

*Leave of Absence*

*Thursday, October 19, 2006*

**SENATE**

*Thursday, October 19, 2006*

The Senate met at 1.30 p.m.

**PRAYERS**

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

**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

**Mr. Vice-President:** Hon. Senators, I have granted leave of absence from today's sitting to Sen. The Hon. Howard Chin Lee who is out of the country.

**SENATOR'S APPOINTMENT**

**Mr. Vice-President:** Hon. Senators, I have received the following correspondence from Her Excellency Dr. Linda Savitri Baboolal, Acting President of the Republic of Trinidad Tobago:

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By Her Excellency, DR. LINDA SAVITRI BABOOLAL  
Acting President and Commander-in-Chief of  
the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

/s/ Linda Baboolal  
Acting President.

TO: MRS. MAGNA WILLIAMS-SMITH

WHEREAS Senator Howard Chin Lee is incapable of performing his duties as a Senator by reason of his absence from Trinidad and Tobago:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, LINDA SAVITRI BABOOLAL, Acting President as aforesaid, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 44 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby appoint you, MAGNA WILLIAMS-SMITH, to be temporarily a member of the Senate, with immediate effect and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of the said Senator Howard Chin Lee.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the President  
of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago at the  
Office of the President, St. Ann's, this 19<sup>th</sup> day  
of October, 2006.”

*Oath of Allegiance*

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**OATH OF ALLEGIANCE**

*Sen. Magna Williams-Smith took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.*

**PAPERS LAID**

1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2002. [*The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Princes Town Regional Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2002. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Enill*]
3. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Princes Town Regional Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2003. [*Sen. The Hon. C. Enill*]

**APPROPRIATION BILL  
(BUDGET)  
[Fourth 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 adjourned on Wednesday, October 18, 2006 will now be resumed.

Those who already spoke on the Bill are: On Monday, October 16, 2006: Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill, mover of the Motion; 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: Sen. The Hon. Martin Joseph; Sen. Ato Boldon; Sen. Prof. Ramesh Deosaran; 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.

On Wednesday, October 18, 2006 the speakers were: Sen. The Hon. Christine Sahadeo; Sen. Dr. Jennifer Kernahan; Sen. Prof. Kenneth Ramchand; Sen. The Hon. Hazel Manning; Sen. The Hon. John Jeremie; Sen. Wayne Munro; Sen. Angela Cropper; Sen. The Hon. Mustapha Abdul-Hamid; Sen. Parvatee Anmolsingh-Mahabir and Sen. The Hon. Christine Kangaloo.

**The Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Joan Yuille-Williams):** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, for this opportunity to contribute to this debate. Let me begin by extending my congratulations to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister in the Ministry of Finance for their presentations. With the permission of the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, if I could just make a comment on the Minister of Finance's presentation, I wanted to particularly congratulate him, not only on his presentation, but on his budget response, because here was someone who had the courage of his conviction, and the end of his response, I was sure that everybody had understood exactly what he had meant and what the budget signified.

However, after the third day, we realized that there is still much that we needed to explain. This afternoon I just wanted to use the response of really one of the Senators and that is Sen. Raziah Ahmed, who had touched on a number of things during her contribution. She could almost give me a framework for what I want to say this afternoon. I wanted to do so as well, because I do not want Sen. Ahmed to say that she was left out; she was marginalized; so I am making sure that I am taking up front and, probably, for the whole afternoon.

Let me just assure Sen. Ahmed, as a woman in politics myself, that there was no attempt at marginalization. I remember that evening, I had invited those colleagues from abroad to sit in and they came during the morning and had to leave after tea time, but because I knew that you had a contribution to make, I told them to come and hear a different sister and hear how she contributes. It was a warm evening, but while you were making your contribution I said to myself be strong. That is all I could have said because I knew they were there and were wondering what she was going to do at this point in time.

I was a bit disappointed when you talked about the marginalization. I think you need to stay in and keep going with what is happening because I think you have some contribution to make to the debates and we were just doing "Women in Politics" and, as a woman in politics myself, we have to forget some of those things. I am quite sure, I want to tell you when Sen. Boldon spoke about the law, no one here associated with anything as Islamic. In fact, I heard some of my

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colleagues saying, Cro Cro's law and understood what they meant at the time and it was no offence. Let us hope that as we proceed during the rest of our time in this Parliament, you could be strong; it is going to be rough, but as we say with all the women, do not let the culture of the politics make you drop out and feel marginalized as you would have said.

However Senator, when you began your debate you talked about the money which was allocated to social development, and when the Minister of Finance made his presentation, he reminded this Senate that the budget was designed to reflect Vision 2020: Moving Onward. Among the objectives, I focused on the reduction, the elimination of poverty, the creation of strong families and by extension strong communities, and facilitating systems to support the most vulnerable in our society. I selected those because they had a direct bearing on the ministry that I have the responsibility to lead. As he concluded, he summarized the whole thing and gave us this meaning that we should help to develop a nurturing and a caring society.

Some years ago, the PNM campaigned on the slogan, "We care" and I want to assure this Senate that it was true then, as it is true now, the PNM cares. [*Desk thumping*] During the debate so far, this has been demonstrated through the programmes outlined by my colleagues, for example, in housing, in education, science and technology, social development, legal affairs, which every minister spoke to, you are quite sure you get that distinct characteristic, the PNM cares.

In every ministry our activities are influenced by that characteristic of caring. We are sure we are doing the right thing because the goodwill which exists outside in the society there and the number of responses which we get from the population, tell us we are doing something correct.

**1.45 p.m.**

In spite of the negative comments which sometimes emanate from that side, we will not be deterred and we will continue to do what we think is best for all our citizens.

The Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs is a people ministry. Regardless of whatever status you are, there is some kind of connection with the Ministry. Some people come in for assistance and some come in to be of assistance to us; therefore, we meet all persons in this community. We also do a lot of work within the Ministry to support other ministries; if I judge from the amount of mail that comes through the Ministry alone. I could spend all day, 24 hours, just looking after all the mail that comes in; that tells you something. Why do persons want to communicate with a ministry?

We have a staff that enjoys serving. I always use the word "serving" and not the word "working", because it takes us well beyond working hours. Because we enjoy serving, we enjoy what we do. Our mission is to become the lead agency in facilitating empowered and harmonious communities in a culturally diverse society. To do that, we see ourselves partnering with communities to enrich the lives of our citizens through the process of community development, gender sensitive initiatives and cultural preservation and development. If we can achieve those, then we would have enabled the Minister of Finance to carry out his objective of "Vision 2020: Moving Onward", and a vision of a caring society.

I refer to some of the comments made by Sen. Ahmed. I think this was clarified before, when you looked at the amount of money given in the budget for social development. In fact, social development speaks to almost all the ministries. For example, I was speaking to one colleague yesterday. There is a brochure we have out marked, "Programmes for Social Development" and some of my friends asked, "When are you going to send one from your Ministry?" In that same programme brochure you get sports, culture, health and social development programmes; so it is an embracing. To find out exactly how much there is for social development, you better go through the yellow pages, do some additional work and see exactly what is happening there.

Mr. Vice-President, the Senator talked about the failed tsunami World Cup shelter. I am using her approach as I go along. I think she got some support from her colleague, Sen. Ato Boldon. I was a little disappointed in that, because I am one of the persons really supporting it. We always complain about facilities in Trinidad and Tobago; I am sorry that Sen. Boldon is not here. He went abroad to train at some of the finest facilities. Now that we have the wherewithal and the means to provide us with these facilities, why would we not do it?

I went to the Australian Institute of Sport. I like swimming, so I was looking at some of the swimmers. I saw the design of that pool; the coach could go at the side of it and look inward. We are putting down a community pool in Cocoyea Village. We are looking towards 2020 as well, and the pool is designed similarly. Why not? We could have one in Sydney and we could put one in Cocoyea. Why not? We are taking our people right to the Olympics as well.

I think you needed to see well beyond it, because the stadium is only one part of a large facility which is going to have academies, training rooms, places where athletes can go to school and do work and hostels. It is going to have the kind of facilities that other sports persons from outside of Trinidad and Tobago would

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want to come in and use. The Minister of Tourism feels very glad about it, since his Ministry is engaging sports tourism now; so it is well beyond just what is there. I hope at some point in time that you would really take a good look at it and see that it is money well spent.

You talked about the children; you said that there was no hope for intervention of those children who are not in school; those who break out of school. This was supported by your colleague, Sen. Boldon. Do you know what worried me about Sen. Boldon? I was a little disappointed. I do not know what people look at as a cure or remedy; some people look at only traditional methods in what they do. We are talking about children at risk, vulnerable children, and, therefore, there are a variety of techniques that you must try with them.

When Sen. Boldon made 70,000 miles around the country, facilitated by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, that was an intervention. [*Desk thumping*] He was used to show people what could become of a local boy and what he could do. When we went out there to meet him, as we went to meet Brian and the Soca Warriors—although Sen. Boldon said something about politicians in ties taking pictures; that was not true. Those people went out there to look at those persons they call their heroes and they must have made some impact on them and on their lives. You would have more cricketers; more persons wanting to go forward.

When you came through Laventille and you saw the faces of those people who succeeded; that was what it was all about. It had nothing to do with the politics or politicking. I was one of the persons who helped to organize, and nobody even saw me that evening. I was not important. As a government you do things like that; you have manifest functions and latent ones. Yes, we were celebrating our heroes, but we also hoped that the celebration of the lives of those persons impacted on others, those same children at risk. I am sorry Sen. Boldon is not here, because I wanted to tell him that he had better keep celebrating and going out and helping to move those persons forward, because he is a part of the solution and should not become the problem. He needs to see well beyond that. [*Desk thumping*]

Let us look at some other vulnerable groups. One of the groups that the Senator talked about clearly would have been women. One of the things you said was that:

“The draft Gender Policy was an embarrassment and a highly controversial document.”

At the same time, you also said that:

"It tossed out months of work and consultation with the community and insulted significant stakeholders, leaving them disappointed and empty-handed."

You also said that the Minister was playing games with the community. How could an embarrassing and controversial document leave persons who worked for months on it, insulted, disappointed and empty-handed? Something has to be wrong; that cannot be. I looked at it.

Yes, the draft Gender Policy was withdrawn last year by the Prime Minister. Yes, we worked for months on it. We are happy about it; we did a lot of work on it. As you know, we worked almost three years to bring that policy to fruition. We had the preparation of the concept paper; the preparation of the draft policy document. We had consultations, social studies, sector reports; all of that was done to ensure that we got it right. The consultants were the Centre for Gender Studies at the university. However, when we brought that document forward, some groups came forward and spoke to the Prime Minister.

Let me tell you, if he did not ask us to look at it again, they would say, like you, that they were marginalized. Therefore, we were asked to look at the document again in certain areas. It took us some time to do it. Do you know why? During the time that we wanted to do it, the Centre for Gender Studies had moved up to the Caribbean where some of the countries there, having seen the Trinidad product, asked them to do their gender policy documents, because it is something that all countries are doing around the world. We lost them for a while. Dominica did theirs and it was accepted.

When they were finished with some of the countries, they came back to us and have now gone through to look at some things. That was the reason for any delay, as well as to look at the stakeholders. Nothing here tells us that people were disappointed. Where is it now? It is about to be sent to Cabinet again. In the meantime, we did not stay like that; we did other things.

We continued with our public sensitization and education on gender issues. We went to the police and prison officer personnel; 300 of them were trained. We went to the schools where they had done Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA). We went to 36 of these schools; we helped their children to be sensitized. We worked with community-based organizations (CBOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). We went to ministries and we asked each permanent secretary to take a high level officer and make that person the focal point, so that person could look at gender issues in the Ministry. All of that we have been doing, while we were having the policy adjusted.

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That was not sufficient, so we brought in distinguished lecturers from outside; Miss Shaarda Ganga of Suriname; we had Dr. Lyndon Lewis from the United States and we also used Madame Justice Desiree Bernard from the Caribbean Court. They came in and ran seminars with us. In addition to that, we had a six-part television series. Let me tell you some of the themes, because this is serious business: Gender and Popular Culture; Masculinity and Manhood; Leadership and Decision-making; Labour and Workplace Issues; Gender and Education and Gender Health and Wellness; plus we had our radio and television series. We have all these films available for anyone who would like to have them.

Mr. Vice-President, I wanted to congratulate Sen. Mark for the first time. I heard him talk about gender policy. I did not hear him well, so I sent for the *Hansard*. Do you know what he said: "Implement the gender policy for working women." Sen. Mark did not have a clue what this gender policy was, but somewhere along the line somebody must have told him to speak on their behalf and all he said was, "Implement a gender policy for working women."

