and evaluation of procedures and without compliance provisions. I might say also, on the construction side, without the Government applying the fundamental principles it endorsed in its White Paper on Value for Money, Transparency and Accountability. Meanwhile we have a very active Nidco, and one is left to wonder whether it is in conformity with the White Paper that was intended to establish the new procurement regime.

The Certificate of Environmental Clearance (CEC) is the only instrument that is applying the precautionary principle in this small, fragile island space which we call home. We have learnt that the Green Fund is now operational. I have not yet found in the documents where this is described, but I will continue to look. It was my understanding that since this came into being under the Miscellaneous Taxes provision in the budget of the year 2000, that it required regulations before it could be put into effect and become operational, and that those regulations needed to come to Parliament. Perhaps I was wrong, and maybe the Attorney General could explain.

Meanwhile, we see instances of the Government itself undermining what little institutional framework exists. Let us take the case of UDeCott proceeding on the Tarouba site for the Brian Lara Stadium before a certificate of environmental clearance is given. The EMA issued a notice of violation for breaking the law; UDeCott knew that, but claimed to be acting on instructions. It had a deadline to meet for the World Cup and so it would not stop. The EMA fined UDeCott \$180,000, but it was paid by the Government and business as usual continued. What an example; perhaps the Attorney General might add that example to his repertoire of examples of breaking the law. The line Minister for this, whoever it is, never commented on the incident. No one was pulled in line. Perhaps the Prime Minister might wish to name two people who might be arrested for this.

Sen. Ahmed: Good point.

Sen. A. Cropper: The Prime Minister has also undermined the EMA, in his repeated announcements before a CEC is given, that the smelter would go ahead. This puts the EMA in an untenable position, despite the attempt by Sen. Montano yesterday to provide a defence for this in terms of “reasonable expectations.” Without taking any position on the smelter, because I do not think that I or anyone else in the population has the body of information upon which we can intelligently, rationally and coherently make a case for or against the smelters, I would just like to comment on the process by which we are approaching this.

Any credible public policy formulation process of the Government would examine the conflicting interests that are inherent in this proposal; it would make known the values, valuation and judgments that are applied to the various claims. It would examine the trade offs that are inherent in it; it would make these known. It would let the people know how it is thinking of these things; how it is weighing them in the balance. It would make a decision. It would justify its conclusion and would take the risk of that conclusion. We know nothing about whether this is the kind of thinking that is going into deciding for or against the smelters.

The Prime Minister's statement that the whole of the southwestern peninsula would become an industrialized zone is like salt in the wounds of the communities and the people who inhabit that space. [*Desk thumping*] Our whole process of treating with them and relating to them does not reflect any of the dignity, participation, empowerment, equity or sustainable development for them that we have talked about.

That brings me to a comment on the structure of the economy. I am not going to say much about this, except to cite and endorse the analysis put forward by Sen. King. I believe that the kind of dualism in the economy that she repeatedly talks about has been exacerbated here over the last few years. The phenomenon she talks about is not just about manufacturing, as Sen. Montano advanced in trying to rebut her analysis, but it is about laying the foundations in skills, in innovative capacities, in different sustainable enterprises, in building domestic technical capacity to support us in another phase. It is about avoiding price and wage movements that cannot be sustained when the boom is over. It is about how we organize ourselves to sustain human well-being.

I have just finished reviewing an early draft of a book on the political economy of the Trinidad and Tobago energy industrial policy, since the time of our independence. It already catalogues the social fallout of the dualism in this economy; the kinds of things which Sen. King talked about. In this context, let me say that the proposal for an international financial centre is innovative and has potential, but the requirements for realizing such potential are challenging and varied and it remains to be seen how we are going to organize to create the prerequisites and conditions to make that successful.

So, are we positioned on a sustainable path? How, for example, does the Government plan to employ the labour force when the construction projects are finished or to sustain welfare when the surplus revenues are no longer available

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for the URPs and CEPEPs? How does the Government plan to sustain the wage and price increases in the future or will these challenges simply be bequeathed to another administration, as we did in the latter part of the 1980s, after the first boom?

In closing, Mr. Vice-President, I would like to reiterate my earlier statement that we should see the characteristics of a caring society reflected in our practices, behaviour and attitudes. In a caring society, we would not see a Prime Minister engaging with and having audience with some of the groups that support him in the smelter exercise in the southwestern peninsula and ignoring those who do not. We would have a little more equity in that relationship.

In a caring society, we would not see the Prime Minister and other high officials making their way in crowded traffic situations, at the expense of the ordinary citizen, complete with outriders and sirens, brushing the rest of us out of the way, and on to the verge, as though brushing flies away from decomposing corpses. That is the way citizens are treated in that situation. In a caring society we would not see that. These kinds of actions and examples are what contribute to that “frontier society” which the Attorney General spoke about: every man for himself; dog eat dog; everything and everybody is fair game. The threshold of behaviour is so low; we are so devalued in all that we do that the kidnappers are now kidnapping the goats of children.

A caring society would not see a Prime Minister seeking to expand his personal entertainment space for himself and his visitors at the expense of amenities to citizens, provided by a long established recreation ground. A caring society would not see a Prime Minister seeking to expand his office at the expense of Parliament.

A caring society would not see a Prime Minister allocating expenditure from which he and his household are the sole beneficiaries. Surely there is a conflict of interest in the Prime Minister presiding over a process that decides that the home of the Prime Minister of the country, provided for by the State, is to be torn down and replaced and where he is the person determining the size of that allocation. Integrity would dictate to a Prime Minister in a caring society that it is inappropriate to do so, that he should not be the decision maker in such a matter, and that the honourable thing to do is to entrust such decisions to a disinterested group.

I propose that in the caring society of the future, that should no longer be allowed. [*Desk thumping*] Such decisions should be made by a committee of the Public Service Commission on the basis of an objective and transparent

assessment of the quality of the housing and of the amenities that the people of the country put at the disposal of an incumbent Prime Minister. I think the same would apply to any decision to obtain an executive jet in preparation for an executive President.

A caring society would not see the authorities reduce the shacks in which poor people live to rubble, doing what the earthquake had failed to do, while turning a blind eye or facilitating large and corporate interests to violate rules and regulations of the Town and Country Planning Division.

A caring society would have long brought into being the Children's Authority. It would have debated the gender policy. It would seek to eliminate the inequitable levels of remuneration between males and females in the society, in the same occupational categories.

8.00 p.m.

A caring society would appoint the judges already provided for; it would implement the DNA Act to help in the solution to crime; it would expand and enhance the court facilities before it builds a carnival centre. A caring society would support the diversity of civic society organizations which are trying to shore up the society by caring for those who fall through the safety nets of the programmes maintained by the State; services provided in food, clothing, shelter, counselling, literacy and skills training. A caring society would increase the minimum wage and would require the corporate sector to have a higher threshold of corporate social responsibility.

Mr. Vice-President, I could not help feeling, having read and studied the budget that the Government is isolated and insulated from the citizens of the country and the realities of life, and I wonder whether representatives no longer get feedback from their constituencies. We have a very restive society out there. We are much better informed than we were in the past, we are also more frustrated, we are more expectant and less manipulable; we are more willing to confront as we have been seeing communities doing everywhere in the country. The global analysis shows that this is a pattern and the tendency for states such as ours, and that there is a higher probability for conflicts in states that are endowed as we are but with endowments that are not indefinite and endowments that we know would cease to exist at some time in the future.

And so, Mr. Vice-President, I think if we are to avoid and avert some of that conflict, which I think is incipient out there, we might be a bit more conscionable about making sure that what we do and how we do it reflects those principles that

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were outlined by the Prime Minister. While we wait for the epiphany of 2020, I think it is important for us to make sure that all we propose and all that we do, conform to those principles, if we want to keep the society together and if we want to sustain it, let alone put the economy on a sustainable path.

Thank you.

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, we shall now take the dinner break and return at 8.35 p.m. The Senate is now suspended for dinner.

8.04 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

8.35 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

The Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education (Sen. The Hon. Mustapha Abdul-Hamid): Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. I would like to begin my contribution to this debate by congratulating the hon. Prime Minister and his team, not just for the budget of 2006/2007, but in fact, for his series of budgets going back to 2002. Because as you would recognize, this budget statement is simply part of an entire package, part of the whole and each budget would have been a critical component in that entire package.

You would recall early in our tenure in office we dealt with a number of issues, and in each budget we would have addressed a particular area or placed emphasis on a particular area of our national development. One would recall in the very early days, we would have addressed the question or the challenges of unemployment and the promotion of entrepreneurial activity with the establishment of NEDCO and the introduction of a number of programmes like CEPEP and others. All of those in that particular fiscal year were intended to address the issues of unemployment very early.

You would also recall the national challenges in the area of national security were addressed earlier in our term, and that was followed I think by an emphasis on health and the construction sector, the provision of appropriate accommodation for our citizens.

Later on, we emphasized social services and public utilities including street lighting and others, and last year, the greatest emphasis was placed on education in particular, tertiary education, and I also recall a very important tax relief measure. This year, our emphasis was placed perhaps most strategically on housing and making it more affordable.

The point I am really making is that you can see each year the Government has been addressing one, two, or more critical areas of national development, and

as the years have gone by when we add everything together we see that we have a comprehensive national package for the purpose of national development. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, I would very much like to thank Sen. Prof. Deosaran for tuning in—the best way I can describe it—to the essence of Vision 2020, in that he was able to connect some very important points. He was able to recognize that all our construction that people sometimes look at and perhaps prefer not to see the value, he was able to connect that with the quality of accommodation for our public servants, understanding that if our public servants have better working environment available to them it would lead not only to a better quality of life for the employees, but it would also lead to an improved quality of service.

Similarly, the infrastructure in which we are investing, road infrastructure, et cetera; the technology about which we spoke, social services and so forth, all of our investments in these areas, the net effect of it is that we would have a better quality of life and a higher standard of living. There is one variable that he did not mention, which I very often like to mention as we talk about developed country status.

That is the human or social factor, in that while we recognize that development is in fact about providing all these services, but very important for us as a developing country—one main advantage we have as we approach the transformation of our society into a developed country is that we have many examples to look at and as we look at them, we are in a position to determine what features or characteristics of those developed countries we would like to emulate and what we would like to avoid.

Because we are in fact approaching our development in a planned way, and we are planning on the basis of what we know and of the experiences of other countries so in a way we are able almost to customize our development programmes to suit our particular needs. That is not something I suspect many countries have been able to do in that their development would have come upon them. We, in fact, are moving in a structured and organized, planned manner.

That particular characteristic or variable I am talking about is the content of the character of the citizen, a very important feature in any country's development. When I speak about the content of the character of the citizen, I am speaking particularly about the quality of relationships we enjoy as human beings. And we are in a position to put in place programmes that would positively impact on how we evolve as human beings and how we create relationships that lead us as a people to enjoying the benefits of having healthy relationships. That is an important part as well of our development.

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By and large, those of us in education, when we speak about development, we understand that in order to be a developed country, our systems must operate at a standard that is on par or better than the best systems anywhere in the world. Our services must be delivered with the efficiency and must exceed the services delivered anywhere in the world with the standards that are normally associated with the developed countries.

What I mean to say is that we must in fact have our services and systems operate at the standards which are generally considered to be international best practices in every field. For example, we must have the best health care system, the best judicial system, our education system must be on par with the best education anywhere, and even in our construction sector we must be able to have an efficient sector here. In other words, all systems must operate at optimal efficiency.

In order to do that, the one factor that is critical in every system and service that we deliver, is expertise. Mr. Vice-President, to have an efficient health care system we need expertise. We need doctors, nurses, radiography technicians, we need scrub technicians. There is a wide range of expertise we need within the health care sector to operate an efficient First World health care system.

To operate a judicial system, we need judges, lawyers, CAT reporters, et cetera, and to operate a construction sector, we need an efficient world-class construction sector with masons, plumbers, carpenters, electricians, people with competence in putting together gypsum. We need a wide range of skills within the construction sector.

8.45 p.m.

In short, we need expertise to ensure that all of our systems operate on par with the best systems anywhere in the world in order for us to be able to describe ourselves as a developed country. That is not an easy task, not in the least. I say so because the United Kingdom which has a very large population pool—65 million—that is an important point because it is from your population pool that you will develop your expertise. They also have a mature education system. When I say mature education system, they have been operating their education system for centuries; hundreds of years. They have had a lot of time; many opportunities to review, revise, upgrade, tweak, adjust as they have seen fit along the way, to ensure that their education system is, in fact, meeting the needs of the British society and the economy.

They also have a strong currency. The strength of the currency is an important point, because the stronger your currency is in relation to other currencies, the more likely you are able to retain the expertise that you produce, meaning, if you

have a pound, the pound being as strong as it is, you would less likely get British citizens, educated in Britain, leaving the United Kingdom to come to work for TT dollars, because when compared to what they could earn home they would find that the value of what they could earn home, on the basis of the strength of their pound, far exceeds what they could earn outside of the United Kingdom. So the United Kingdom, on the basis of the strength of its currency, manages to retain a lot of the persons that they train. So those three points are very important: a large population pool; a mature education system and the strength of their currency.

The United States is not very dissimilar. They have an even larger population pool—275-plus million, approaching 300 million. They also have a different education system, different to the British; far more mature than ours. They have been independent since 1776 and they have worked on their system over hundreds of years as well, and they too have a currency stronger than ours, and as a consequence they are able to retain a lot of the expertise that they produce.

That strong currency that you see on the part of both of them did not come just like that. Once you look at history you can look at the basis of the strength of the British economy. For many years they held colonies all over the world. They were able to reap the benefits of the world's resources; take them back to London; build their economy and build their economic strength, not too different from what has happened with the United States as well; able to benefit both countries; able to benefit and profit from the world's wealth in a way that we have not.

So all of these variables in their favour and still the United Kingdom find themselves having to import to operate the health care system at British standards; at First World standards, more than half of their nurses from countries just like ours, from the Philippines, countries in the Far East. They have to import expertise so that their health care system can operate consistent with international best practice. Also, when the school term started last year, London was short 600 math teachers, so challenging is the task of providing all the expertise that you need.

The United States, with all the advantages that I have spoken about, they, too, have to import IT expertise from India, doctors from Africa and India and other parts of the world; nurses from the Philippines; teachers from Trinidad and other countries in the Caribbean. They are constantly out there looking for expertise because in spite of the fact that they have these large population pools, in spite of the fact they have a mature education system; in spite of the fact they have strong currencies, they still are unable to produce the expertise required to operate their systems and deliver services consistent with international standards of best practice.

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That is what Sen. Prof. Ramchand said—a bit silly, because he said we must do it ourselves. “Why we cannot do things ourselves?” Which country in the world can do it themselves? This globalization thing did not take place by accident. There are very real factors that would have gone into it, because countries know that there is expertise out there that they would like to recruit, and all of that is part and parcel of that globalization process.

The question is: Where does that leave Trinidad and Tobago? We are a small population of 1.3 million people. It is from that 1.3 million that we have to grow and extract all the expertise we need to run our health care system, our judicial system, our education system. Any and every system that we hope to operate we have to extract that expertise from that 1.3 million people, in the main. We have a less mature education system. We have been independent only for a very short time. We have inherited this British education system and we are in the process now of examining that system, constantly, to determine to what extent that system, in fact, is meeting our needs.

So we are in the early days of the assessment/review/adjustment/upgrade of the education system. That is what the Minister of Education was talking about, that changes are taking place because we are in our very youthful days in the evolution of our education system, and similar things we are doing, even within our own Ministry. We have a currency that stands weaker than the British pound and the US dollar. So the same factors that work in favour of the British and the US, those factors do not work in our favour in the same way.

What that means for Trinidad and Tobago is that this Government has adopted a policy. Understanding that we require expertise, understanding the challenge to grow and develop that expertise, this Government has taken the policy position that not a single citizen, as far as education goes, will be left behind. [*Desk thumping*] We can afford to allow no potential to go to waste. No citizen of this country with any potential must allow that potential to go to waste. We have a responsibility to work with every citizen, to examine what his or her potential is, and to work with that citizen to grow himself or herself into becoming the best that he or she can be, using all that the Government has to offer. No potential must go to waste.

The individual must achieve his own potential, not only for the benefit of the national economy, because once you are able to become proficient in a particular skill or a particular discipline, you can make a contribution. But separate and apart from that, your personal human development is also a critical and important factor, in that you are able to grow and become self-fulfilled.

It is in that wide context that this Government has taken the position, a critical policy position that distinguishes us clearly from those on that side, that education is not a privilege; education is a right. [*Desk thumping*]. In fact, education became a privilege in 1988: That was the first year. We have known free tertiary education before. And it was in 1988 when the hon. Member for St. Augustine, as part of a government had introduced for the first time, what became a cess fee that put a tax on students wishing to pursue tertiary education, and for 18 years, from 1988 to 2006, apart from the assistance that came their way in the last five years, between 2001 and 2006, many poor persons were locked out of the tertiary education system. They were locked out of the university gates because they could not afford to pay the \$2,600, or the \$3,500, whatever the fee became over the following years. So for years Enterprise was locked out of tertiary education; Patna Village, River Estate, Bagatelle Road and Laventille were all locked out. Tertiary education was only available to those people who had funding and were able to pay. It was only available to those who had means.

In that way, large sections of our society were debarred on account of a policy that was put in place by the NAR government, the same Mr. Dookeran who is talking about contributing to national development, et cetera.

Sen. Prof. Deosaran: I always enjoy listening to the Minister, but I think it is important for the national community to know what is your thinking and your Government's thinking on an important element in tertiary education and that is: How do you intend to respond to the fact that so many of our graduates, including medical graduates and other graduates, leave the country after being trained here at public expense?

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: I will try to do that sometime later, please. It is easier if you allow me to say the things I want to say—

Sen. Prof. Deosaran: Answer the question or I will cut in, you know. You are only gallerying, gallerying—

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Listen, listen. Do not raise your voice at me.

Mr. Vice-President: Please, do not talk across—

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: No, the Professor is being rude.

Mr. Vice-President: Will you please continue if you say you will give him the answer.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Why must the Professor accuse me of gallerying? Five minutes into my contribution he interrupts me and is accusing me of gallerying.

Mr. Vice-President, this is the philosophical perspective that accounts for this Government's unprecedented and unparalleled investment in education. This Government has taken that particular philosophical perspective understanding the value of the development of the human resource capacity of our country, so much so that we have set for ourselves the goal that by 2015 we would like to see 60 per cent of the graduates of a secondary school system move on to higher education. That is a formidable challenge. Not too many countries have attempted to set for themselves a goal as significant as that.