Gender means male and female, for one. If you know what a gender policy is, it does not only include working women. So I think that we have to find a day for educating Sen. Mark, because he is a trade unionist. As a trade unionist, if you are not talking about the gender policy in the correct way, something is wrong. It is the first time that I have caught him off, so I think I have to tell him that. I was going to congratulate you when I heard you talk about gender policy, but when I heard what you said—[*Interruption*]

**Sen. Mark:** Maybe it was an error on the part of the *Hansard* persons.  
[*Laughter*]

**Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams:** The gender policy is very much alive. We are determined to have it done; it is part of our international obligation as well. It is going to do well for us, both male and female. The Prime Minister has now given \$6 million to the Family Planning Association. I do not know if you did not link that with the gender policy, because that is what it is for. They are happy about it.

It is a partnership with the Government and the Family Planning Association and it will contribute to the realization of, at least, six recommendations of the National Gender Policy. Let me just read some of them. One is the concerted effort to design innovating and interesting ways of teaching sex education in schools. I want you all to know why the Family Planning Association got that money. That is item 130 in the gender policy: the upgrading of primary care



facilities countrywide to increase the range, quality and quantity of services offered, thus strengthening the access to health facilities, especially for people in rural areas and the training and retraining of all categories of health professionals for gender sensitivity, particularly in areas of reproductive and sexual health, breast and cervical cancer; prostate cancer; male reproductive health and sexually transmitted diseases.

**2.00 p.m.**

The gender policy advocates programmes for the sensitization of women about issues related to their sexual reproductive health; it advocates support for the Family Planning Men's Clinic; the gender policy advocates our programmes to reduce the incidence of HIV/AIDS and other lifestyle diseases among women and men. And that is part of the outreach programme, part of the gender policy which the Family Planning Association will be doing on behalf of the Government.

So I want to tell you that money came from the Minister of Finance, so when we hear some people talk things around it, they need to get the information. I hope that this would clear up some of the misconceptions people have had.

There is a partnership established with the Family Planning Association which signifies Government's commitment to promoting gender equity, equality, social justice and sustainable human development in Trinidad and Tobago as articulated in the Draft National Policy. I am hoping that after today we would not get the kind of comments that people had been making about it.

In addition to that, we looked at some of the vulnerable groups in the society and, of course, we noted the women as some of those groups. I want to tell you, as some of my colleagues to the back would recognize, that we have been working well with the women in this society as a vulnerable group.

But let me take another group which I had placed a little more importance on and they are the elderly. That is another vulnerable group within the society with whom we have been doing work. Yes, there is the \$200 increased grant, CDAP and all the other things from health, and I always say, do not look to one ministry only for the solution, pull from all around.

What are we doing for the elderly? We feel at this time the elderly need to live with some dignity, and sometimes as we always say, they live alone but need some kind of companionship and assistance, and through the placement service with the ministry, we have been able to send trained caregivers to those elderly persons who have requested it, and their salaries are paid for by the Government

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of Trinidad and Tobago. That has nothing to do with their pension or reducing their grant, or smart card, or anything like that. This is in addition to whatever they were getting. As long as we feel there was the need and that person could not pay, we have been sending our trained caregivers, which is part of the placement service of the ministry and again, part of that caring attitude of the Government.

Most of those young persons who go out there came from the programme called GAPP. The elderly also had the opportunity to relate to the Self-Help Commission and we have been giving the minor repairs grants and I can tell you we have almost given over 1,200 to 1,300—[*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Senator—grants to those elderly persons to help to repair their homes.

We hope the community will come forward and help, but where sometimes we do not get that community effort, we, from the Government try to help them get carpenters or somebody to assist them with their homes accordingly, but it is supposed to be a community effort. So they get that money to help with their homes in the minor repairs plan, and that is something the elderly have always had as another vulnerable group.

The same placement persons who give that service, the young caregivers are GAPP people. Those are young people, and Sen. Boldon, they are young people who are at risk and, therefore, they need help and some of them need almost a one-on-one help and that GAPP is a one-on-one help. It does two things; it helps us to get people for the placement service, but it also means that we are bringing the young people in contact with the elderly almost on a one-on-one basis, so when we keep them for three to four months in the programme full-time, we send them off to the homes of the elderly so that the mentoring and nurturing could come from them. That is why we give them the skills so if anything happens they will be able to attend to those elderly persons.

I am really happy with the success that we have had with those young people and those are children at risk who we have identified and put into programmes like that. Then there is the RAP programme—and even the name sounds nice—where again we take retirees from the community who still have skills and put the young people with them.

First, it was a programme for the junior secondary schools, some are closing, but there are many young people who are out of school and, therefore, we kept the programme and have some of those out-of-school children in the programme where they are getting mentoring; 1 to 5 is the ratio. They do academics, sports, culture, life skills and self-esteem on a one-to-one basis.

When those young people are finished, some have now opted to go back to school and the older ones encourage them to go to the Multi-Sector Skills Training Programme (MuST) and HYPE. So we are saving them. We have not forgotten those young people, and if you look at it you will see the number of efforts we have been making and we can tell you by numbers how many young people we have served in the communities. We give some of them a career out of it because at the end of the day, they so like what they were doing—and I always boast about it—that some of them continue getting into Patient Care Assistants and one fellow even went abroad to study it.

So these are the kinds of programmes we are doing for our vulnerable community. I want to assure Sen. Ahmed and Sen. Boldon that we do not allow our young people to fall because we feel it is our responsibility to help just as I was saying it is your responsibility to help.

Senator, you also spoke about the fact that sometimes NGOs want to get involved. The policy of the ministry is not to do the implementing ourselves but, where possible, we try to get people to implement some of the programmes and we have funding which we make available to some of those NGOs.

What we need to do before that is to strengthen the NGOs so they would know how to do it, and the Community Development Fund is one of the poverty alleviation ministries within the ministry and I am satisfied that we have made all efforts. We have gone out into the communities to try to get those NGOs to come in for that institutional strengthening before they take the funding. It has not been always easy, but we cannot give up because we need them, we cannot reach all the people out there.

What we are also doing with the Community Development Fund which is our real poverty alleviation is decentralizing. So you are going to see a number of offices again opened around Trinidad and Tobago making it easier for the organizations to come in, plus the fact that all the Community Development Offices would be made available to this funding so that it would not be out of the reach of the people who really need the service.

I am hoping with that, we would be able to reach many more persons because the money the Government—and I want to say thanks to the Minister of Finance—yes, the money is there, but we also need to have the organizations doing it. Of course, Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie would know that there is a branch in Tobago which has just moved into new offices near the Self-help and Best Village. Clearly, it is a fund for Trinidad and Tobago and none has been left out. So that is one of the areas which we talked about in terms of asking NGOs to come forward so that they can get funding.

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There is another group of vulnerable people we talked about and they are those who suffer the scourge of domestic violence. Yes, the ministry has a hotline 24 hours a day, seven days a week—I am not going to say where it is—we have listeners, staff all the time, we are online with the police. We have received about 12,000 calls from people. We have the counselling facilities to support the hotline, we have drop-in centres which we are now trying to increase. There are 14 of them which used to open one or two days per week, now we are trying to open them six days a week so that persons around the country can go where they would find a counsellor, and there is a food bank and other things they can get there. There is also some therapeutic counselling for families, or even children who witnessed the violence.

We have the support of the police and other persons from the law as we move through, but this is an important agency to us. We recognize that because of the number of victims, when you go to a transition home there is a time period of three months, it is not a home for all time and sometimes in some of those homes, at the end of three months the victims have not been rehabilitated and they move from one home to the next.

We have just identified a place for another home which we are now refurbishing. We cannot say where it is because we do not want people to know where those homes are as you would know. So we would have a new home to take many more of the persons who are being neglected, or these vulnerable people who have suffered this scourge of domestic violence.

One of the things we would clearly want people to know at the end of the day is that for all these persons about whom we spoke—domestic violence, even the low-income persons—is that we have to do something to help them to move on with their lives. We have special programmes that we have been putting them in. After the counselling and you can make it, we set you up with training; you can also go into the Women Harmony Programme or the geriatric in which case you will be put into the placement service as well.

There are only single women in the export centres or craft centres, whom we are actually training and hoping that at the end of the day they will return to their families to start cottage industries. There are 14 of those centres which are well supplied and I think the persons who go there are doing quite well in the export centres.

We have the non-traditional skills programme for low income and unskilled women and that is one of the programmes we are quite happy about where they have been doing things that are not normally done by women, and now we have

moved them into technology. They are doing editing, computer repairs and all kinds of things. They are not all into the construction areas, but they have moved into some of the technological areas as well just where they feel they can make it.

Yesterday, or the previous day when I left here, I went across quite quickly to Queen's Hall where some of the classes from the Women in Harmony Programme were graduating. They came from Misir and Clark Rochard. Quite clearly, I heard people talk about we have our graduates from the PNM communities. We take them from all over, that is one thing I do not make that mistake about. I have a life here and somebody to answer to at the end of the day. I felt I needed to go across and meet some of the graduates so I left and went across. They were quite happy that they had now gone through a programme like that and felt confident they could move on with their lives.

Many of them did landscaping and I was quite happy to hear some of them talk about the value of it and the kind of money they could make with landscaping. Actually, I had met some of them while there and I asked about their land and garden and they said they did not have gardens and so forth. They gave all kinds of excuses; there was no water and all kinds of things. They went, did landscaping, grow box as well and now they are quite happy to go out.

We normally set them up, just as the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education said. We give some kind of initial funding to start, or some kind of equipment to go by, give them some skills in how to set up a little business and so forth. Some of them may just use it for their families and why not? They need to produce something because of the high prices of food, so if you could produce for yourself and family it would bring down the cost.

I was very happy to be there and what was exciting was to see the faces. They were delighted to show me the certificates they had achieved. Some of them had gone there for the first time, they might have gone even beyond the schooling but, they had achieved and I was quite sure they were going to use it to help themselves.

The Senator also talked about another vulnerable group, that is the one involved with the gang warfare, but what you were talking about was the marginalized community; that is in the community, East-West Corridor, Laventille and other areas, those who were not involved were marginalized and I do not know why you used that term.

However, Mr. Vice-President, I need to tell the hon. Senator that there are intervention programmes for that and although sometimes when I talk here my colleagues on the other side try to snicker at it and say: "You are with those people again." Let me tell you, if you do not make an intervention it is going to be worse.

**2.15 p.m.**

I want to tell Sen. Dr. Kernahan that there is no one intervention that we could make. You have to try several things. No sports meeting or job in URP could do it. Over the last few weeks we have had communication with some of them and we felt by this time that we needed to do some changing there; some work to be done with them. But you know it is very difficult to get people to say yes in that kind of formal setting where you have to think—move your mind. However, we did some intervention programmes. People came in and they talked. I do not know what happened, but some of them decided that they would go into one of the programmes to see if they can effect some change. Do you know what made the difference? When we asked some of them about their children, they could scarcely tell you anything about them. To me, that evening, some of them felt a little hurt. They could not say anything about their children; they did not know.

Therefore, we had a psychologist tell us afterwards that we should organize a programme. But we had this programme called “Defining Masculine Excellence”, which we have been doing for quite sometime now and with great success, and we decided that we would allow them to be a part of that programme. So we have organized that programme and, as I speak here 25 of them are on the programme at the moment, with the psychologist and the other persons who are working with them. To us, that is a victory.

Let me just tell you what the programme will include—some of the topics: Self-esteem; Man and his Feeling; Father and Son Bonding; Male Friendships and Second-Class Relationships; Masculinity in the Workplace; Man and his Mother; Men and their Life Partners; Spirituality and the Celebration of Excellence. We had done this programme with other persons whom we considered to be trainers, who would go out in the community to train. We have 450 of them now, well prepared to go into the community as trainers and we are now working on that. We have brought these persons in and we are trying to subject them to the same programme. They wanted to do it and I am happy that at least 25 of them are now doing it.

But they have also asked us to do two things. They have asked us to add two other modules: One, what are the things the Government has to offer in terms of programmes that we can tell our children or the people in the community. So we are going to be exposing them to that one day. Some of them are artisans, masons, carpenters, and whatnot. They wanted to learn how they can price a job; get the scope of works and work on it, because not all those people are very literate. So

they wanted to get some idea of how to do that, so we have also put that module in. They have asked for it. We have also put in a module called anger management, because that, we felt, was one of the difficulties.

This is just the beginning. It is a small beginning but we are hopeful because we have seen them come and sit there. We transport them to the venue; they spend the day. It is a nice venue; they have their meals; they use the Power Point and we use different methods for teaching. We have people there with us who use drama and different methods, because not everybody is into the reading of any heavy literature. They have used the types of methods to reach these people. I am satisfied that this is one way that we can go. After this, we will look to see how we proceed with this pilot group.

In the meantime, those who have been in the programme already have gone out to the communities and they do things with the community. They do street theatres—large numbers of people. Our street theatres are out on the streets, in the pubs, in the recreation hall. Wherever they are, we have to go there to meet those people. Therefore, sometimes when I hear Sen. Dr. Kernahan talk, I feel that she is not there within the system because she is someone who could identify with persons who did not agree with what was happening and the responses. But then we have a job to do with those people and all I could ask is that we give it the support. It is for all of us. There are a number of persons who volunteer and go in there to help. We are trying to control what happens within the whole movement.