What that has meant for us is that we have had a lot of work to do within the tertiary education sector. We have embarked on a process that if we want to develop all the expertise that is needed in the country, we must make sure that all our institutions are functioning efficiently and delivering education opportunities, such that we are able to develop the best expertise possible.

When we came into office we met a tertiary education landscape that was—one can probably describe the institutions as being entangled; they were all trampling on each other. Tripping over each other might be a reasonable way to describe it. In some cases, they were even tripping over themselves. There were issues of standards, in that in not every case we found that the standards were what they ought to be. We saw the need to organize and to streamline the institutions. When I say, organize and streamline, make sure that each of the many institutions delivering tertiary education was so organized that it could do its best work.

Many of them were under-resourced and rundown. There were, in fact, problems in terms of the geographic spread of some of these institutions, meaning that some parts of the country found themselves without institutions close to their respective communities.

So we have had this task of trying to rationalize institutions, making sure they have their proper focus; making sure that the management structure of each institution is properly organized and that each institution is properly resourced to allow it to perform its task, and that is an exercise we have been undertaking over the last couple years.

9.00 p.m.

I want to spend some time looking at each institution. In 2002, the University of the West Indies—here we are looking at the question of capacity. Because we have set a target of 60 per cent of secondary education students moving on to higher education, we must have places into which they would move. We must have tertiary education places available so they can progress naturally to that system. The first challenge is capacity. In 2002, the student population of the University of the West Indies was 8,600. With much hard work and cooperation from the university we were able to move that number to over 14,000 places in 2006. I say with the cooperation of the University of the West Indies because we have made very flexible and creative use of the plant by introducing evening classes. Wherever there would have been available space and time, we found a way to optimize or maximize the use of the plant.

Fourteen thousand tertiary education places at the University of the West Indies are still not enough. It does not even come near to helping us meet the target of 60 per cent that we have set for ourselves. That alone provides adequate justification for the existence of UTT, the fact that we have a need for greater capacity. There were other issues. For many years UWI operated in an environment where they held the monopoly. Like any monopoly, you would have the same difficulties any monopoly will have. The effect of that is that generally, UWI had a guaranteed market and there was very little pressure for them to improve other than internal pressure. Sometimes that is not enough. A guaranteed market for any monopoly generally tends to result in a situation where the needs of the client may be less regarded than perhaps it might be in a competitive environment. We also found that the University of the West Indies was perhaps not as responsive to the needs of the economy as they should be.

The effect of that is that at a recent university council meeting in Jamaica we heard the deputy principal of the Mona campus complaining that too many of Mona's graduates were unemployed or unemployable, meaning that they could not find jobs in the Jamaican economy. A similar sentiment was expressed somewhere in Trinidad because the principal of the St. Augustine campus also called on the Government to absorb graduates of the University of the West Indies, meaning that they could not naturally be absorbed in the economy.

There are three variables that must be aligned. Any serious education institution would have to look at itself in the context of three variables. They are the needs of the economy into which the graduates would be moving; the places that are available at the institution—the places must bear some relationship to the needs of the economy—and the demand of the students, meaning that you have a

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responsibility to help shape the demand such that the places at the university would be filled. There must be a general alignment and if it does not take place we would have a situation not too dissimilar from what we have, where the universities are producing large numbers of sociologists when we have need for engineers, IT personnel, et cetera.

We might be producing 1,000 sociologists when we have need for 100 in the economy, so we end up with 900 unemployed sociologists. We may be producing 100 engineers when we need 1,000 engineers and we end up short of 900 engineers. Those are issues that any university must address. Having recognized some of those challenges, we moved in the direction of establishing the University of Trinidad and Tobago, paying particular attention to the issue of the needs of the economy and the places available.

When Sen. King spoke, she came very near to crying, I thought, for the University of the West Indies because she spoke of the university not having money to pay for some patent or the other. I want to go through and advise Sen. King that she need not worry about the University of the West Indies and money. The University of the West Indies is properly well resourced and they have a lot of money. They have no worry when it comes to money.

I would go over the Government's contributions of money to UWI for the last few years.

Year	\$
2001 (before our time)	144,192,000
2002	288,192,000
2003	299,815,000
2004	468,000,000
2005	461,000,000
2006	514,000,000

That does not include tuition fees that also come from the Government and goes into UWI's coffers. In 2006, that amounted to \$91,965,000 to a total budgeted figure for UWI of \$617 million. That does not include our other contributions that we have made to particular capital projects at the university. We have provided and released \$12 million for the Milner Hall dormitory; a lecture theatre and classroom building, \$7.9 million and the teacher learning complex, \$2.031 million.

In addition to the \$617 million I spoke about, the sum of \$22.756 million was released to the university. That generosity has resulted in the University of the West Indies finding itself sitting on a \$400 million fixed deposit. Happy like pappy with money and complaining about money for a patent or the other. One need not worry about the University of the West Indies and funding. Sometimes they have no shame to come and ask me for \$1 million to do something.

At UTT the sheer demand for places at tertiary level would justify its existence because of the capacity. There are three other factors that we took into account in the establishment of UTT. They are capacity, relevance and excellence. The University of Trinidad and Tobago was established a few years ago with particular goals. The first goal is to expand capacity; offer programmes relevant to our economy and to ensure that we maintain the highest international standards of excellence in the design of each programme. Before UTT came on the scene we had institutions that existed as John Donaldson Technical Institute and San Fernando Technical Institute that were under COSTAATT which was put together in 2000. It was like a big barrel and everything was dumped in that big barrel and neglected thereafter. It was put in that barrel, put a label COSTAATT on the barrel and left it to fend for itself.

The necessary attention, management, infrastructure and resources that were required to make COSTAATT work were never even conceptualized. So much so that when we came into office the situation was very bad, even in terms of the programmes. At John S. Donaldson Technical Institute and San Fernando Technical Institute which were originally intended to deal largely with engineering programmes, there were three programmes, the Associate Degree Programme, National Technician Diploma and NEC Diploma. The same institutions were trying to do all three. The situation was so chaotic that the matriculation requirement for the Associate Degree Programme at San Fernando Technical Institute was different from the requirement to do the same programme at John Donaldson. You needed five O levels to get into John D and four O levels to get into Sando Tech.

There was a situation of strong disorganization. More than that, for many years the lecturers had taught the NEC programme and they were very comfortable teaching that because the University of the West Indies accepted that as a basis for entry into the faculty of engineering. No one knew anything about this Associate Degree Programme. At that state the Associate Degree Programme came in as a kind of alien. The University of the West Indies did not know anything about it, so they could not assess it. If you had an associate degree in civil engineering

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they did not want to use that as a basis for entry into UWI. The lecturers at John D and Sando Tech resisted teaching the Associate Degree Programme. They did not want it because they knew it had no value in the engineering world, but the management of COSTAATT insisted and foisted it upon them. It created a situation and there was much tension between COSTAATT management and John D and Sando Tech.

When we came in and assigned both institutions, the first order of business was to scrap all three, Associate Degree, National Technicians Diploma and NEC Diploma Programme. There were good reasons for that. I would read a paragraph of our report.

It was found that the three programmes varied significantly in terms of entry and matriculation requirements, staff qualification, duration, curricula content, teaching, evaluation and quality assurance methodologies and facilities. Failure rates have also been very high ranging from 40 per cent in the former TTIT to 85 per cent in the COSTAATT programme.

With reasons advanced for these rates encompassing some of the preceding factors as well as the students' weak foundation in the core subjects and lack of preparation for the demands of tertiary education, the institutions were failing in delivering quality education that we need as we move towards developed country status.

Together with engineers and the best advice available, we established the National Engineering Technicians Diploma (NETD). We took the best of the three added some other components and made it a superior programme under the management of UTT. That is what we are offering at the diploma level. We were able to standardize the programme to ensure that the entry requirement was more stringent. It was necessary to introduce a greater level of stringency in the admission's requirement because people must have a certain core competence in order to have a chance at being successful in the diploma programme. To ensure that persons who may not have had the entry requirement had a chance, we introduced transition courses.

9.15 pm.

Mr. Vice-President, we introduced preparatory programmes so that if you came and you fell short of the entry requirement we would still accept you. We would work with you for a year in a pre-National Engineering Technicians Diploma (NETD) programme, and we would do it within the same framework, so you would have the line of sight on the NETD programme. We would not say to

you: Go out and get yourself upgraded and come back. The fact that you have expressed an interest is something of value to us, we keep your eyes set on the NETD programme and we develop and train you, specifically, directed toward the NETD programme. Mr. Vice-President, the students who would normally have been able to access the programme would have found themselves still in a position to access the programme, but they just had to do an upgrading programme. That is proving to be quite a success.

The infrastructure was also in a mess. When we visited John S. Donaldson Technical Institute in 2002, the building was totally in a dilapidated condition, there were no computers and the equipment was bad; old and broken. The reason for that, we have come to understand, is that all the moneys were invested in the Trinidad and Tobago Institute of Technology (TTIT) which was located in Couva. There was a deliberate, perhaps, neglect of the institutions located in Port of Spain. The factors that might have gone into a decision like that I leave for you and the national community. Mr. Vice-President, we found a far superior facility in central Trinidad and there is no problem with that, Mr. Vice-President, just so long as all the facilities are done at equal standards.