Let me tell you another thing. They do not trust many people. So even though we organize, they are not the people out there. Because I am a politician they know me, but they do not trust that many people in those circumstances. So you have to be quite clinical in your choices of who you choose, how you choose them, what you do, how it is done, because you can break down the entire thing by making those mistakes. It takes a lot of time and energy.

This whole programme is supported by the Community Safety and Enhancement Programme. I have already spoken about that one before, which was formerly the Neighbourhood Watch, but it is no longer called that. Those, together with the Gender Affairs division, working on this type of Defining Masculine Excellence Programme—and I am hoping that at some time some of us will have a look at what is happening. We have had the testimonials on the television; we have shown it around where people actually testified to the changes they have made in themselves.

**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. J. Yuille-Williams:** Let me just move on very quickly to another area and I think the Senator raised it when she was speaking, and that is the cost of infrastructure. There are two sets I am going to look at. I am going to look at Community Development and Culture very quickly and I am going to look at the cost of infrastructure in Community Development. I remember the Senator talking about the community centre. Remember I said we have to bring people together. Everybody needs a space. Even in the middle class areas, they are asking you for that space. I want to tell you something. What you saw—an open floor plan with a stage fifty years ago, we are talking about 2020; that cannot work. We need to move on. If it costs \$6 million for the centre, what we are doing with the centre is important. Why do we want the centre? Let me tell you.

Right now we are rehabilitating 73 of them and it is taking quite a lot of money because it was just a box and a stage. What could we do with that in these modern times? In these centres we are building we have an administrative office, security booth, a lobby and hospitality area, a large auditorium. Of course we have a stage to accommodate culture and other performances and, therefore, we need to have lights. Space is important. We are doing it now and doing it properly. We will have full change room facilities. We are doing one on the Beetham down there. When they came to look at it—even the basketball court—they asked about the change rooms—male and female. They know that is what they need to have. We have to do it now.

We will have a sickness and wellness centre—not like the one the Attorney General took and made into a day care centre—training rooms, computer rooms, a full teaching kitchen—not a kitchen that you bring things in to serve for a wedding; a kitchen in which you can teach people nutrition and whatnot—and a ramp for access for the physically challenged, according to the contour, if it is an upstairs or downstairs. You will have paved walkways, car parks, games hard court, and in certain areas where you can have about five or six of them, one of them will have—if we care to—a swimming pool for teaching and training.

When you hear \$6 million, if it costs that, it is well worth it. We are on Laventille doing the Pelican Extension. I want to tell you, we have to put it on top of that hill and that is costing us almost \$4 million to do it, and last week we got



the shock of our lives. The earth started to slip and we had to do a retaining wall for that and all the persons who live on the hill. We cannot say we are not building the centre there because that is where the people live; they have their homes and everything there. That retaining wall is taking a few million from the cost, so when you count that it might well pass the \$6 million, but when you count the social cost on the other side, it is necessary that we do that. [*Desk thumping*]

In addition to all of that, we are building a whole number of new ones. Not only that, within the staff itself of the Ministry, we have to upgrade their skills, because when Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie was there, an officer then and now is quite different. So we have to go into a lot of upgrading of skills and that has taken us some time. Our people have moved and have accepted the fact that they need to upgrade their skills. Before, we did not have all this access that is out there.

Let me tell the Senator, when we are finished with the centres, you do not have to drive around with that van again to show the film. They are showing it inside there. That was long ago. We have changed. When I heard her say that is the box we were looking at and you had to drive the van from each place, you do not do that again, because the way it is built you are going to have all the facilities. Some of those same films you hear me talk about, we are going to be able to put up.

We also had to train some of our people in the film unit in different things. They are using video cameras now. We had to carry the thing to another level. Therefore, all those boxes that you see, if we do not take them down, we will never get to where the Minister of Finance says we are supposed to be—2020 vision; developed country. We cannot have those boxes. It is going to cost us some money. If we have the money now, we need to do that now.

At the same time we also look at another set of facilities that we have to move on to, that is our cultural facilities. I need not talk about culture around here for any one of us. We know the power of the culture of Trinidad and Tobago; we know what it can do for our people and we need to look at it, because right now we have to look at what we are having. We are building those cultural centres. Let me just tell you something because Sen. Mark gave us some wrong figures and I would like to get the figures right, quickly. We are building two academies. Those are teaching and performing areas. The University of the West Indies will be in control of those two. The one in Port of Spain on the Princes Building grounds will cost US \$60 million; the one in San Fernando will cost US \$40 million. We got a loan from the Chinese government to do it. It is a 2 per cent loan over 20 years, with a five-year moratorium. Oh, Lord, you could not expect better. So do not complain about costs at all. [*Desk thumping*]

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I want to tell you something. We have the best designs. Shanghai came and helped us, because they have been doing it. I do not want to go through it; I think I did it last year. We are moving; we are doing the National Carnival Entertainment Centre, the one in the Savannah. I just want to tell you we might change that name. It is going to be a cultural centre for everybody. At the moment the name of the facility is not there. Sen. Mark, it is going to cost \$450 million and not \$700 million.

**Sen. Mark:** You had said that.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams:** Well, that is the figure now.

**Sen. Mark:** Well, you are now correcting yourself. Do not tell me it is wrong; say you were wrong.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Yuille-Williams:** So I am just telling you it is \$450 million for that facility and before the end of the year we will be moving into that facility. I also want to tell you something that is very exciting to me. Some people said the stakeholders were complaining of not being involved in it. As far as I know, we have had a couple of stakeholders' meetings. The design was done by Mr. Stephen Mendes, and there is the Ansa McAl architectural awards for the Caribbean and they had international judges for that, and I was pleased to hear that the design for that centre won the first prize in the Caribbean civic design. [*Desk thumping*] So that design that some of us wanted to scoff at, won first prize. So we are going ahead with that and before the end of this year we will be doing that.

Other things that we are doing in terms of facilities, the Little Carib Centre, we are upgrading that; we have money to bring all the spaces together. Mautica Folk Theatre is also going to be upgraded. Pan Trinbago which you see on the highway there, and I know it is a sore point to all of us in this Parliament, let me just tell you that money was voted for that last year; we could not complete it because it was in court. I have sent all my papers to the Attorney General because the lawyers for Pan Trinbago said we could move on it. The Attorney General is now looking at it and giving me advice on it. More money is voted again this year for the completion. As long as we get the advice, yes, we can go, that would be no longer there.

Queen's Hall has been refurbished and I want to compliment the management and the board of Queen's Hall. Not only have they refurbished it but they have also taken time off to send the technical officers abroad, and I saw that their CEO went abroad to Carnegie. The senior lighting technician and the senior audio technician,

both of them spent time on attachments abroad. The administrator went to the Lincoln Centre for the Performing Arts where she had first-hand knowledge of front house operations, booking administration and production.

**2.30 p.m.**

If you looked at Queen's Hall you would have seen some visible signs of improvement. To ensure that we have a cadre of technical theatre personnel, the board of Queen's Hall has now collaborated with the Centre for Creative and Festival Arts, 2006/2007. The technical staff at Queen's Hall provides training for students enrolled in certificate and technical theatre, lighting, Carnival arts and theatre production. I have asked the staff at Queen's Hall to move to some of the other theatres to spread that kind of information. There are Naparima Bowl and the private theatre; there is a new one coming at Strand. We want everybody to be on board to use their skills in that way.

The pan chroming factory which I told you about last year, again, we have funding for it and we have received the final designs for it.

The TUCO Convalescent Centre for artistes—we say we care—we had funding in the last Bill. They have launched it and they got increased funding. We hope by the end of this financial year that centre would be there. A number of our artistes are in need of that type of care and the Government saw it fit.

Let me go to one other thing that Sen. Prof. Deosaran talked about. Sometimes we are very happy to get advice. Sen. Prof. Deosaran talked about the cultural groups that get money from the Government. As I said before, we need those cultural groups to help us, but we have to keep our eyes open to see what happens. I have been getting so much of this from the Chutney Foundation trying to put a little discrimination into it. I did not respond to this one from the Chutney Foundation but I should have done it at the time. One thing that was said here that is not true is that I told the Prime Minister that the Chutney Foundation should deal directly with him. That is not true.

Let me tell you. This is Vijay Ramlal speaking here.

The Chutney Foundation people are involved in the National Chutney Foundation, the Tassa Foundation, Trinidad and Tobago Tassa Association, the National Cultural Foundation, the National Carnival Judges Association which I went to once and then I saw my name all over the world and one of the copyright organizations of Trinidad and Tobago. The same persons are involved in about

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five or six of these organizations who feel that because they had come to Parliament and got incorporation, it automatically means that everything they do, they must be funded. I agree with Sen. Prof. Deosaran that you need to have somebody out there to look after the funding because it is getting longer and longer.

I am one of those persons who have been trying to help all organizations that come forward, but I have to be careful. Tassa got \$144,000; for Carifesta the same person got that; they got their bills paid for Carnival and all their prizes, \$212,000. It is not said here, but they feel that every time they run a competition they must bring their bills at the doorstep of the ministry without even asking before. I think it is a little unfair in how it is done. We have to look at it and the first thing that they cry is discrimination. Discrimination in Carifesta? We had a well run Chutney show in San Fernando where we had the Guyanese and everybody.

There is another group in the United States called the Soca Awards that is giving me some trouble. You might have read about it. They were here last year. They were going to Apollo in the United States and they had a big article about how the Minister here did not help them and they had to move from the Apollo to another smaller venue. I have a long letter here from the Consul in New York. They went to him at the last moment and they got through saying that they were promised money to do that and there they were. The Consul had to reply in a long letter saying that they knew nothing about it and they were not responsible.

Sometimes when you see some of these things on the newspapers you have to be very careful about what people say. They know that we want to help but there is a way in which things are done. I have always told some of these groups that I would rather they send things to the Community Development Division into us so that the officers can go out to see the work that has been done and then make a recommendation. At the ministry we are happy to serve all, and Mr. Vice-President, whichever race, we do it. MPs send in for their group. I do not discriminate against anyone. We feel that we are the people's ministry and here to serve everybody.

Mr. Vice-President, thank you very much for the opportunity to make these comments on the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Hon. Senators, earlier, there was an error in the list announced for the speakers of Wednesday October 18, 2006. I will read into the record that on Wednesday October 18, the speakers on the Appropriation Bill (Budget) were as follows: Sen. The Hon. Christine Sahadeo, Sen. Dr. Jennifer

Kernahan, Sen. Prof. Kenneth Ramchand, Sen. The Hon. Hazel Manning, Sen. The Hon. John Jeremie, Sen. Wayne Munro, Hon. Jarrette Narine MP, Sen. Angela Cropper, Sen. The Hon. Mustapha Abdul-Hamid, Sen. Parvatee Anmolsingh-Mahabir and Sen. The Hon. Christine Kangaloo.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh.

**Sen. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh:** Mr. Vice-President, I am very grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this debate of the budget for fiscal 2006/2007. This budget raises more questions than provides answers. The budget only becomes meaningful when it is compared to the actual previous performances; variances identified and someone held accountable. In this context we have to hold this administration accountable, but what are they accountable for? We want to say that they are accountable for this precipitous decay in the quality of life of our citizens. They have to be accountable for the high cost of living; the double digit inflation which has been spoken about; the high Government expenditure of nearly \$155 billion when they would have completed five years; poor social services; inadequate attention to agriculture, unabated crime and criminal activity.

This budget can be considered a laundry list of hopeful expectations; everything we will do, we will do. After five years we have a repetition of we will do in 2006 as was said in 2002, woefully short on delivery of previous budget objectives. The budget is lofty and ambitious but the reality is that the Government continues to fail in delivering the minimum expectations of the population. The more they spend, the less return is obtained. Trinidad and Tobago has been united across generations by enduring commitment to generations that toiled and laboured, so that everyone must serve a chance. No insignificant person was ever born. Everyone is significant. I deliver thousands every day. Whilst many of our citizens prosper, over 250,000, nearly one in five of our population doubt the promise because of poverty.

The ambitions of our citizens are limited and stifled by the loss of security, personal safety and poverty; stifled by rising inflation, galloping dictatorship, decay of institutions, health care, education—even with the beautiful contribution by the Minister of Education, we will discuss it pretty shortly—infrastructure and everyone knows that there is environmental degradation. We have lost faith as a people in our freedom and democracy, for our democratic faith is being eroded on a daily basis and our democratic faith is the inborn hope of humanity.

All around us today there is widespread suffering. We go south of Trinidad, south-west, south-east, central, some areas in north-east, the people in the north of Port of Spain to some extent, but when you leave south and coming up through

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central, you are coming to the north, you see the gradual wealth accumulation. Poverty in the south and wealth in the north. When you go to Tobago you see some degree of poverty but not as much. There must be a duty from all of us to eradicate this. All of us are diminished when any is hopeless. This budget exacerbates this hopelessness and suffering. Hundreds of thousands in our country know and feel the pain of severe poverty. I came from poverty like many of us.

We are calling this PNM administration to responsibility. This is a call to conscience because they have failed. In our ideal of freedom we must find the dignity and security of economic independence. Each individual must have some economic independence, instead of labouring on the edge of subsistence with what everyone knows as URP, CEPEP and handouts. This and previous budgets have failed to provide this dignity and security of economic independence of any citizen. We cannot carry the message of freedom and the baggage of bigotry at the same time. Freedom must be chosen and defended by us in this august Chamber. On behalf of our citizens we must expose the pretensions of tyrants' reign of political persecution, harassment, hatred and resentment.

In this budget, education has been described as priority number two. We know that the success of any economic and human development strategy hinges on the quality of our human resources and ability to build an integrated knowledge network promoting innovation and entrepreneurship. Let us examine the budget pledges in education. In 2003, the Minister of Finance said, "Our strategic plan has been informed by the White Paper on Education in 1993—2003."

There have been 19 task forces on education since independence. I suggest that the hon. Minister of Education should have documentation before her to see how most of these task forces have suggested basically the same thing in the '80s, '90s and 2000. In the early '90s, under their administration over 200 distinguished educators came together over a two-year period to produce an educational policy paper, a national task force on education which, unfortunately, I heard the hon. Minister of Education indicate that that is no longer relevant. I took part in those discussions and I presented a paper when I was in the NAR in 1993 on behalf of the NAR.

**Sen. Manning:** Mr. Vice-President, on a point of order. I did not say that it was no longer relevant. In my contribution I said that we had implemented almost 100 per cent of that policy document, 1993—2003. We have used that document as a Bible to be able to implement what we are implementing now, because we know that that document came from the salt of the earth.

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** I will attempt to show the hon. Minister of Education that she has not satisfied what she has indicated that they have completed all the things in the 1993—2003 document.

The major concerns then in that document and still are, to cater for pupils with special needs and adequately for early childhood care and education; school buildings that are in urgent need of refurbishment and rehabilitation; an absent coherent human resource management capability; low morale in the teaching service, teaching core; morals negatively influenced by poor selection, recruitment, deployment, remuneration and promotion policies and a need for de-shifting of junior secondary schools, urgently. Therefore, Mr. Vice-President, they have not completed what the Minister indicated in 1993 to 2003. [*Interruption*] You can respond through the hon. Minister when he is winding up.

**2.45 p.m.**

During the period of the UNC administration from 1995 to 2001, we were faced with these monumental hurdles in the education system. By 1996, the five to 11 age group primary school children was approximately 214,000. By the year 2000, it was projected to rise to some 227,000. These increases would have resulted in shortfalls of 25,000 aged 5 to 11 being without a primary school place by 1996, and some 38,000 by the year 2000.

In order to ensure universal primary education then, which we fulfilled, there was the need for construction of some 51 new schools by 2000. We delivered. We constructed and refurbished over 100 primary schools under the World Bank Loan, IBRD, which the PNM Government did not use subsequently. We constructed 15 secondary schools. We de-shifted five junior secondary schools. We built 30 Early Childhood Education Centres. We heard on that side that these are no longer suitable for occupation, but the ones at Barrackpore, Tabaquite, Gran Couva, Rose Hill in Laventille are all standing tall. [*Desk thumping*] These schools were World Bank loan approved so they had to be well constructed. They were constructed for less than \$250,000 each, not \$2 million as it is costing the present administration. Yours is only a promise yet to be fulfilled.

We computerized 83 secondary schools, with computer labs, and at least 50 primary schools. We settled long outstanding arrears for teachers during our period—the then Minister of Public Administration is here. Some of these were from the 1980s; remember we were offering shares in NEL to public servants.

Contrast UNC's achievements with PNM's non-performance. This present administration cannot utilize the present IDB loan. The Secondary Education Modernization Programme (SEMP), as it is called, loan funding—they had to

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renew the loan agreement recently for another three years because they could not complete one primary school, or secondary school, or any Early Childhood Education Centres. It is part of their document which they put out for advertisement.

“ESCL, Changing the Face of Education Work In Progress and 16 Early Childhood Care Centres, one primary and 12 secondary schools.”

Work in Progress, Mr. Vice-President.

In the 2003 budget they said:

“We will increase the number of Early Childhood Care and Education Centres (ECCE) in every district;”

Not one has been completed. In the 2004 budget they said:

“We shall construct 43 Early Childhood Care and Education Centres as we pursue our objective of universal access to pre-schools.”

In the 2006 budget the hon. Minister of Finance is saying the same thing, that we are going to pursue Early Childhood Care and Education Centres. As my colleague said it is *deja vu*. We heard it in 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006 again. I think it is a shame and disgrace to repeat the same promises year after year—boasting universal access to early childhood education in 2010. The Prime Minister said:

“This will make us one of the few countries in the world to have targeted such an achievement.”

It is pure illusions of grandeur, a bipolar schizophrenic hallucination—[*Desk thumping*]*]*—when you have not completed one in five years out of the 600 promised.

In the 2003 budget he said:

“We will increase the number of Secondary Schools;”

Not one built; 15 are being constructed.

“We will de-shift the Junior Secondary Schools...”

We will construct new primary schools but not one was built.

Under the UNC administration, we produced a new primary school curriculum. I took part in that with Sen. Prof. Kenneth Ramchand, Dr. Bhoie Tewarie and a number of people in 1997/1998. In 1999, we standardized the textbooks but there



was a free-for-all in the textbook industry. We rooted out the more than \$200 million in corruption in the textbook industry in the primary schools in 1998.

In 2005, the Minister of Finance said that they would establish a National Curriculum Council to review and revise the national philosophy and goals of education. Mr. Vice-President, they came into power in 2002, if they were very serious about education, in 2005, would they be now thinking about revising a national curriculum education programme? They are talking about the development of a textbook industry in Trinidad and Tobago; pie in the sky.

They said 3,000 computers at primary degree school level; if they even put in 3,000 computers that will only cost the country \$3.6 million. What they should be doing is looking at putting in 30,000 computers in schools, which will only cost the country TT \$36 million. We have a lot of money and every primary school child should have a computer at their desk. The teachers should be trained to be able to educate the children in computer literacy because this is where the world is moving.

They said that they wanted to establish IT units in each education district and establish one wide area network connecting all schools. How could you establish a wide area network when you do not even have computers in the schools? You do not even have a local area network far less a wide area network.

Another aspect of our approach to delivering quality education—

**Sen. Manning:** It is happening.

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** It is happening for the last five years. —is our comprehensive programme for school construction and enhancement. In 2005, the hon. Prime Minister said:

“Another aspect of our approach to delivering total quality education is our comprehensive programme for school construction and enhancement.”

Where are the schools?

“As part of the \$2 billion school-building programme, we shall provide six new secondary schools and upgrade 100 others throughout Trinidad and Tobago. The programme also includes the construction of 13 replacement primary schools.”

None, Mr. Vice-President.

**Sen. Manning:** None at all?

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** None. With respect to the Textbook Rental Programme, there is a corruption scandal going on in this country of nearly \$1 billion amongst local publishers, authors and booksellers, who are calling for an investigation into the operations of the Textbook Committee. This is illustrated here:

“The War of the Words: Publishers, Authors up in arms over Textbook Rental Committee.

With each passing academic year the Textbook Evaluation Committee seems to approve the next worst textbook, especially at the primary level.

This is quoted from the *Sunday Guardian*, dated October 15, 2006.

They were claiming that many of the books being given out to schools were not selected by the Textbook Evaluation Committee. This was disbanded and replaced by three new committees: Learning Material Evaluation Committee, the Textbook Development and Research Committee and a public interest group, all reporting to the National Textbook Committee.

Now with the Textbook Rental Programme there is a corruption of more than nearly \$1 billion.

The UNC administration established Distance Education Centres throughout Trinidad and Tobago. We established Adult Training Literacy Centres throughout Trinidad and Tobago. We know that the functional literacy rate is only about 70 per cent in Trinidad and Tobago. The functional illiteracy is more than approximately 30 per cent. This is work done by ALTA. Some people cannot make a sentence nor read a sentence and this is very unfortunate.

We did on-job training for teachers; established the College of Science Technology and Applied Arts. We established the National Energy Skills Centre. We established the Dollar for Dollar Programme, which they have renamed GATE—there is nothing different. We established the Trinidad and Tobago Institute for Technology. We developed universal secondary education, providing secondary school places for all students.

You may remember for almost 30 years under PNM’s administration, almost 7,000 to 10,000 students in primary schools were unable to obtain a place in secondary schools and were therefore left out of the mainstream of education. Therefore almost 200,000 citizens, who are now adults, are left with only a primary level education—very sad and unfortunate, Mr. Vice-President. Many of them are unemployable and unemployed, left with no self-esteem out of which crime emanates.

This is the legacy of 30 years of the PNM-style education which we sought to correct in 1995 to 2001, and which we corrected in 2000. When we examined the output in the present education system—I believe that approximately 30 per cent of students in the government secondary schools, the statistics are there—obtained full passes at CXC. Only 30 per cent in the government secondary schools obtained full passes at CXC—that is five subjects—70 per cent failed to get full passes.

With respect to the Technical/Vocational Education System, in secondary schools they are sadly lacking. There are many comprehensive reports sitting at the Ministry of Education to be implemented on students weak in academia, moving through the tech/voc stream, doing technical/vocational training and able to come back through the academia later after the tech/voc training.

In 1998, a committee led by Prof. Stefan Gift produced an implementable tech/voc report, which today is still languishing.

Rural transport system: This can be eliminated by construction of schools in the rural areas. We did that. We built schools in rural areas. When you say we are transporting 160,000 students, build the schools there; provide the incentives for the teachers to reside there; provide the housing for the teachers to reside—they are building houses—and these poor children will not have to be awakened at 5.00 a.m., travel in the midst of traffic congestion and on arriving at school they are already tired and unable to concentrate and learn. These poor students have to get up at 5.00 a.m. to be transported. This is untenable in a country where we have so much money. Build the school there; have the teachers and let them be accommodated close to the schools.

What about the enquiry into the education system? The *First Report of the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into and Report to Parliament on Municipal Corporations and Service Commissions* dated June 28, 2005 says:

“There exist a high percentage of vacancies in the teaching service, 220 vacancies of 449 available positions of principal...”

That is almost 50 per cent.

“50 per cent vacancies of Principal I; 81 vacancies amongst the 165 positions of vice-principal...”

Fifty per cent approximately and the Committee cited the manual system in the Ministry of Education as the main reason for delays in making appointments which still today has not been corrected. They still have a manual system for 14,000 teachers.

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“The denominational board had major disagreements...”

**Sen. Manning:** Mr. Vice-President, on a point of order. What is being said is not correct. It is totally not correct. I would like the Senator to quote what year that was said.

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** This is in the *First Report of the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into and Report to Parliament on Municipal Corporations and Service Commissions*, dated June 28, 2005. The book is available; we can send for it; I had it here for the last two days and I documented it properly. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Manning:** Mr. Vice-President, in my response to that Report we had made all the changes, so what is being said there is not correct.

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** The denominational boards had major disagreements and informed the Teaching Service Commission that they had difficulty with the Ministry of Education not forwarding their recommendations for filling vacancies at the levels of principals and vice-principals. That was another finding. Here it is in the Concordat:

“The Chairman of the Teaching Service Commission reported that there was a high level of incompetence and lack of professionalism amongst present-day supervisors which contributed to poor school management and poor supervision of the teaching staff.”

**3.00 p.m.**

“The Committee noted that the staff reporting systems in schools had collapsed and this had a deleterious effect on performance and promotion.”

Do you expect the education system to be moving along when all of this is happening? The main contribution for the collapse of the system:

“The unwillingness of principals and school managers to be honest in their assessments of members and staff, undue delay in the implementation of the new Performance Management Appraisal System. Only two disciplinary cases had been dealt with at the Commission for a particular year in a system of more than 14,000 teachers.”

What has been happening to the disciplining of teachers where so many reports are made on a daily basis, and only two reports? This is what the committee found.

“Teacher absenteeism: One of the main reasons advanced was the need for teachers to regularly take time off to pursue tertiary level or other forms of further specialized education because of the problem being exacerbated in light of the new criteria for promotion to the positions of vice-principal and principal.”

The new criteria is that you must have a first degree, you must have a diploma in addition to that, and to move from vice-principal to principal, you must have five years experience as vice-principal. So people are taking time off, who did not have degrees, to obtain degrees.

“Deans: Cabinet had created an additional 1,500 positions of deans. However, the committee learnt that none of these positions were filled due to incomplete discussions between the Ministry of Education and TUTA.

Concordat: Questions arose as to whether the various boards and the Concordat superseded the Education Act or the Teaching Service Regulations.”

You would remember the Ministry of Education had to come with large advertisements because the denominational boards had difficulties with the Ministry of Education and for days the Ministry of Education had to put out these advertisements, because there was a dichotomy in the thinking. The denominational boards were not accepting what the Ministry of Education was trying to dish out for them.