We have now found ourselves where we are investing heavily in plant and equipment. If you look at the budget numbers, large sums of money have already been spent on John S. Donaldson Technical Institute's and San Fernando Technical Institute's upgrade as we intend to make them full campuses of the University of Trinidad and Tobago. We will be offering at each campus, not only the NETD programme, but we are also going to expand that so that students can move from the NETD programme into a Bachelor of Engineering programme, a Masters programme and beyond. Again, we are creating a very open system where students can come in at the diploma level and find themselves moving within the UTT system all the way up to Masters, PhDs and even beyond.

The Eastern Caribbean Institute of Agriculture and Forestry (ECIAF) is another institution that we have assigned to the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT). Quite a few persons have expressed agreement with this. In fact, this came out as a result of a committee which was set up in July, 2005, under the chairmanship of Prof. John Spence, which included a number of other distinguished persons in the field of agriculture and engineering. They found that there were major gaps in the delivery. These are some of the comments they made: The output of professionally trained agricultural scientists from UWI's Faculty of Science and Agriculture had fallen dramatically. In 2004 and 2005, there were 19 graduates in the Faculty of Science and Agriculture at UWI and by 2005 that number had gone

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down to six. In addition, they pointed out that these UWI graduates had no particular interest in going out to work in the agriculture sector on farms: managing and creating farms. They found that these persons were generally interested in public service or university jobs. The education system was not, in fact, contributing to growing farmers; if I may use that pun. They found that there were deficiencies in research. They found that the graduates of ECIAF preferred—the technicians as there was an inadequacy in the programme—to go on to the University of the West Indies to do their degree and not go directly into the agricultural sector. The facilities at ECIAF left a lot to be desired in terms of its condition.

What Prof. John Spence's Committee proposed is that the UTT should establish an Institute of Food and Agriculture, agriculture being used in its broadest sense to encompass crops, livestock, fishing and forestry. The committee proposed that this should be a technology-based institution aimed at graduating young persons with a practical technical tertiary level education, relevant to today's farming and agriculture. The graduates of the Eastern Caribbean Institute of Agriculture and Forestry would be what we hope to be farm-ready farmers. We are hoping to produce farmers who would go out there and take responsibility for establishing, creating and developing farms.

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. [*Hon. Dr. L. Saith*]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Mr. Vice-President, with respect to the Academy of Performing Arts, a similar proposal came to us from the Director of the Carnival Institute. We proposed for the Academy of Performing Arts, again under UTT management—We recognized that the Academy of Performing Arts exists in a multi cultural context in Trinidad and Tobago to teach, promote and disseminate all the local manifestations of dance: including classical, contemporary and folk forms, drama, robber talk, plays of local, regional and international prevalence; song and music including: Ramleela, conventional, opera and musicals, architecture and other public and other festival arts including Carnival, Hosay, Phagwa, Ramleela and Best Village.

In short, what we are looking at is that in the same way that the British could offer degree programmes in the study of Shakespeare and Horace and whomever they may have, is the same way there are art forms that exist in Trinidad which

are worthy of study and are worthy of scholarship. We propose to look at all our indigenous art forms and to create scholarships out of that. [*Interruption*] It is within UTT. At the same time we also propose to collect, preserve, and conserve a number of very important documents as they relate to our local art.

Mr. Vice-President, we have also put NIHERST in UTT. Originally, NIHERST encompassed the School of Nursing, the School of Foreign Languages, et cetera. They have moved out and they are moving into the community college, which I hope to get to in a couple of minutes. NIHERST developed for itself a proficiency and competence in science popularization, encouraging students to become scientists. The University of Trinidad and Tobago also has a responsibility for outreach—to go into the communities and help grow and nurture interest in science. We intend to use the resources of NIHERST, which are generally similar to what would have been UTT's mandate and have them grow out.

We have so far, within UTT, been able to do all of this. That is not all that UTT is, however, UTT is much more than the amalgamation of these institutions because we are investing heavily on creating new programmes that are relevant to the needs of the economy. In putting together these programmes we have been able to work with a number of international institutions. For example, in the development of our engineering programmes, we have worked with Germans; with respect to the IT programmes, we have worked with Indians; with respect to manufacturing we have worked with the British; medicine, Johns Hopkins in the United States, and in our Natural Gas Institute of the Americas, we are working with US personnel.

In fact, we have entered into partnership agreements with the following: Tata, InfoTech of India, South Hampton Institute, Cambridge University, the University of Texas and in Southern Alberta, University of Technology. The way we approach all of these is that—Mr. Vice-President, building a university in 2006 is very different from building a university in the 1940s. This is an era where the expertise of the world is available to you. It is much easier now to source and bring that expertise, work with that expertise here, even using the communication technology, and build and develop programmes that are relevant to our particular need.

I am hoping that before the end of the year there will be an Act to establish the University of Trinidad and Tobago coming to this Parliament. It is not a very easy thing to do. How do you balance the independence of a university with the interest of the taxpayers? It is not a balance that we have right, not with the University of the West Indies, certainly. The University of the West Indies is governed by the university council. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has one representative

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out of about 60 on the council, and yet with respect to funding, we are to the tune of over \$600 million. I am not sure that one out of 60 is enough protection for the interest of the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago, but that is what it is. It was established many years ago and we have been working with that system.

We are, however, trying to put something in place and we are looking at what exists throughout the world that would ensure that the governing structure balances the independence of the university with the interest of the taxpayers. It is not easy to do; it is something we are working on and we think we are approaching the right formula.

We are doing quite a lot of improvement at TTHTI. We have approved, in principle, a development programme for the next few years, again, with the intention of expanding capacity. That development programme is likely to cost somewhere in the vicinity of \$60 million.

I must say a few words on GATE and on the Higher Education Loan Programme. As we all know, over the last few years we have put in place this free tuition, the GATE programme. We have been able to provide free tuition for a number of persons. In 2001, under the Dollar for Dollar programme—about which much had been said and much had been exaggerated, I would say—we were able to assist 3,000 persons with an expenditure of \$23 million. In 2006, we have been able to assist 27,000 young persons in this country at a cost of \$179 million, accessing tertiary education at the University of the West Indies at the expense of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

We expect that in the coming fiscal year, 37,000 young persons will benefit from the GATE programme at a cost of approximately \$300 million. More than that, understanding that even if your tuition fees are paid, there are citizens of the country who may still be unable to access tertiary education, simply because there are other expenses associated with tertiary education, which they may not be able to meet. They have the expenses to maintain themselves and accommodation, et cetera.

Mr. Vice-President, to come to Sen. Prof. Deosaran's question, what we have put in place with the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses—we cannot chain people to Trinidad and Tobago; this is a global environment. The same way we can import expertise from elsewhere, it is the same way our expertise is available to other countries for import. We have, however, put in place a scale where, if we spend a certain sum on your education, you are required to work in

Trinidad and Tobago for a particular period of time. If we spend on your education up to \$50,000, you are required to work—not for the Government, necessarily, you could work in the private sector, it does not matter—anywhere in Trinidad for up to one year. If it is between \$50,000 and \$100,000 then you work for two years. If it is \$100,000 to \$150,000, three years, et cetera. That is a mechanism that we are trying to put in place in the hope that we would be able to retain some of the expertise that we are trying to produce to service the sectors we are talking about.

The Higher Education Loan Programme is available to our citizens who may need money to pay accommodation, to pay for transportation, to buy food, clothes, books, computers, whatever it might be, you would need money to pursue your tertiary education that is available in the form of a loan. If you are studying in Trinidad and Tobago you can borrow up to \$25,000. If you are studying in Caricom: Jamaica, Grenada, Barbados, you are eligible to borrow up to \$75,000. We will pay all the interest for you while you are at school and six months after you have graduated the loan becomes repayable, and even then we give you a discounted interest rate. Mr. Vice-President, never in the history of Trinidad and Tobago has there been a government that is as committed to the development of its human resource as this Government. [*Desk thumping*]

9.30 p.m.

The way the MuST programme works is that we take citizens of this country, the 30 per cent who may have dropped out of the secondary schools system, anywhere we find you, we take you, and we ask for nothing. We will provide an opportunity if you need to be trained. We will hire a training instructor, we will assign 16 trainees to the training instructor and we will take you on a construction site and we will pay you to ensure that you work under the instruction of the instructor and working alongside experienced masons, carpenters and so forth on the construction site and you will learn the skill over a six-month period.

You may not have any clothes, we will provide an overall free of charge; you say you do not have a hammer, we will give you a hammer; you say you do not have a saw, a measuring tape, we will give you a saw, we will give you measuring tapes, all the tools, we give you a trowel. You have no boots, we will give you shoes; no hard hat, we will give you a hard hat; you have no money to go to the training, we will give you \$60 a day to ensure, understanding as you train, as you learn—you have to live—and we will provide that opportunity.

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Mr. Vice-President, over the last two years we have been able to train 7,596 persons in the MuST programme. I can also say the majority of them, more than 50 per cent of them have been able to access jobs right on the very construction sites on which they were trained. The only difference between those who get jobs and those who do not, is attitude. It is the individual who is making the difference in his own life. It is a programme of which we are extremely proud and it is also available in hotel and tourism. We also entered into agreement with many of the larger hotels around the country and we provide training opportunities in the hotel and tourism sector.