The Ministry of Education should hold the hands of the denominational boards and work with them because they are more efficient in the delivery of construction, filling vacancies and so forth. Because the denominational schools are much more successful than government schools.

The hon. Minister told us yesterday of the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Ministry of Education and the denominational boards. Why was this new Memorandum of Understanding necessary? Is it because of conflict emanating?

The committee found that the Ministry of Education did not function with the efficiency, transparency, control and expediency that it should.

How do we expect education to move forward? Mr. Vice-President, I feel sorry for the Minister of Education because I have been there as chairman of the National Advisory Committee on Education, and I know that the management capability of your top line staff at the Ministry of Education is extremely weak. I am not blaming her and I know that there are difficulties there and the World Bank had to produce some financing to help train management at that level.

I see the Minister of Health coming in. It is the same thing in the health sector. Management capabilities are what we lack sadly in Trinidad and Tobago. I feel sorry for her, she may mean well, but she is not supported by the type of staff that she needs to have. It is a recommendation that the Minister of Finance

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should consider, bringing in and employing people from outside with the capability and capacity to assist in the administration and management of these large areas.

The committee made six recommendations at that time:

Decentralization: Principals be given more authority and more training, training of schools supervisors, needs assessment for remedial teachers, child psychologists, new performance appraisal systems, review of the Concordat.

It is surprising that in the book that they sent us for their highlights of achievements: Government at your service, page 27, it says:

“The performance rates in all the four indicators...are very high, the highest of which is the Adult Literacy rate which got a rating of 98.5%.”

Heaven help us!

In Trinidad and Tobago we know the adult literacy rate is not more than 70 per cent. How can we put that in a book and show it to the world? No wonder then that the Education for all Global Monitoring Report, 2005 rated Trinidad and Tobago among the highest countries in the world as far as education for all development index is concerned. This is what they wrote in their book. Far from reality! We are fooling ourselves. We do not have more than seven out of ten people in Trinidad and Tobago who are functioning literates.

A little bit on the UTT.

Where are the international standards for the recognition of the University of Trinidad and Tobago? I have been with the university—and so have Sen. Prof. Kenneth Ramchand and Sen. Prof. Deosaran—for almost 22 years. We have toiled and sweated to ensure that the standards of a university education are kept. The University of the West Indies is 56 years old in medicine; from 1950 so they have built a standard. The University of Trinidad and Tobago is coming into being, but do not try to give PhDs; to begin to think about giving PhDs to the University of Trinidad and Tobago—when you do not even have recognition in Trinidad. You want to give a PhD to give international recognition. Who is going to mark these PhD scripts? Who is going to analyze that? This is untenable. Is it that you cannot control the University of the West Indies and that is why you want to have a University of Trinidad and Tobago? [*Desk thumping*] Is it because you are being forced to give the nod to the principal and you decided that you would not have it? Are we having a dictatorship in the education system? We are repeating the same thing—

**Sen. Prof. Ramchand:** Mr. Vice-President, since the University of Trinidad and Tobago gets much flack in the Senate, perhaps I should answer this one point about the award of research degrees.

Research degrees in universities can either be done by course work and dissertation or by pure dissertation, and I know, because I am supervising two of them at the University of Trinidad and Tobago. I have two people who are doing PhDs under my supervision and I am working with them exactly in the way that I would have worked with them at the University of the West Indies, and a similar thing is happening with other academics. So on a selected basis, PhDs are being done, and I know for sure that the standards are going to be maintained.

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** I am gratified to know Sen. Prof. Ramchand, who I have tremendous respect for, is part of the system but I still would not accept the fact that a new university of that could begin with PhDs.

Let us work through the first degrees, the second degrees and then move through. Universities around the world do not operate like that. If you want to create your own kingdom of universities go right ahead.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to move to the health care situation. Any health care debate occurs along the ragged border between ethics and economics. Good health care must be a right and something that people ought to receive when they need it, not poor health care. At any time we must be working towards a health system which balances an individual's need for dignity of life and society's need for economic discipline. But life in this country is cheap. The indices for determination of the state of health of any country amongst others, are life expectancy, infant mortality, pre-natal mortality, maternal mortality and immunization and so forth.

In the USA, life expectancy in the 1950s was 68 years. When you were born you were expected to live 68 years. Now it is 76 years. Canada is 76 years. Trinidad and Tobago, 69 for men and 72 for women. Fifty-six years later in Trinidad and Tobago, we are now reaching the American and Canadian life expectancy situations.

Expenditure on health care in Trinidad and Tobago in the six years of our administration had been about \$560 million in 1995 to \$1.1 billion in 2001. So in the six years we spent \$5.5 billion on health. In this administration, they have spent nearly \$10 billion in five years but there has been no improvement whatsoever; we see total decay of a system.

Our infant mortality rate is 17 per thousand. Canada is 7.2 per thousand, USA is 10 per thousand. Our child mortality is 20 per thousand. Our maternal mortality is astounding, 160 per 100,000 pregnancies. Developed countries have a maternal

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mortality of less than 10 per 100,000 and each mother who dies, there is a confidential enquiry into the death of this person. But life is cheap in Trinidad and Tobago.

They say that they are making head roads into HIV. In 2003 the incidence for prevalence was 2.6 per cent. In 2005 the prevalence is still 2.6 and this is quoted from the UN programme on HIV/AIDS, UN/AIDS 2006.

Our doctor per capita ratio is one to 1,200. In Canada it is one to 450, in the USA it is one to 400. Even the best health care system must change over time to meet new challenges and opportunities. No foreign system got to be the way—It is true revolutionary transformation goes through a process of evolution that reflects national values and consensus. Germany has a unique public/private health system, one of the models that the Clinton health plan used in the United States. The premium through a parole tax split, 50/50 between employer and employees. We are not saying we are going to advocate that here because it is a different situation. Patients never see a bill. They choose their own private sector/public sector and receive top quality care regardless of income.

Your administration decided to implement a health sector reform programme pivotal of decentralization in 1994. You brought on the regional health authorities and it has proven to be your albatross. When we came into office in 1995, we met a health system in total decay. We met the Regional Health Authorities Act. We decided that we were not going to change it as a responsible government because much work, money and effort were spent by previous administrations working through Coopers & Lybrand to bring about the Regional Health Authorities. The hospitals and institutions literally—I feel ashamed to say this word—were literally stinking, and all plant and machinery were dilapidated. The UNC administration had left a PNM appointed board until mid-1997. We did not remove them. So what we were able to achieve in a short period of three and a half years was just astronomical.

We had over 500 infrastructural projects throughout Trinidad and Tobago, improving the institutions. We repaired 17 out of 20 wards at the General Hospital, Port of Spain. We built a new pharmacy waiting area. People were lining up every day, hundreds of people waiting for the pharmacists. We built a new hematology ward for Dr. Wavney Charles to treat sickle cell patients. We built a new gastroenterology ward for Dr. Mario Bartholomew to do endoscopies. We changed over the laboratory department. We built a 10-bed intensive care unit in just four months in 2000 at a cost of less than half of what it was costing in the late 1980s. Mr. Amar wanted to give an ICU unit, we built it at a cost that was



less than predicated. We built a new 37-chamber mortuary with state-of-the-art for post-mortem and pathology department. You will remember rats were nibbling at patients bodies, and that is the type of dignity you would have for member of your family who dies and is at a mortuary. I understand it is now being left for ruin and some ruining is taking place.

We refurbished and equipped seven operating theatres. I was there. I did it. We did build a new x-ray department and an x-ray department at the Accident and Emergency where you can get your x-ray in five minutes. We air-conditioned the administrative area at Port of Spain. We improved the nurses' quarters, water storage systems, standby generators; we built four new wards at the St. Ann's Hospital, improved the electricity system, improved the water storage, improved the roofing system.

At St. James we built a chemotherapy chamber for mixing chemotherapeutic drugs. We had infrastructural improvement to St. James and we put in a new cobalt radiotherapy source. We rebuilt and refurbished 47 health centres, two district health facilities at Couva and Princes Town and over \$200 million were spent on new equipment.

One would remember how we moved through that successful transition of the Y2K without loss of any lives. We had over 50 open-heart surgeries for children. We did over 3,000 cataract operations. We opened four wards at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex; we opened the Wendy Fitzwilliam Paediatric Hospital with transfer of the four paediatric wards from the general hospital. I did that within four months when I became chairman of the Regional Health Authorities because we wanted to have the Wendy Fitzwilliam Paediatric Hospital as the centre of excellence for paediatric care in Trinidad and Tobago. We rebuilt three new wards at the Caura Hospital for the TB patients who were at Mount Hope because the TB patients were located at one part of the hospital and the germs could have been moving through the atmosphere and infecting the rest of the patients; we sent them back to Caura.

### **3.15 p.m.**

Remember the Machel Montano concert damage of over 150 people. We treated all of them at the emergency department in less than four hours because we had a health care system that was beginning to work for the first time.

We made tremendous progress in the National Health Insurance System and we were just about to have a unique identifier. We signed off on a government-to-government arrangement for the National Oncology Centre, in 2000. We did a

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completion study by PricewaterhouseCoopers for the transfer of Ministry of Health workers to the RHA and we increased nurses' salaries by 25 per cent. [Interruption] I cannot bore the Senate and the general population with all our achievements, but I was there.

What do we have today? We have screaming headlines: "23 babies die at Mount Hope from enterobacter"; "Minister says heads will roll", not a head rolled; "Roaches and rodents at San Fernando Hospital kitchen", kitchen closed; "People falling through the floor of San Fernando Hospital laboratory"; "\$109 million missing which was supposed to be paid to the Board of Inland Revenue and NIB"; THA Chief Secretary Orville London describes the Scarborough Hospital as a frustrating experience". Next headline: "Tobago hospital project sick"; "Tobago Hospital to cost \$128 million more than on December 19, 2004", and that was in 2006. It was less than 40 per cent completed and was then costing more than \$300 million more.

You are in Tobago, Mr. Vice-President, who has been charged for moving material from the site to their private property? The commission of enquiry indicated that someone must be held liable, yet the DPP's department has not charged anyone. Is it because they may have to charge one of their own boys?

We see "Fire at St. Ann's Hospital"; "Toddler's death at Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex"; "Enterobacter pseudo-pneumoniais and staphylococcus in four areas in the neo-natal unit in Tobago". On February 17, 2005, an opportunity to speak, Mr. Vice-President, do you remember the commission of enquiry? Do you know what year that was? That was 2005, February 17. It is now 20 months later. That was a President-appointed commission to hold an enquiry into the public health care in Trinidad and Tobago.

"Feel free to speak without fear of victimization", now 20 months later, nearly two years, the commission of enquiry has been prevented from completing its work by this Government. They have refused to provide the four lawyers needed by the commission and the public health enquiry is on hold again due to circumstances beyond the commission's control. Is the work of the commission being forced to stop? Why is it being forced to stop? Is it because of chilling and disturbing reminders that ills in the health sector are being unearthed?

On Friday, September 15, 2006, we see the headline:

"Corruption in hospital

Allegations of corruption on the bidding on tenders for hospital supplies and babies dying due to ongoing hospital feuds..."

These are the words of Dr. Petronella Manning for whom I have a tremendous amount of respect as one of the best neonatologists that this Caribbean has ever seen. This is a lady who has been frustrated. I worked with her at the Port of Spain Hospital. She is a tremendous person and she had the audacity to come against—she knows that her brother is the hon. Prime Minister and if she can say this in a public enquiry, I give her all the kudos. These are the facts. She would not say these things if they were not true.

She said that certain medical suppliers were preferred and often privy to inside information. There was internecine warfare resulting in deaths of babies; companies being made privy to pricing information in order to underbid for a tender; wheeling and dealing with equipment not put to proper use; tendering corruption; medical supply monopoly at Port of Spain General Hospital on procurement contracts; “medications for change must be included in the health sector reform programme”, she said, and they were not seen to be fulfilling these requirements.

The hon. Prime Minister, addressing health care workers from across the region and internationally, said that our current package of initiatives is undergoing extensive—and broad-based international best practice. Best practice? What I described there is best practice? How could he address Caribbean health care people and say that is best practice?

In 1985, there were four kidney transplants from living donors. I was in the operating theatre when the first kidney transplant was done at Medical Associates. On July 04, 2005, the *Trinidad Guardian* wrote that 50 patients had travelled to Pakistan for kidney transplants and the hon. Minister of Health said that there were no problems with the National Organ Donor Programme; that once all the elements were in place, transplants surgery should begin within the next two months at Eric Williams. That was July 04, 2005.

The Human Tissue Transplant Act was passed in 2000 and only the regulations were to be passed and those regulations were passed four years later. Presently, 250 patients are being dialysed.

**Mr. Vice President:** Hon. Senators, the speaking 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. T. Gopeesingh:** Thank you, hon. Senators, for the opportunity to speak for another 15 minutes. I have a lot more to say. I have a tremendous amount of respect for Dr. Rahael.