Mr. Vice-President, the On-the-Job Training programme is also a phenomenal success. We have been able to provide training opportunities over the last few years in the On-the-Job programme in 2002, 913; 2003, 5,136; 2004, 5,927; 2005, 7,197; 2006, 8,068. Since the inception in 2002, the On-the-Job-Training programme has been of benefit to 27,241 citizens of this country. You say you have difficulty getting a job, you cannot, because you have no experience, we find a job for you; if you have O levels we pay you \$1,400 per month; if you have A levels, \$2,500 a month, if you have a degree, \$4,000 per month and allow you to work within a real life work environment allowing you to get all the experience you need. You can put that on your resume, it strengthens you, it strengthens your skills.

Mr. Vice-President, YTEPP as well, has been a piece of machinery that has been working quite well. We have found that in the last few years the numbers have been increasing from 7,000 in 2001—2002; 6,000 in 2003; 5,900 in 2004, 6... [*Inaudible*]; in 2005, another 4,000 in 2006. In the last five years 31,205 persons have been able to access real training opportunities from the YTEPP programme.

I have gone through a list of the entire training programmes that we have, over a five-year period. From the MIC, in five years, 8,588; from HYPE, 5,607; NESC 1,716; these are all young people, YTEPP, 31,000, On-the-Job-Training, 27,000, Retraining programme—another one I do not even have time to talk about, 4,861; MuST, 7,596 in a five-year period benefited—and this does not include the 35,000 I spoke about with GATE and HELP. In addition to the GATE and that 35,000 there is another 86,000 persons benefiting from various training programmes; all told, over 115,000 young people of this country have been able to see themselves grow and develop as a consequence of the Government's decision to invest in education in a way that this country has never before seen.

I have so much more to say as you know, but I think my time is up. I thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President, and it would be a pleasure for me to continue my contribution on another occasion. Thank you very much.

Sen. Parvatee Anmolsingh-Mahabir: Thank you for the opportunity to make a contribution on the 2006/2007 budget debate. This year we have before us a budget estimated at \$38 billion. This is a lot of money to spend but merely spending money does not solve problems. Practical ideas, effective planning and implementation is necessary if we are moving onwards to transform our society. At best, money can be an instrument, by itself it is certainly not a solution.

Members of this august House heard about GDP, PSIP, inflation, fiscal policy and so forth. But what impacts on the man-in-the-street is implementation, the delivery of services which would improve the quality of life for its citizens. [*Desk thumping*] Therefore, we must look beyond the broad macro data. We need to determine whether the quality of life for our citizens is improving or deteriorating because of or in spite of the massive expenditure of billions of dollars.

Mr. Vice-President, let me first of all congratulate the Minister of Finance for the increase in old age pension. This measure, together with free medical care and free bus passes, will indeed, improve to some extent the quality of life of our senior citizens. Further, the Government stated that no public officer will receive a pension of less than \$1,150 per month and while this is commendable one would also wish to know when would this provision take effect?

I have taken the pain to examine some of the programmes implemented by the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs with special regard to their Community Education Programme, and I am pleased to state that these programmes are working. These programmes have, without doubt, impacted positively on the lives of hundreds of our citizens especially in the rural areas. Many of our young people who have dropped out of school, single parents and not so young people have had their livelihood and their lives transformed by exposure to training in courses offered in subjects as: cosmetology, tailoring, small-scale agriculture, care of the elderly and a wealth of other skills, and I congratulate the hon. Minister, Joan Yuille-Williams for these programmes.

And through you, Mr. Vice-President, if I may, I respectfully suggest that the process be continued and moved from basic living skills to a higher level where we expose our creative and talented people to new thinking, innovation, new products, things which can lead to the use of our intellectual capacity to produce goods and services for export, thus earning foreign exchange.

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I have also observed that the National Commission for Self-Help has rendered assistance to thousands of citizens with the provision of roads, water, electricity, recreation parks, churches, mandirs and minor house repairs thus enhancing the lives of those involved. However, it is in the field of education, especially the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education that is slowly but surely improving the quality of lives of our citizens as we have so eloquently heard from the Minister.

One of our Nobel Laureate of the Caribbean, Sir Arthur Lewis said on one occasion: "The solution to poverty is not wealth, but education." When we invest in developing our human resources we are making sound investment for the future of our country.

On-the-Job Training, MuST, GATE, HELP and many others are successful programmes and I must congratulate Minister Abdul-Hamid for his programmes. Thousands have indeed benefited. Never in the history of the country has there been so many educational and skills-training programmes available to our citizens to improve themselves. There is no excuse for those who are not availing themselves of these opportunities. But as you know, Mr. Vice-President, you can take the horse to the water but you cannot make it drink. Having said that however, let me also point out a few areas which impact negatively on the lives of our citizen.

In fiscal year 2005/2006, the Government's expenditure on national security was over \$2 billion. Having spent all that money we must ask: Has there been a substantial or any major improvement in respect of the security of our citizens? Do our citizens feel safer? Has our police service become more efficient and effective? Are our coastal shores being properly monitored and our fishermen being adequately protected?

The hon. Minister has given us certain assurances and while I am not fully convinced I, like so many other citizens, live in hope. In his preface to the World Drug Report, 2000, Mr. Kofi Annan stated:

Globalization offers the human race unprecedented opportunities. Unfortunately it also enables many anti-social activities to become problems without passports. Among those are drug abuse which brings misery to millions of family around the world every year, and drug trafficking which cynically promotes and exploits that misery for commercial gain.

We are all aware that the drug trafficking and gun smuggling go hand-in-hand. Indeed, gun runners see themselves no different from other global entrepreneurs. They are suppliers, responding to demands and making profit from regional disequilibrium. The Minister spoke of a clear road map for his ministry. I hope

the Minister stays on course and delivers on his vision to secure this nation and while we are aware we cannot eliminate crime entirely, we all want a safer Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, it is imperative that I make some comments on the present state of the Licensing Authority at Wrightson Road. Like Sen. Prof. Deosaran, many are complaining. That authority is woefully understaffed to handle the increased vehicle population. There have been urgent calls to increase the human resources to address this problem but with no relief in sight. The long, frustrating hours it takes to complete a simple transaction at that agency shows that department is still in the dinosaur age.

9.45 p.m.

This is the 21st Century and one would expect that with all the money available, high-tech equipment would have been the focus of decentralizing services to the public. May I ask the status of the high-tech transformation of that department that was promised to the citizens of this country? At the end of the day, it is the delivery of services that really count. Decentralization of the public services and the consequent enhancement of the welfare of the people could be advanced through heightened computerization of the public service. We thought that would have already occurred. That is the way to go forward.

Mr. Vice-President, I now turn to the all-important issue of health care, one of my pet peeves. The hon. Prime Minister, in the other place, stated that health was given the third highest allocation in this year's budget, a whopping \$2.8 billion. I am heartened to see that such largesse and significant monetary allocation has been given to health. Hopefully it would help bring our country at least on par, if not exceed, with the sum allocated by many of our Caribbean neighbours.

But, Mr. Vice-President, I again ask the question, for that matter we can all ask the very pertinent question: Is money all? Will it cure the ills of our public health care services? If that were indeed the case, we would all be leading healthy lives. No! It takes more than money. It takes proper management and administration. This means, among other things, having the required number of doctors, nurses, bio-medical technicians, engineers and support staff. It means health education given the prevalence of lifestyle diseases such as diabetes, HIV/AIDS, hypertension, obesity and cancer, just to name a few.

As the nature of our society changes and develops, so also the medical needs of the citizenry changes. In this regard, primordial ailments such as tuberculosis, malaria, diarrhoea, dysentery, yellow fever and all those ailments, which belong

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to the hey day of colonialism, have, to a large extent, been eradicated. How well are we coping with the new medical problems? Are we training enough medical personnel, nurses, pharmacists, doctors and biomedical engineers? The situation at present clearly shows that we are not, and if perchance we are, they are certainly not staying in the public service.

I ask the question, therefore: What is being done to stem the critical haemorrhaging of our highly qualified doctors, nurses and supporting technical staff? Of course, one would expect that with the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) coming on stream and offering so many courses in the medical sphere that, hopefully, we would soon be able to close this gap. In this regard, I say, hats off to Prof. Ken Julien and others at the UTT, but the question still comes back to haunt me and, indeed, all right-thinking and forward-thinking citizens: What is being done or proposed to retrain our trained and highly-skilled nationals?

The answer is best provided by the great number of our citizens who have demonstrated so forcefully and equivocally with their passports, their feet and their suitcases. Is the enormous budgetary allocation going to be properly spent? Are we going to pay our nurses a decent salary that would attract them and enable us to keep them? What about their terms and conditions of service, issues such as leave, overtime, their general career development and promotional opportunities? Are we rewarding workers who are competent and hard working, who are dedicated and loyal in our health services? Are steps being taken to eradicate cronyism, corruption and the hiring of friends, family and party faithfuls of either side? How is the Ministry dealing with these issues and how are the RHAS gearing themselves to deal with the myriad problems in these areas?

What about the role of medical technology? Are our hospitals being equipped with the latest technology and with trained staff to operate and maintain this equipment? Who monitors the suppliers of medical and non-medical equipment from the private sector to ensure that we are getting value for money; that the State is not being exploited and that there are proper maintenance contracts for all equipment purchased? Are the doctors, the foreign doctors, who play such a critical role in the maintenance of our health system, being given a fair deal? Are their contracts, housing and other entitlements being appropriately honoured by both parties?