**Hon. Rahael:** Dr. Rahael? [*Laughter*]

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Minister Rahael. I will pass on to you the file of matters with which we have difficulty, which I will sit and talk to you about. There are many irregularities going on at the Ministry of Health about which you ought to know. One of them is the same programme you are trying to achieve, the same-day surgery programme. Mr. Vice-President, this is through you. I will alert you and at a subsequent time we may be able to discuss it in public. There is a lot of corruption going on. You see suppliers from Tours and Travel Service. I want to know if they are doing surgery on their aircraft. [*Interruption*] Yes, it is part of my contribution. There is a lot more information which we will give.

Mr. Vice-President, I have come to a very important part, although the others were equally important. This is something I want to bring to the national community, as well. The Attorney General, in a statement in the Parliament yesterday, boasted of spending \$20 million on matters he spoke about yesterday. We would like him to answer a few questions at some opportune time. He does not have to answer them now but can answer later.

**Sen. Jeremie:** I want to answer now.

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Do not get into my time; you will have your opportunity. We have the information and we will give him an opportunity to clear the air on these matters, but not on my time. There are grave implications.

Mr. Vice-President, you said yesterday that today I will have the opportunity to say whatever I need to say. I listened to you, as a diligent person. May I be given the honour and privilege?

**Mr. Vice-President:** You forgot to say that I also said “within the confines of the Standing Orders”.

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** There are grave implications for the continuation of his position of Attorney General. The country and its citizens will need to know, in the same way they were informed yesterday, how the new criminal justice system operates in Trinidad and Tobago. Is it operating on the basis of the Attorney General alone?

Sen. Dr. Jennifer Kernahan, on June 15, 2005, asked this question of the hon. Attorney General:

“Will the hon. Attorney General inform this Senate, for the period January 01, 2002 to May 05, 2005:

- (i) When were the undermentioned persons or companies associated with them, engaged by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago?"

She had 17 names: Karl Hudson-Phillip, Gilbert Peterson, Roy Holford, Edward Jenkins, Timothy Cassel, Elaine Greene, Raimundo Lopez, Lima Levi, Lopez Levi & Associates, Robert Lindquist, Ed Davis—17 persons.

This Opposition, in our quest to ensure that the money was being spent properly in the criminal justice system, asked that question. We have had no response since June 15, 2005, one year and three months later; not even a whisper.

**Sen. Jeremie:** Was it a written question?

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** The UNC had to try to get some invoices on its own. We want the hon. Attorney General to indicate how the money was spent. Was Raimundo Lopez, a Miami accountant, one of the persons being paid by the Attorney General? Was the \$1,688,440 paid by the hon. Attorney General for the testimony of Raimundo Lopez? Did Mr. Lopez prepare a slide show of his work for the Attorney General?

We have the hon. Attorney General saying he is not involved with prosecutions. Did Mr. Lopez make a slide presentation for him, to be paid with this money? Why was the hon. Attorney General telling only less than half the story today and hiding the rest? Is he saying it tongue-in-cheek? Is he still saying that he is not involved in the prosecution? Is it the DPP alone?

When we asked the question, we were trying to determine whether there were certain unlawful activities taking place—paying money to witnesses. We would appreciate if he would give answers to these. Is the justice system operating on a basis where witnesses are paid for their testimony by the Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago? If it is so, then no one can have the confidence in the criminal justice system.

Were the prosecutors meeting with the witnesses at the Marriott Hotel in downtown Miami? Was there a prosecution matter being dealt with in a hotel? Is this how justice is being dispensed? In a hotel?

We remember that Justice Bereaux quoted section 90 of the Constitution and specifically said that prosecutions are the direct domain of the DPP, who is the holder of an independent office, not politicians. By putting policemen to report to politicians, does he now have his private police team? Can he now dispatch his police officers to deal with his political opponents? Did he indicate that these

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negotiations are now ongoing as he made it out to be complete? Was it out of order for the Attorney General to disclose in Parliament matters which relate to an offer from the prosecution in Miami? We understand that these negotiations are still ongoing and that a plea bargaining process is still ongoing. If that person who is undergoing the plea bargaining process had refused, he would have been prejudiced already because of the guilty headlines in the newspaper today.

In addition, are there many aspects of the offer and settlement currently being negotiated that the Attorney General has failed to disclose? We are reliably informed that one of the accused is currently negotiating with respect to the conduct of a number of PNM officials, at the highest level in their party, who offered him protection from criminal prosecution in exchange for money. Does the hon. Attorney General know this? If he wants, we can call the names later. We have them.

Some of these people visited the office of the accused in Miami and collected their money. Some collected their money at the Piccadilly Restaurant in Miami. Some collected at the Capital Grill. Those who went to the Capital Grill and to the Piccadilly Restaurant know who they are. Will the Attorney General be bringing criminal charges against those? Does he know that one of the senior men in his political party associated with a firm William, Russel and Johnson Incorporation (WRJ) and went for cash? He wanted the money in cash. Did they ask one of the accused to meet with someone in Tobago? Did they want one of the accused to withdraw from the Scarborough Hospital in order for another contractor to get that because that person was the lowest bidder?

**3.30 p.m.**

We are informed that when you said that they pleaded guilty, you did not tell the country all these things. I would not call any names today but you would have—[*Interruption*]

**Sen. Jeremie:** On a point of order. That is imputing improper motives, but I am prepared to answer each and every single question now.

**Sen. Mark:** At an appropriate time.

**Sen. Joseph:** What appropriate time? You cannot just throw that out there and now.

**Sen. Jeremie:** Now. I have the answer now.

**Sen. Joseph:** This is not a “duck and run”.

**Sen. Mark:** Look at the list of all these criminals in the PNM.

**Sen. Jeremie:** I have the answers.

**Mr. Vice-President:** For you to answer now he would have to give way and he is saying that he is not prepared to give way. Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh, you will, I presume, file that as a question.

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Yes.

**Sen. Mark:** No, we would not. We would suspend the Standing Order for him to answer at the appropriate time, not now, later.

**Sen. Yuille-Williams:** Are you afraid of the answers?

**Sen. Jeremie:** They are afraid of the answers.

**Sen. Dr. Saith:** Mr. Vice-President, the Senator is asking questions and implying improper behaviour. The Attorney General is willing to answer them. If it means that we have to suspend the Standing Orders to allow him to answer, we will do it. [*Desk thumping*] We will do it.

**Sen. Mark:** Allow him to continue and then we will allow him to answer. We have no problem. Lenny, I support that. Suspend the Standing Orders because we have real juice here. It is real solid. You have a lot of answering to do this afternoon, but allow him to continue.

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Would the Attorney General be able to offer immunity for half of his PNM Government? The Attorney General went there and it backfired on him. He did not know that all of these people were working out deals before. They even collected some money. Does he know whether they collected some money in the Hilton Hotel in Trinidad? This is the same administration that has been relentlessly attacking important institutions that safeguard our fundamental human rights and freedoms, with the objective of controlling these institutions.

Some of these institutions which were and are being attacked are: the Judiciary, the Parliament, local government bodies, the service commissions, the public service and the EBC. The PNM Government is attacking the Judiciary. [*Interruption*]

**Sen. Mark:** Do not interrupt him. Let him continue. You will have your time man. No, no, he must conclude his contribution and then you will talk.

**Sen. Jeremie:** We suspended the Standing Orders.

**Sen. Mark:** He cannot interrupt him.

**Sen. Dr. Kernahan:** In the middle?

**Sen. Jeremie:** He is going to something else and I said that I was prepared to answer.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh, I thought you were going to continue on the same matter, are you finished with it?

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** That part but I have another—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Vice-President:** The Senate took a decision to suspend the Standing Orders so that the Attorney General could answer and then you will finish your contribution. I should let you know that you have four minutes more.

**Sen. Jeremie:** Mr. Vice-President, it is always a pleasure for me to rise to speak of integrity on the part of those of us on this side.

The prosecution of criminal matters in the United States is not and cannot be a matter for the Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago. I have no jurisdiction beyond the seas which border our two islands, Trinidad and Tobago—whatever he speaks of, in terms of the plea bargaining arrangements; restaurants; who sundaes, chicken, rice, roti and who paid cash—the Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago would have no knowledge of that for the simple reason that this is a matter which concerns the authorities in the United States. The plea bargain matters of which he speaks were conducted entirely by the United States Government. I made that abundantly clear yesterday.

I, in poor, little Trinidad and Tobago—[*Interruption*]

**Sen. Mark:** Poor?

**Sen. Jeremie:**—have absolutely no jurisdiction over—[*Interruption*] We are only richer now because we have stopped stealing money from the Treasury. We have a little more money than we would otherwise have had.

In respect of prosecutions in the United States, I know absolutely nothing. I do not ask any question. That is a question which, if we think about it, we would not ask, seriously, in this House.

He asked a series of questions. I have dealt with the American plea bargains. That is a matter for the Attorney General of the United States, whom I know to be an honourable man, and the AUSA Attorney, who has conduct of this matter and whom I know to be a very honourable man and a competent lawyer.



I do not know anything about what happened in the United States, who ate at what restaurant and at what time. He asked what the powers of the Attorney General are and if the Attorney General has a private police force. The answer to that is, obviously, no. Former Attorney General Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj was the first Attorney General who was given a role in anti-corruption matters.

Under the UNC—I thought I was explaining all of this yesterday but they would not hear me—under the astute stewardship of former Attorney General Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj, there was formed, in their administration, an Anti-corruption Investigations Bureau, under the office of the Attorney General. That bureau is staffed by police officers and it reports to the Commissioner of Police. The role of the Attorney General is limited to providing forensic and legal support to that bureau. The Attorney General knows nothing of their day-to-day operations. That is how I have run the show and I am confident that is how Mr. Maharaj ran his show. That is what allowed him to bring the evidence to the table to bring that government down.

In terms of sections 76 and 90 of the Constitution, a copy of which I just happen to have at hand, provide as follows:

“Director of Public Prosecutions”

I am sorry that my friend, Sen. Dana Seetahal, S.C. is not here.

“90(1) The provisions of this section shall, subject to section 76(2) have effect with respect to the conduct of prosecutions.”

In law school, we know when something is subject to, we turn the page. I am turning the page to section 76(2), which provides:

“The Attorney General shall, subject to section 79, be responsible for the administration of legal affairs in Trinidad and Tobago and legal proceedings for and against the State shall be taken—

- (a) in the case of civil proceedings, in the name of the Attorney General;
- (b) in the case of criminal proceedings, in the name of the State.”

My role, in relation to criminal prosecutions in Trinidad and Tobago, is limited to providing general administrative support and general policy directions. I have no role whatsoever, in determining who should be charged, when they should be charged, if they should be charged and who should not be charged. What I do is that I make absolutely certain that the department functions without fear or favour, affection or ill-will in compliance with the oath which I took.

**Sen. Mark:** Mr. Vice-President, seeing that we have suspended the Standing Orders—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Vice-President:** The suspension was to allow the Attorney General to answer. [*Interruption*] Sen. Mark!

**Sen. Mark:** He has not answered.

**Mr. Vice-President:** However he answered, we have to go with it. The suspension was to allow him to make a contribution. Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh, you may continue. You have four minutes more.

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** I want to repeat whether he knows about Mr. Lopez and if he ever had any meeting with him to view any slide presentations.

**Sen. Jeremie:** I am sorry. If you allow me—I thought all that would have been subsumed in the answer. But, for the purposes of the record Mr. Raimundo Lopez—you probably know the name better than I do—would have been assigned to the Anti-Corruption Bureau. In compliance with my role, whenever he was paid—he has never provided a slide show demonstration to me. He might have done so to my office and my officers but I am too busy to see slide shows. I have no time for that.

We pay all our bills, including our bills to our forensic experts and our accountants, whom we had to hire to get at the \$5 billion figure. I accounted for it yesterday, \$20 million was spent with \$5 billion in bribes. I counted it in cash and in opportunity cost. I went through it for an hour yesterday.

**Sen. Mark:** You are in trouble. You would have to resign.

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Am I getting my four minutes now?

**Sen. Mark:** The Attorney General is in trouble.

**Sen. Jeremie:** Never.

**Sen. Mark:** Total trouble—\$1.6 million.

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** This is the same PNM Government that has been attacking the Judiciary because this Government has been embarrassed by decisions of the court, which clearly show that it had been guilty of discriminating against its own citizens on numerous occasions.

The Privy Council also found that this Government had infringed the Maha Sabha's right to freedom of expression, was guilty of arbitrary and capricious conduct and had misled the courts by withholding crucial information.

The Attorney General, we understand, deliberately withheld information from the Court of Appeal and even from his own attorney, Mr. Martineau.

The PNM administration has been relentless in its efforts to bring the Judiciary under its control and has shamelessly violated the principle of separation of powers, which requires that the Judiciary be independent of the Government's influence or control.

The PNM administration, in an unprecedented move—which has alarmed the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and which has made Trinidad and Tobago an object of ridicule in the eyes of the civilized world—attempted to arrest the hon. Chief Justice, despite an order of a judge of the High Court prohibiting such an arrest.