These are but a few of the critical issues, even more than the supply or allocation of money which will effectively determine the proper delivery of health care. In other words, until the administration and management of our health

services are radically overhauled, I fear—in fact, I am horrified that despite all the money we throw behind the health service, the defects, deficiencies and cancer of the health service will not be cured, far more eradicated. [*Desk thumping*]

In this regard, I would like to compliment Madam Justice Gafoor and her intrepid team of commissioners for the job they are doing. The nation eagerly awaits their report. The revelations of the Public Services Association as well as that of Dr. Petronella Manning-Alleyne and some of the managers of our medical institutions, certainly paint a grim picture of a service into which we stand poised to pour \$2.8 billion. Indeed, if I may use a medical imagery, there is need for an urgent corrective surgical operation on the public health care system before rigor mortis sets in, otherwise I fear it will be too late to revive the patient.

Mr. Vice-President, I thank you.

The Minister of Legal Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Christine Kangaloo): Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. The hour is late and once again I am speaking in what I call the graveyard shift and I know that Senators are tired. However, it is my honour and privilege today to stand here in support of the budget for fiscal 2006/2007 and, having sat here for the last few days and listened to the speakers before me, I feel I will not do the budget presentation any justice if I do not take the time to respond to some of the issues that have been raised.

Taking a country to developed nation status is no easy matter. It requires not only a vision, but a clear and decisive plan of action. It is the view of those of us on this side that this year's budget is doing precisely that. It is a clear and decisive plan of action for moving Trinidad and Tobago onwards to Vision 2020. [*Desk thumping*]

Let me talk about Vision 2020. We keep hearing certain derisive comments being made, but I do not think, having heard Dr. Rowley speak on how it was formulated, anyone should at any time question this Government's commitment to Vision 2020. It is not an epiphany; it is a clear and decisive course that has been mapped out for this country by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Some of the contributions made by Senators in the Opposition suggest that in this budget debate persons may have been afflicted with one of two maladies: either they did not read the budget and the supporting documents carefully, or they did and failed fully to understand it. In some extreme cases, some of the Senators suffered from both.

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Unfortunately, Mr. Vice-President, Sen. Boldon was an extreme case. He started off by suggesting that the Government had dropped the ball in protecting the children; that nothing was done for them and that a country is judged by how it looks after its vulnerable persons. I want to direct Sen. Boldon to the *Social Sector Investment Programme*, one of the documents laid with the budget statement. I humbly suggest that he take some time and read through this document.

Mr. Vice-President, just look at page 144 of the document and you will see a listing of all non-governmental organizations that have been receiving government subventions and the money the Government is giving for children's homes. It comes up to \$17,938,492—that was paid in 2005; in 2006, it will be some \$90,041,510. You have the breakdown right here in the document, but Sen. Boldon chose to make his sweeping statements. It is a nice thing to get a sound bite, you know, Mr. Vice-President. It is a very nice thing.

He then went on to say that a government cannot support a sport, an individual or a team after the success happens or when it appears imminent. He said that sports have never been high on Government's list of priorities and, once again, I will have to ask him to do his work as a parliamentarian and read the same *Social Sector Investment Programme*, pages 147 to 149. Just take a read.

10.00 p.m.

You will see again, the list of NGOs receiving Government subventions and how much this Government is paying to these organizations for the development of sport. I am taking a cursory glance through it and I see \$14,618,551 for 2005. For 2006, what will be payable is \$65,869,869. On top of that, he says that it is not a high priority of the Government when he has benefited from this Government's contribution to sport. He knows very well about the Elite Athletes Programme that had been launched in 2004 and that athletes have been benefiting to a maximum of \$250,000, to assist them in their development and preparation activities. He knows about that intimately because he was a beneficiary.

Sen. Boldon might, perhaps, have been served well in his other incarnation by sheer speed but when you are dealing, as a parliamentarian, you have to remember that the budget should not be read with speed. It should be read with care. Forget about the speed.

Sen. Ahmed also seems to be a victim of the more-haste-less-speed syndrome. Her arguments were that not enough was being spent on the social sector. That, again, was frighteningly at odds with the reality. Once again, I have to ask if Sen. Ahmed read the *Social Sector Investment Programme*. She picked out things and

did not read it in its entirety. Do you know what is one of the classic examples? She was disputing the fact that the poverty rate is 17 per cent, as was announced by Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill. She referred to the *Social Sector Investment Programme* and said that a 2005 survey had poverty at 24 per cent. She is disputing what the Minister said. If you look at page 25 of the document, it refers first of all to a report of a Kairi survey of 2003. She even got that wrong. She read the page wrong. That was talking about the poverty rate being at 24 per cent. It is in the document. If she had just taken the time to turn over the page, the next page, she would have seen where we spoke about the Survey of Living Conditions being done in 2005, under the EU Poverty Reduction Programme. She did not care to take her time to read the document properly—Sound bytes again. [Interruption]

Sen. Mark: What does that show?

Sen. The Hon. C. Kangaloo: Let me move on.

Sen. Mark: On a point of order.

Hon. Senators: What point?

Sen. Mark: “Leh meh tell yuh nah.” It is under Standing Order 32(4).

Hon. Senator: Read it.

Sen. Mark: You want me to read it? The Vice-President has to read it, not me. I think the Minister is misleading the Senate. She has misrepresented the Opposition. I want to refer to the document. I have the right to stand under Standing Order 32(4), which is dealing with misrepresentation. She is misrepresenting the position taken by the Opposition. If you look at the said document nowhere in this document is there a record of 17.1 per cent. What we have in the document is a 24 per cent poverty level. Look at the page. There is nothing here. She is misleading the Senate and misrepresenting what we said. I want her to be very cautious or to withdraw. [Interruption] I am not threatening. I say withdraw.

Mr. Vice-President: Standing Order 32(4) states that a Senator who has spoken—[Interruption]

Sen. Mark: I spoke on that. She is misrepresenting me.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark, I need not go any further. The Minister clearly referred to a contribution by Sen. Ahmed.

Sen. Mark: She is not here and I was defending her.

Mr. Vice-President: Standing Order 32(4) says nothing about that. Be careful when you say what you are objecting to. You said that the Minister is misrepresenting the Opposition. Be careful. Minister, please go ahead. You are not in order. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. C. Kangaloo: Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. Clearly Sen. Mark is confused again. It reigns among them.

The Minister, in presenting the budget, said that there was a preliminary figure of 17 per cent for the survey of living conditions. Sen. Ahmed chose to open the document, read it wrong and did not seem to understand at page 25—she spoke about a survey done in 2005. The survey that was referred to was done by Kairi in 2003. She did not read it correctly. If she turned the page she would have seen what the Minister was speaking about, if she cared to. Let me leave it at this stage.

Let me move on to Sen. Dr. Kernahan. She spoke a lot, as is the norm, about Jekyll and Hyde and everything. She said: Government has failed to deliver on promises, how have our people been empowered, to what are we moving onwards, and this administration is mad with power. She talked about how we hide information on the services that we offer. Any self-respecting parliamentarian should remember the guide to social services that was published and laid in this Senate. Do not get up and say those things.

She said that we should establish a family services centre. There is a family services centre in Couva.

She spoke about micro credit institutions and that they are very important and that we are paying lip service. I want to tell her that she should read the documents. Look at page 21 of the PSIP where it talks about the Micro Enterprise Loan Facility administered by the Ministry of Social Development, which uses CBOs, equips and trains them and the CBOs then generate and give the loans to members of the community, all of that is in the PSIP—but we are paying lip service to it.

She went on to say that we are using our social programmes to benefit only “PNMmites”. I think that was the inference that she was making.

I want to point out for Sen. Dr. Kernahan's benefit, first of all the Micro Enterprise Loan Facility (MEL), as it is known, exists in Mayaro, Tamana, La Seiva, Gonzales and Roxborough. In 2003, the UNDP advised that MEL was selected as the second most successful initiative in Latin America and the Caribbean in the realm of poverty reduction—We who are paying lip service to our Micro-Credit Fund. I wanted her to know that.

I also want to point out the success of Micro Enterprise Loan Facility. The success shows because there are many people who doubt this Government's determination to deal with poverty. There are some who say that we are creating programmes of dependency to keep people on the State. This programme is an example of what we are achieving in the poverty reduction initiatives. It is clear that the Opposition Senators have chosen to ignore all of the facts for the budget of this year.

Sen. Munro, I do not really want to go into it. I think he said something about us saying that we introduced the smart card and that we also said that would reduce food prices. I do not know who said that. I know that it is nobody on this side. We said that we introduced the debit card as an initiative to help the vulnerable in our society deal with rising food prices. That is what we said. We never said that in introducing it, we were going to reduce food prices. We never said that. I am leaving Sen. Munro, because I really have to move on at this stage. *[Interruption and crosstalk]*

There are quite a few issues that I want to address and I feel that I need to address those issues before I move on to what—*[Interruption]*

Sen. Munro: Standing Order 32(4). I said that there is a perception in this country that the imposition of—*[Interruption and crosstalk]* the smart card is an indication of how you fight inflation in this country. There is a perception, as it was used to solve the inflation problem—Perception, perception.

Sen. The Hon. C. Kangaloo: May I continue? Before moving on—there are many initiatives in the Ministry of Legal Affairs about which I wish to speak—I need to talk about the Children's Authority because we keep hearing about the Children's Authority.