**Hon. Senators:** The matter is before the court.

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** The PNM administration, showing utter contempt for the courts, criticized both the judge who made the order that the Chief Justice should not be arrested and the decision of the Privy Council in the Maha Sabha case.

The Law Association of Trinidad and Tobago passed a resolution to the effect that statements made by the Attorney General criticizing the judge who prevented the arrest of the Chief Justice, should be referred to a senior counsel to determine if the statements amounted to contempt of the court.

**3.45 p.m.**

**Sen. Dr. Saith:** Mr. Vice-President, on a point of order which you ruled so ably yesterday that matters before the court should not be discussed in this Senate.

**Sen. Mark:** We respect that.

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Mr. Vice-President, I just want to close by saying that good governance is about seeking the overall interest in the well being of the nation and of all its citizens; not political persecution; not political harassment; not to go through the process of wanting to “lock up” everybody.

**Sen. Mark:** And not selective justice.

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** It is development in context; it is about the people, the public, their representatives; and the democracy. Unfortunately, this is not what the PNM is about.

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There is overwhelming dissatisfaction with this administration's waste and mismanagement. You lack any capacity and capability for implementation. Flowery promises; well, promise this nation that you will call the general election soon. We are asking you to call the election and there will be a resounding defeat by us for you.

**Sen. Mark:** You are marked for destruction. The PNM is marked for destruction.

**Sen. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Good governance will once more be established in 2007, whenever it is called. We ask you to call it now.

Mr. Vice-President, on behalf of the Opposition Senators, since I am the last speaker, I wish to extend sincere Divali greetings to the Hindu community and the wider community of Trinidad and Tobago, because everyone celebrates it. We wish Eid Mubarak to the Muslim community and also the national community who celebrate Eid with all its Islamic brothers. We wish this from this UNC, as an alternative government.

Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Brother Noble Khan:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, for allowing me to share some thoughts on the Appropriation Bill 2006/2007, which is the budget for the accounting year from October 01, 2006 to September 30, 2007. As you know, the budget is normally considered the most important piece of legislation in the country's parliamentary agenda. As we too know, the budget sets the pattern for policy and authorizes funding in pursuit of the Government's goals and objectives.

To some extent, our country Trinidad and Tobago is not alone, or it does not stand alone in these days of globalization. We form an important part of the Caribbean; the western hemisphere, and state agencies like the OAS, the world and the United Nations at large.

Like so many other new countries—though we are about 50 years plus or thereabout—our position is beyond survival, and we are to take our position in the proper international scenario. I will touch on a few areas, many on which our colleagues have made their contributions, and I will not like to be repetitious, since I have heard everyone who has spoken.

I am going to touch on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Again, I stress, our Government must play a stronger role in the international arena. Even on the international scene and our thrust in Vision 2020 and so forth, there is need for

our experiences which we have evolved by our wide experiences. Though we are small, the inputs of the experiences could be applied to any of the big countries. So, it is there I think that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has an important role to play, particularly with what is taking place in the world today. I will like to see that we have some input to address this question. Obviously, it may not be here now, but they should give that a high point in priorities.

This budget has a very important part to play insofar as the developmental emphases are concerned. One of the important aspects which, I think, we may not be treated fairly with is with the question of information. As we know, that may have its colonial experiences and maybe the values that people have at the moment where they keep everything close to their chests, and when you ask a question so very often it may linger for quite some months or the answers are totally inadequate. At times, that might definitely be deliberate.

Now, the budget is the chief vehicle through which we get things done. We bring money together with people and, hopefully, what we will like to see done is done in an effective and efficient manner. I have mentioned in the past that maybe the system of budgeting that we have does not carry a high amount of managerial emphasis. It is highly biased towards a sort of legislative approach where you get money approved from the Consolidated Fund against our yellow books, at the moment, and then the Government takes over and does its thing. It seems to me that to really execute an important aspect of implementation—we have heard repeatedly here many of the cries in respect of performance breakdown when information comes.

Obviously, it will be necessary to look at the systems that we have through which we implement. Some may say that it allows for laxity, and many other various things that may not be desirable, but it is important that if we are to go forward and to match the situation with what is required in a modern day state, there is need definitely to look at your systems. I particularly made reference to the financial systems; what we have and under which we operate is, basically, what we had in pre-colonial times. One wonders, if our aims and objectives that we are seeking at this moment might be definitely archaic.

Now, that will also bring to bear on the public service machinery that we have. Again, the response that we should get from the public service, very often we hear negative things about that. It would seem to me that there should be a continuous ongoing exercise where the systems are being monitored and put in place. Now, in the absence of that, it means to say that “Pinko Perry go down the

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same old way” and, at the end of the day, much money is spent and results might be very inadequate, or they may not be accomplished. This is one of the major areas I think we should definitely look at.

Obviously, there is need for control mechanisms. This appears to be so simple that we have to bring this after 50 years. It will be necessary to design structures that exist in the public service. Again, if you do not have a proper motivated public service, there will be problems of implementation. I think all of us are aware of that, but I am just bringing it to your attention because of its absence.

There would be need, therefore, to overlook the public service and to come up with the necessary model, particularly, in the accounting system to reflect stronger managerial emphases. There is also need to bring a consciousness, not only in the new mode of apprehending the visible world, but also to recognize the inner reality which we are encompassed with by men’s politics, morals and ethics.

When we think in terms of people, what I think differentiate ourselves from the other forms of creation that is humankind and human sapientis is that area where we are a bit different and that is having the responsibility for doing things and seeing that they are accomplished. I think this may appear to be very simple, but unless we keep these things before our mind’s eyes, it means to say that we will be spending a lot of money and when we look at results they are hopeless.

The question of certain areas that are very important at the moment: We are in the situation where we are changing gas into money, or monetizing with the whole production system in our country. This apparently is being linked to Vision 2020, and what we hope to achieve. The linking of Vision 2020 with what we hope to achieve has been the subject of not only ourselves, but in other parts of the world, especially when we had substantial inflows taking place, as we do.

I would just like to touch on a matter which had been dealt with exhaustedly in the Senate before, but there is a particular element which I would like to bring again, because that was not dealt with. I did not observe that. Obviously, in anything that we are doing, we should have a sort of theoretical underpinning of it; we should have a background; and we should have a commitment. In this case here with our inflows, one would think that we should definitely overlook the way in which we are about to achieve what we would like to do; that is to bring ourselves up to a First World country in the shortest possible time.

I think we could remember sometime ago when we had the first inflows dealing with the OPEC people doing their thing. Although he was a member of it, one of the architects of OPEC, Juan Pablo Perez, who was a Venezuelan oil

minister, had used an expression and also one of our own Caribbean persons used an expression, and I share what Juan Pablo Perez had said at the time.

He had indicated when the price of oil skyrocketed, and his country Venezuela and to a latter extent, I think, ourselves—we were in a sort of vicious wealth situation—did not fall for the idea that it was black gold. He referred to it as the “devil’s excrement”—we are drowning in the devil’s excrement. Of course, the late Michael Manley made a comment, “it working us like salts”. So, again, they were signalling, and this was done by further studies later on by countries that have inflows as we have and how that would relate. The underpinnings of this have far-reaching effects insofar as where we are going.

As I said before, the budget is the major document; the major strategy and, by far, we have a big budget of \$88 billion. Unless we link these underpinnings with this, it might be that when the day passes we are going to end up like some of the counties that have inflows, like the Congo and Nigeria; these massive countries that had inflows, even as we did.

To some extent, when we had the first inflows, I think inflation rate moved to 22.4 per cent, and we are here today with a next movement of inflows and, again, we are confronted with inflationary trends which I think are not desirable. These experiences to which I allude are very important in taking into consideration what we were about.

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

I think that both our colleagues Sen. Wayne Munro and Sen. Mary King had made reference to Dutch disease. I would also like to put on the table too the question of low linkages to the rest of the economy. Basically we are still a plantation type economy in the classical sense of it. Of course, we are trying to get out of that and to diversify as they said. But one wonders how we are going to go about that.

Secondly, the political courses of the resource curse. It has been referred to as a rent seeking behaviour; well that could be very involved; very, very involved, especially when high powered people from the North come to deal with our people in the Third World, so to speak, or who are now going through a change in development. And of course, the question of inappropriate economic management; something with which we are confronted all the time.

Obviously, when I referred to the first movement of changing your systems in which to get things done, it would seem to be that if you have to classify it against this background, we are using inappropriate economic management. This, as we

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know, especially in the world today; you have a continuous flow taking place as far as North/South; as far as scholarships are concerned; techniques and what have you. It is important therefore that we formulate and put things in place. For example, I know of much vaunted places—we have mentioned this very often—like Singapore and some of these smaller places, where they do not have any resources as far as nature is concerned, but yet their economies are booming; and that obviously has been based on a sort of knowledge-base which we are heading for. Again, I think this is a good movement that we are about.

What strikes my mind is that we are not really touching the high end of the technology at the knowledge base. How are we going to do that? These are questions because I had mentioned too, W.W. Rostrow in the past; we are talking about economic models in the 1960s or so, which may still have some relevance, even if it is just to know that change has taken place and they are no longer relevant.

Basically what he had said in a five movement, from one stage of bartering into a next stage and so we move up to the upper end to countries like America and European countries where you have that. I mentioned there too that unless we are able to hurdle over those stages he had mentioned or we are in a small community, take for example, India or China which are very big, you may find bartering communities still existing in that situation. It may exist in some of our country areas too in order to overcome the slow flow of cash, which the budget hopes to address. So that you may have exchange of provision, exchange of fowl and what have you; you still have that. It is important if we are to make an impact that we have First World cutting edge technology.

Again, even the downstream industries that have been around for the longest while, where we have been trying to integrate to make better use of other systems; other types of materials that we could derive from other—for example the sugar cane, it is still relevant. I do recall someone making an enquiry that they wanted to buy plenty molasses; I do not know what would be the effect now after what the hon. Prime Minister has said; he was using the molasses to generate alcohol. This again, I strongly urge that we look at that model of how we are building our education thrust.

I know much has been said and I do not think—we are a small twin-island state; as has been mentioned and it is important when we look at the small island state to see how we are going to use our natural resources; they are not unlimited.



I recall having a talk or sharing some thoughts with people from ALCOA, and what came to my mind is that one, the major things that we make: power, the gas will be used to generate electricity. I think if my memory serves me right, 550 megawatts capacity and which obviously will meet the needs of the aluminium plant that is proposed. Again, they did indicate that they may have some surplus which they can get into our grid at a cost.

Also, one of the other things that Trinidad and Tobago, our Government, our people would have to provide is a harbour port for which they would pay services. Importantly too, it was the question of water. Water was very important in this type of process that they would be using to make aluminium and to put casting. The person with whom I spoke—it was a team of us who spoke—did say that they cannot have power shortage for at least three, four hours, because the pots will seize and they would have to bring in jack hammers, et cetera, so they have had to put in place to deal with that, their own power plant.

When the question of water came up we had indicated that we—when I say "we" ,the Trinidad government—will have to supply water to the gate, so to speak, the term. One wonders the vast amount of water which even up north here, we are not being serviced sufficiently well and maybe down in the south land; although I have been hearing things of the last 20 years of using plants or winning water down in the south; in the Moruga area, there is a feeling that there is plenty of water there.

One wonders again, dealing with the idea of bringing in foreign people to invest and at what level these investments would take place, also, the use of our own resources being channelled to that area; what the cost would be. I heard the term "opportunity cost" was mentioned just now. Have these studies been made? What has been done in this area and what, importantly, is the feedback mechanism of relating to the people?

To me, it reminded me of that famous poem, "The Deserted Village" at one time, because I think it is about 138 families; I do not know if that number is correct, but families would have to be relocated and going with that at what cost to the families. I am speaking here not only of monetary cost, but I am talking as a part of a way of life. And for what? Always in my mind is why are we doing this thing; who is benefiting? To have people, just move them out; replace them with a plant. So that would be 138 families, I think, with a way of life; great contributors to our society just being pushed aside.

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Of course you may say that they would get compensation but what amount of money could compensate for a way of life; a culture? These are the things that occupy my mind with this type of investment and I cannot help but say, apparently not sufficient thought or action was taken to put this programme or this project on a true footing, which is sad, because we are talking about the resources of our country and though we exist now, those resources were there even before us; long before maybe thousands of years BC figures, et cetera. And though we have a responsibility for “good living” to use what we have now, there is also a responsibility to consider future generations. To be arrogant; to be out of place just because you are in a position and you have not gone through the correct methods of involvement, so that when what comes, you would have had that full participation.

Perhaps it might be because of our slave/indentureship background that we do not have that. But within the same slave/indentureship syndrome, you find that there has always been a great communication between people and this is very important where even the State, through its various agencies, should pay respect. They should definitely pay respect because very often we hear about things; they are not handling it right and they are treating people like—I do not know, I would not like to use the Venezuelan expression. You know we have a flowery tongue, Mr. Vice-President; “cacajab”, in the patois, good; devil excrement; excuse me; that is what it is. If they treat us like that, but they do not take the necessary action. Because you see to my simple mind what is the price—I think I would keep plugging until we get it—at which ALCOA is getting gas? It might be a dialectic question. What is the economic benefit? Again, for whom?