The Children's Authority Act was passed some time in 2000. I think it was passed in October 2000. Between October 2000 and December 2001, not very much was done, with respect to the implementation of the Children's Authority and the other relevant pieces of legislation.

What this Government sought to do was to ask the Family Court Committee—which comprises members of the Judiciary, members of the Attorney General's Department, the Ministry of Social Development, the Law Association and NGOs—and referred the package of legislation to the Family Court Committee. The Family Court Committee expressed serious reservations about the effectiveness of the legislation.

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The Government also got the comments of a senior solicitor and team leader in the Camden Local Children's Authority in London. The committee also looked at the operations of other children's authorities in other jurisdictions. The general consensus of the Family Court Committee is that the legislation is seriously flawed; typical, again. I am not surprised. It is seriously flawed.

Several issues were raised and one of the issues is that the legislation is supposed to be protecting the child, but it is not child-centred enough. Other issues raised were: the authority was given wide powers without the protection of court orders and, therefore, it would be subject to many applications for judicial review; parental appeals were not adequately provided for in the authority; and, as I said, the voice of the child is not heard. In some other legislation, provision is made for the child to be separately represented, and there is no such provision in our legislation.

Amendments to the Children's Authority Act and to the package of legislation are being done now. A decision was taken to amend the legislation. Cabinet accepted the recommendations of the Family Court Committee and, as I said, the amendments are being drafted.

One of the critical areas in the Act that was a critical flaw was about child abduction. In the Act there is a little clause that the Children's Authority would be the agency for child abduction. What has been decided is that you need a separate international child abduction Bill. So, the amendments and this Bill are now being drafted. A multi-disciplinary committee has been established to advise the Minister of Social Development on the implementation of the Children's Authority Act. [*Desk thumping*] We are moving forward. The legislation was seriously flawed, and at the end of 2001, very little was done with respect to the implementation of the Children's Authority Act.

On top of that, when I was the Minister responsible for social services delivery, we had a retreat where we brought all the stakeholders together to talk about the Children's Authority Act. The stakeholders were from all the different homes, different legal persons and so forth, and they were all confused about how the Children's Authority Act would function, and what would be their responsibility.

Mr. Vice-President, I think that at the end of the day we are going to get a much better Act, and you will see that this Government will move to have the Children's Authority Act implemented, and you will get a system that will work for the benefit of the children of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

I really need to talk about the Ministry of Legal Affairs, but before I do so, through you, Mr. Vice-President, I just want to say a few things in respect of Sen. Cropper's contribution today. I always enjoy listening to Sen. Cropper, but I was taken aback today by some of the issues that had been raised by her. I have sat here for the last few days, and I have seen Ministers come and account to this Parliament for what they have done for the last fiscal year, and what are their projections and policies for the upcoming fiscal year. Sen. Cropper seemed to be saying that the Ministers were not responding to questions that were being asked of them. I just want to say to Sen. Cropper that sometimes we on this side are criticized for not accounting, and when we come to account—we need to get the information, out because we understand that we have a limited time—we are also criticized for wanting to put forward the information. Mr. Vice-President, there has to be a balance.

Sen. Cropper said that we need to change how we approach what we are doing in Parliament. I want to say yes, everything is subject to change but, at present, as parliamentarians, all of us are subject to the rules of Parliament. There are other avenues that are open to persons who want to get information out of Ministers. You could ask questions; you could file Motions and the Ministers will come and respond to those things—

Sen. Cropper: Minister, would you please give way?

Sen. The Hon. C. Kangaloo:—so that you are not completely without redress.

Sen. Cropper: Thank you, Minister. I think I should clarify the point I sought to make. I sought to make the point that the arrangements by which we debate—one on this side and one on that side and so forth—put us all out of sync in terms of questions we may have for a Minister who may have already spoken and left the Chamber. I was not talking about the reluctance to answer questions, but I was talking about the structural arrangements that we have that preclude the good exchange of information and the answering of questions.

Sen. The Hon. C. Kangaloo: I actually thought that information was being shared. I saw Ministers responding to most of the questions, as best as they could. I saw that. Ministers will also come here because they also want to account to the Parliament and to the larger public about certain other things they have been doing in their ministries. So, sometimes when the time is moving on, they also have to balance it and may choose, therefore, not to answer certain questions, because they have to move on. There really has to be a balance. As Ministers, I

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think we all try to do our best to accommodate questions that are asked of us. [*Desk thumping*] I just want to point out as well that, as I have said before, there are other avenues. It is not just when we come here that you could ask your questions. You could file your questions and raise matters on Motions. I just wanted to make that point.

Sen. Cropper also asked whether in Cabinet there was any discourse. The answer to that question is yes, there is discourse. There seems to be a view—I do not know what the view is—but let me just say that each and every one of us on this side take our responsibility very seriously. [*Desk thumping*] Much is asked of us, and when we go to Cabinet we have to account and there is a lot of discourse. We share, we object and we oppose and all of that is done to arrive at the best decisions for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, one more thing. Sen. Cropper also talked about if we are a caring Government. Having listened to the contribution of Sen. The Hon. Abdul-Hamid, it is very obvious that we are a caring Government. Not everything that we do is theory. You have heard Sen. The Hon. Abdul-Hamid talk about the successes of his Ministry and, I think, it is quite clear that we are about action as well. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Cropper also talked about the poverty eradication initiatives, and I just want to point out that there is a Monitoring and Evaluation Division of the Ministry of Social Development. That division is to monitor and evaluate all of the social programmes. We are not just having social programmes there for the sake of them. We have about 120 social programmes, and those programmes seek to help different sectors in society.

Mr. Vice-President, recently, the Government decided to appoint a task force to coordinate, monitor and evaluate all the social sector programmes. This task force has as its mandate to streamline the social sector programmes to ensure that the programmes are operating in accordance with stated objectives; to minimize unnecessary overlaps between the programmes; to identify gaps in the social services delivery system and recommend approaches for such gaps. This task force will continue this Government's effort at ensuring that all of its social sector programmes benefit everyone in need and that the programmes are universal in scope.

The task force is chaired by Dr. Carla Noel and has as its vice chairman, Dr. Carl Theodore. It is also comprised of officers of various social sector ministries. I am just trying to show you that with all of the social sector programmes that we

have in place, we recognize that we need to monitor and evaluate these programmes, to make sure that they are meeting and treating with the needs of vulnerable persons in Trinidad and Tobago.

I just feel that I am wearing my social services hat here. I feel I should point out that we now have a policy on ageing; we now have a policy for persons with disabilities; we now have a national revised plan of action for children; we have a national youth policy; and we have a national sport policy, all of which will show that we are not acting in a vacuum. We are not just spending money. We have the institutional framework within which we know we have to operate these programmes. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, with all of these social programmes and all that the Government is doing for poverty alleviation and elimination, let me just say that Government is ensuring that in moving onwards to 2020, all sectors of the society will move together. [*Desk thumping*]

Let me very quickly tell you about some of the initiatives of the Ministry of Legal Affairs, because I think Sen. Anmolsingh-Mahabir talked about her frustration when she goes to the Licensing Office. Let me tell you about a few of the very good solid initiatives of the Ministry of Legal Affairs.

We have the Registrar General's Department at the Ministry of Legal Affairs. It is comprised of several registries: the civil registry, the land registry and the companies registry. You may recall that we have the free Computer Generated Birth Certificate Programme which was launched in 2003. What the Government committed to was to giving every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago one free computer generated birth certificate.

I am very happy to report that this programme of the Ministry of Legal Affairs got the recognition as the award for excellence for the Prime Minister's Service Excellence Award for Innovation last year. [*Desk thumping*] We shared it with the Ministry of Housing. I just want to point out that we intend to get that award again this year. I challenge all my other Ministers here to tell you that is what we are looking for.

Mr. Vice-President, we have built on that service. We have a same-day service in Port of Spain and a same-day service was launched in San Fernando. Now, persons in San Fernando can order and get their free computer generated certificates on the same day. We have cut that down from 10 working days to a same-day service. [*Desk thumping*]

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Further to that, in July of this year, we also launched the mail-in mail-out service of the free computer generated birth certificates. We recognized that we want to bring our services closer to the people. So, what have we done? A successful collaboration was done with TTPost. I think someone talked about how the ministries are not relating to one another, but a successful collaboration has been entered into with TTPost where persons can now mail in their applications for the free computer generated birth certificates or they could drop them in at selected TTPost outlets. We are going to process them and we are sending them back to them via courier service with TTPost, free of charge, for those who have applied. [*Desk thumping*]

As of late August 2006, we received over 10,000 mailed applications for these certificates, and they are currently being processed. I just want to inform Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie that I would love to introduce this in Tobago but, as you know, the facilities in Tobago do not allow for that, and we are desperately trying to find new accommodation to expand our services in Tobago as well.

Mr. Vice-President, during this fiscal year, we have done very well with the other Registries. With respect to the Land Registry, we have introduced a system. In April of this year, we upgraded the property information management system, and this has resulted in a faster retrieval of documents; a faster delivery of certified copies of deeds and more efficient electronic searches of records. Certified copies of deeds can now be obtained on the same day as ordered, except for those that are newly registered and have to go through the process of being scanned, but we are now offering a same-day service for the older deeds. So, you can see that the Ministry of Legal Affairs and the Registrar General's Department are moving very quickly onwards to Vision 2020. [*Desk thumping*]

10.30 p.m.

Let me just tell you that we are not leaving out Tobago; because you will remember last year Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie, through you, Mr. Vice-President, I said that all the services that we offer at the head office we want to offer them in San Fernando; we want to offer them in Tobago. Recently in Tobago we installed a bar code machine; this now allows for the faster registration of deeds in Tobago. You do not have to, as before, call Trinidad to get the registration number; you can now get that done in Tobago, as well.

Moving on very quickly, I think I have to tell you about the Companies Registry and about a very innovative initiative that we are now proceeding with in the Companies Registry. What we are doing; you may recall that we embarked on a back filing project in the Companies Registry where we try to put all the

companies registered on the database. Now staff has been able to view the electronic scanned images of the filed documents since December 2005. Since February of this year, a pay per view station has been available to persons visiting the Companies Registry in Port of Spain. They can now see everything via an intranet service. We are saying that these initiatives are really heralding the beginning of an era of e-government in the Ministry of Legal Affairs. While the new online name search remains free—

Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie: Mr. Vice-President, may I ask a question that I have heard, that I do not understand and do not know what it is about. If I could ask you, in the Companies Act and Registry, when they talk about pre-emptive rights, what do they mean? I have heard people talk about it and I have no clue.

Sen. The Hon. C. Kangaloo: Okay, I will have to check up on that and tell you as well, all right?

Sen. Jeremie: A pre-emptive right has nothing to do with the registry per se, it is a right of a shareholder to acquire shares before another class of shareholder; a right of pre-emption. So it is a creature of company law not the registry.

Sen. The Hon. C. Kangaloo: The new online name search remains free but a \$20 fee is payable in order to actually investigate specific companies. Under a proposed subscription service a sum of money would be deposited by a user who would then draw down on same by accessing the records, and his account will be correspondingly reduced in payment for each transaction. Any person wishing to see this online service locally or internationally need only to have his or her subscription fee paid at the Registration House, where a user name and password will be issued.

For Members who are familiar with shopping sites such as amazon.com or barnesandnoble.com; the online search facility operates in a similar manner. You can choose the files you are desirous of viewing by temporarily placing them in your shopping cart; you can add or remove files before actually finalizing your choice of documents to be viewed in detail and it is only at the point at which you choose files for detailed viewing that the deductions from your prepaid subscription correlating to the number of final searches will occur.

This latest initiative puts Trinidad and Tobago a cut above all our Caribbean neighbours. [*Desk thumping*] Both Jamaica and the United Kingdom have similar systems but Jamaica does not offer the general public access to the information and the facility in the United Kingdom does not have full features and is not interactive. When this administration talks about Vision 2020 we know of what we speak. [*Desk thumping*]

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Let me just move on and tell you about some other divisions of the Ministry. It would be remiss of me not to talk about the Consumer Affairs Division and the publication of food prices that we have embarked upon and the fact that there have been, I think, four publications to date. We promised that we would have done that in the last budget presentation and it is something we are seeking to do to educate and empower our consumers in relation to their rights and responsibilities. The magazine—what we have sought to do in our last publication is to get feedback from persons. We have sent out questionnaires asking persons to respond to us; to tell us what they would want in such a publication, because we are looking to improve it in any way that we can. But we have kept our promise that we made last year and the publications have been made and are ongoing.

We also sought to decentralize the services of the Consumer Affairs Division and a consumer complaints desk in March of this year was relocated from the City Hall compound, Harris Promenade, San Fernando, where it used to be open once a week on a Wednesday, to 13 Leotaud Street, San Fernando, which now provides full-time services; that is from Monday to Friday. We have seen an increase in the number of complaints that have been made, so that people are appreciative of this decentralization initiative.

We also established a 24-hour toll-free 800 line for consumer complaints; 800-4CPS, especially designed for persons wishing to lodge their complaints outside of working hours, and on average, each of the six consumer protection offices received 20 complaints lodged daily after hours. The developments last year therefore in relation to the consumer division complaints desk demonstrate in a tangible way this administration's commitment to bringing Government services to the people.

Mr. Vice-President, I should also like to talk to you about law revision and you may recall that when I brought the legislation to amend the Law Revision Act, I said that we would be moving to have the revised laws available on the Internet. I want to tell you that by October 30 we will have the laws on the Internet. [*Desk thumping*] I am even more pleased to note that the web page design for the laws will allow users a hyperlink to HTML pages containing a list of laws in categories and chapter numbers.

When the categories and chapter numbers are selected they will go to the arrangements of sections in the law. All the sections in the arrangement of sections have hyperlinks to the specific sections, as well as, the appendices, schedules and subsidiary legislation. The appendices, schedules, footnotes, notes and subsidiary legislation will all be in PDF format, as some of them contain drawings, tables and maps, et cetera.

Mr. Vice-President, by comparison, the web page designs of Bermuda, Belize, Antigua, Barbuda and Jamaica allow for users to go directly to the PDF files in the laws. However, Australia, England and Hong Kong allow users to go to HTML pages with hyperlinks to various sections of the laws. The People's Republic of China only allows users to go to HTML pages of the laws, but not to sections directly.

The Law Revision Commission in keeping with Vision 2020 intends to update the laws annually so that citizens would always have access to the most recent legislation. It is envisaged that the Acts, the amendments to the Acts and subsidiary legislation from the period January 01, 2005 to December 31, 2006 will be updated and published in 2007. We are looking at the staff structure of the Law Revision Commission to suit the new work flows that would be required to keep the laws continuously updated.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. C. Kangaloo: Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. While we are putting the laws on the Internet, we are still awaiting the proposals from prospective publishers shortly on the basis of which a contract will be awarded, because it is before the Central Tenders Board. I hope and anticipate that the textual format would be available by May 2007 and an electronic format by March 2007. In the meantime, keeping faith with what we had promised, I am very pleased about the fact that the laws will be on the Internet as at the end of this month.

Let me talk a little about intellectual property. Last year I indicated that we were seeking to deal with the issue of the steel pan patents that had been granted in the United States by USA Patent and Trademark office. We have now received the advice from a respected Washington law firm that specializes in the re-examination of patents that lack novelty, and now have advised that both patents can be challenged successfully in re-examination proceedings. Having agreed with and accepted the opinion of the law firm, they would now be instructed to file for the inter partes re-examination of the patent.

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We are confident that our case is strong and hopefully, I would be reporting to you early on the invalidation of the pan patents by the USA Patent and Trademark office. [*Desk thumping*] That, though, is a defensive action we had to take to deal with this issue. We had to defend this whole granting of the patents. And I just want to inform Members of this honourable Chamber that at the same time a committee was appointed in January 2005 to report on how we should protect our steel pan and other intangible cultural heritage.

The report I understand will be handed over shortly and this will outline how we are to proceed in the future so that we would never have to be defending our rights; having to take this defensive posture; we will know what we have to do to defend and to let everyone know that the steel pan belongs to us.

Legal Aid and Advisory Authority also falls under the Ministry of Legal Affairs and I did say last year that we were seeking to decentralize our services and I want to report that the San Fernando office of the Legal Aid and Advisory Authority was formally commissioned in March of this year. The opening marked the full-time operation of a district office outside of Port of Spain and Tobago for the authority.

The office is fully staffed; legal and non-legal; well equipped and plans are afoot to complete the computerization process to have a direct link to the Port of Spain office. The full-time San Fernando office is located at Howard Land, off Coffee Street and according to the latest statistics provided by the Legal Aid and Advisory Authority, 3,175 persons accessed services between the period of the commissioning to September 2006; an increase therefore in the number from the previous year.

10.45 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, with respect to Legal Aid, we have recruited five new attorneys-at-law in the last fiscal year. We have sought to recruit a human resource specialist, an IT specialist, and they are all working to put Legal Aid on a proper footing so that it can really offer the services to the people who are most in need of said services. This again, augers well for the achievement of the vision of the authority as it journeys onward to become a dynamic organization recognized for quality legal services delivered by well-trained, highly motivated, professional staff, in a timely manner and operating within a modern technological environment.

Mr. Vice-President, in closing, once again, a budget has been delivered that takes this country's citizens closer to the goal of First World nation status by the year 2020. With each successive PNM administration's budget the country draws

closer to realizing its full potential. [*Desk thumping*] And with each PNM administration's budget the prospect of any other political party forming the government grows dimmer and dimmer. [*Desk thumping*]

Nobody, Mr. Vice-President, is saying that this is a perfect budget. No budget ever is. What we are saying, is that this budget is far better than anything any of them on the other side could ever produce. [*Desk thumping*]

This budget, like all this administration's budgets, is a sound, well-thought-out financial plan. It puts people at the centre. It demonstrates a clear understanding of the rules of the economy, it balances the need for developmental expansion against the need for counter-inflationary measures. But those are not concepts or imperatives we expect those on the Opposition Benches to understand. They never did when they were in government. Nevertheless, we continue to invite their support of our application of these principles. It may be that we are wasting our time in doing so. It may be that doing so is the triumph of hope over experience. But this, Mr. Vice-President, after all, is a budget of hope. [*Desk thumping*] And if there is one thing that we on this side have an abundance of, it is experience.

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

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Public Administration and Information and Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith): Mr. Vice-President, I beg to move that the Senate do now adjourn to Thursday, October 19, 2006 at 1.30 p.m., at which time, I hope that we will be able to complete the debate of this Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 10.49 p.m.