While talking with the man, he said that why they are here is because of the cheap gas; what else. We must look at it vis-à-vis national cost and what is the opportunity cost of these exercises being done or as they say, somebody get a “vaps” and they go in ALCOA or they go in aluminium smelter plant.

I do remember too, many years ago, where in Jamaica there was a big plant in a place called Ewarton on the road to Spanish Town going across. It was said that the power that they used there was more than the combined power for the rest of Jamaica. Obviously, they would really be drawing down gas from what we have. I get the impression too that even though questions remained unanswered about our availability of gas, we do know it is a wasting asset; that the time for its completion of its waste might be sooner than we think.

I do not know that the linkages that are being—but we hear about wheels and things like that. Some may ask: well, why not bring the material here and we work on the material; we do not have to get it otherwise. This again, are some of

the things I would like to see, at least considered, when we look upon our responsibility and seek within ourselves; within our hearts; within our consciousness, because very often when we look at these things that are before us here today, it seems to be purely on an economic base and one wonders, when you look at it at the economic base, are we using the right techniques; even in our conceptualization and where would it lead us to.

We are talking about the use of our national patrimony; transparency is one of the major aspects in governance today and how that impacts on Government, particularly in the changing scenes. This set of money, \$38 billion plus that we are having, if we do not have this thing clear in our mind; have the proper systems in place or make use of what we have—and I strongly suspect we are not making use of what we have in personnel, human resource and the techniques and the knowledge base that are available to us.

Obviously, under this system, if we were to take the negative effects that have occurred in some of the countries where you had just inflow, you would have to deal with conflict and violence. That has appeared in countries like the Congo, even in Nigeria and some of the other countries. I do not know if we could link up our high element of violence with something like this oil splurge that is taking place, as far as funds are concerned, with the phenomenal rise in violence on our country. Perhaps the social scientists could look at that, but it is important to look at, unless we manage these things.

It is not that when we have inflows, as we do, it is not necessarily all bad. My own view, as far as inflation is concerned, a little inflation might not be bad, because it could stimulate the economy and I think that is well done in the economic exercises that go on.

Again, the question of the violence and the conflict is one that we could think in terms of being a spin-off, if not handled and managed properly. I understand too that some of our institutions need re-engineering, so to speak, and I would like to think in terms of EMA and giving them the necessary tools. This may also go into other areas within the system of governance. I would like to think in terms of the internal auditing sectors within the ministries and also the Auditor General's department.

#### **4.15 p.m.**

I remember that great attempts were made to bring in new techniques in auditing by the audit department, some may have been done but it has not left the impact or the continuity for allowing a more sort of detailed value for money type

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of examination taking place. I think this is what our colleague Sen. Basharat Ali, was implying that the techniques and the feedback and the control mechanisms that were supposed to be in place or that could be put in place would lead us definitely, when it comes off, to better decisions, so to speak.

Again we hear the question of transparency, information flow, failure to follow due process even in what we are doing and its impact on governance. Make no mistake about that; our people outside, we may claim that they are not sophisticated, but they very well know how to look at things and I could tell you there is a high amount of cynicism when it comes to some of these projects that we have within the Government framework. My own feeling is that the information mechanisms that we give out are not working well, so this is very important again to see how we will handle that.

In each one of the ministries or agencies one would think that, again, to get better results that there should be a sort of control in the sense of looking at goals that are set and how close we are to them when we link money and human resources together. I think we would get quite a bit of benefit and this definitely is a hallmark of what we refer to as, seeking First World status. Very often we enter into agreements, which we refer to as confidential clauses, and so you run into an abyss. But even then, as now, those who come to invest and the way how they do it leaves much to be desired. I would suspect that it is not only because of our inadequacy, because when you think in terms of massive transnationals coming to deal with us and the resource base that we have, that will be matching with them, it would be a phenomenal disadvantage that we—when I say “we” the Third World—in dealing or addressing questions as these negotiations that will take place.

Not to mention too, as I have mentioned, the question of the rent. The rent that I am speaking here of, is not in the classical return in early economics but apparently giving a new meaning to rent in dealing with these negotiations across the board. I think that we will definitely be much wiser in our negotiations if we become have a little more open and have a little more belief and confidence of whom we are dealing with.

I know we have been around for quite some time—50 years or thereabout and responsible for ourselves—and even the Government has been here for quite some time, they have been doing plenty work, at least on paper, doing the job and what I am saying here I would be using my own personal experience which I think you could find in nearly the whole of Trinidad and Tobago. I live at

Laventille; there is a road, the Old St. Joseph Road that comes from Port of Spain going east. In the morning, the traffic from 6.00 a.m. to 9.00 a.m. goes that way under normal circumstances. Mr. Vice-President, the road is totally unfit to be called a road. There are times when even vehicles fell into holes and they had to come out—It is a good thing Laventille people are able, they are very helpful people and they went and lift it out for the man.

**Hon. Senator:** Really?

**Sen. Bro. N. Khan:** Yes.

**Hon. Senator:** It was in a crater.

**Sen. Bro. N. Khan:** A crater, a volcano. Yes, I agree with that and if you go now you will see it. And that is supposed to be a main highway leaving Port of Spain.

I am not putting blame on anybody or anything like that; I am just showing the question of implementation. I felt very happy too when our Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment had mentioned that they were going through a system of changing the pipelines, because I am almost sure that the pipelines that are there were the original pipelines. It is about a 2-mile at most to come up on the back road, it is referred to as the Old St. Joseph Road, you could also look at that and you would see that throughout the country. Yesterday morning people wanted to come and—what some people in the other areas were doing—burn tyres and all those kind of things.

My own view on that was, that is not necessary, you could do it but better than that because when a nation has to resort to that type of attraction to get things which we have formed a covenant with the people to give them these services, so you could understand the frustration that is going on. These are people who stood right through thick and thin and you hearing changes in their minds of how they are looking at that sort of sticking it through thick and thin. That is throughout the country as far as some of these services and transport are concerned.

I would also like to see more traffic police on the roads to ease the difficulty because of the high amount of traffic jams that are taking place during the day and particularly at the high times of transport around 6.00 a.m. to 9.00 a.m. or 6.00 a.m. to 10.00 a.m. that you would have them. When the police come they help to run things good and this is good in respect of our police service. People like to knock the police but they do plenty good things and this is one area I think that you could definitely add another social input until the things lighten up.

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I mentioned the question of the overheating on the economy and just let me touch on that again. In the first run, that is in the 1970s I said it peaked, so it means to say that there are old tricks that they are using. Because if you go next door, maybe to Grenada or to Barbados, prices for consumer items are by far less than what we pay in Trinidad so somebody is making a killing, somewhere. This is something that, again, we could look at and do a good study to address this question of the inflation rate which seems to be going up, and again, heading this in the second movement: How are we going to do that? Where are the policies to reduce inflation?

I suspect that the budget failed to address this. I know dealing with inflation will require a total package with the Central Bank playing a very important role; the Ministry of Finance playing an important role. But definitely if this thing continues, what is the situation of the fixed income people? I mean to say, will you continue giving them \$100 and then afterwards you “scroogingly” give another \$100? Money is not solving the problem, totally, but it does help, definitely.

You get a facade where people seem to be looking as if they are getting richer but, in effect, are relatively poorer. This is what is taking place in the sight of plenty, and again, I draw our attention to some of those countries which had a run of inputs and we had that sort of experience, because in the 1980s the IMF had to come in afterward and deal with it. I think that our people have reached the stage where we could handle these things, but obviously, the political will—I am not talking here about political parties, the political will—to put these things into place and to bite the bullet, as they would say, and deal with the situation as it is.

As I said before, we are resource-rich, suffice that, with a non-renewable input. Some have said it is a curse if Government fails to manage the resources. I do not think that they are not managing it properly, but unless we take that cogent command of the situation it will definitely be there.

I would like to touch—as again we are a small island state—on the question of the national park system, the question of our trees and our rivers, which we immortalize in our songs, our people, our children, the watershed management system, the waste management system, the EMA system, and the question of implementing what the EMA is.

Mr. Vice-President, just think in terms of when the EMA came to Trinidad, I do not think it was “we” the people who generated that; it had to come from outside. Of course, Trinidad and Tobago has many agreements at the

international level, but obviously the question of putting it on a footing where we give them the responsibility, we give them the tools—and let me again, express this little aside to the Minister of National Security in the thrust he is making in trying to update the skills and the whole ethos surrounding the police service. We must share that in other areas too. [*Desk thumping*]

The documentation dealing with Vision 2020 is a good documentation some would say. It is something which we could deal with and use. But one would appreciate that very often, even, as the last drop of ink is spent on any planning it becomes obsolete then, because the rate of change is so fantastic and there might be a need to review and re-look this whole thing of the Vision 2020.

The National Development Plan which I understand is required by law, how are we integrating this? The question of land use as they said, we have about 5,000 square kilometres in Trinidad and Tobago, and that responsibility which I have mentioned the question—“the amanat”, the responsibility that we have as being here, and I am not only speaking about we in the Parliament, it might be high here, but humanity on the total scene, how we are really handling that responsibility, not only towards other forms of life or creation, but more importantly so, to our future generations, our children.

To some extent I have touched on the human resource base. The question of being sustainable is very important if we are to go forward, the human resource base is one of the keys to it. I think that education is a good place to start, and we have heard quite a number of initiatives taking place, but again, Mr. Vice-President, the relevancy. You have heard it said, even at UWI, you have graduates but no place for them, that obviously is not relevant to where they will find a niche or to be working in. If you want to be frontline—I think somebody had mentioned the nano-technology; the question of nuclear science and all these things, what are our thrusts in that?

**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.*

**Mr. Vice-President:** Senator, you will have 15 more minutes, but in the meantime, we are going to take the tea break now and return at 5.00 p.m.

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

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

**Sen. Bro. N. Khan:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. When we adjourned for the tea break, I was on the question of the National Physical Development Plan. I had mentioned too that we are limited in resources; we are limited in style and we are particularly limited in size, we are small, definitely small. There is therefore need to have a proper identification of our lands, rivers, sea, what have you and we should have a proper land use management plan. One gets the impression that that is not so, but we know that the outline of Vision 2020 is to set up the planning process in order to achieve the specific goals. So I think we definitely have to revise our own concept on meeting the requirements. On the other side of it, we may think in terms of those who are in positions of power, the Cabinet and what have you, is in a short period time and they would look to try to get as many things done.

I agree with that, try and get as many things done, but it must be done in a way that could be achieved in an economic way, where we get value for money; where we get services and there is a general feeling that things are running effectively and efficiently. So, I do not think that that has been highlighted too much in our planning process as it exists at the moment.

Human resources, this again is an area that everything depends on. No matter what you have, what you do, and we know we have to go with what we have, the question of upgrading the skills of human resource, no matter where it is. Well, of course, we have learned that new initiatives are being put in place to take the child from even before five years of age and bring them up into that mould, which I think is a good thing. But even on the practical side of it and in the world scene environment, we ought to be, we should be strong in the training of our managers, in the training of those people in the various skills they are required to do.

I think that UWI and even University of Trinidad and Tobago should strengthen their initiatives in this area—our human resource personnel. Because, if as one of the major goals is diversify and go towards, I might be using an old term here, industrialization or change from what we are, there is need definitely to retool and to even create that work ethic through our training process. I know we took some good knockings on that. I remember when the five-day week came



about in the public service, they used to work five days and on Saturdays half day; it was negotiated that you work five days, increase the hours, and you are able to get the half day off on Saturdays.

I think that in any thrust forward, we cannot afford not to use the time that we have on our side, because I was saying the Rostrow model was that we follow a path and if we are to look for development, we are following that path. Though there is some relevancy in it, especially from a historic perspective, if we want to get ahead, it means to say that within the five stages, we have to over hurdle that, as far as our training and deliveries are concerned, and setting up the mechanisms for that. I do not know if this is included. It is all well and good to say prepare books here, we know about that a long time. You prepare planning documents, nice words, cut and paste and what have you, but when it comes to the implementation processes, the whole thing “gone” through. If you do not have the command of that, it means to say that the time frame to come up to the First World status as has been announced would definitely be pushed back, if not achieved. So, I stress this point again.

One also gets what is taking place here because the question of our expenditure profiles and all of that, if it is sustainable. Too much has gone. I have already mentioned in the past that if you look at a simple ratio between how the sectors are spent, as against the subset of the sectors and you look and see the wage/material ratio, you would see that plenty money would be spent, just not to get things done. To put it in a bombastic way; if you have 20 people and you have two brooms to sweep, in a simple model, what is your situation? Twenty people will get paid, but how much sweeping? Two? How long will that last? So, we have to review and see how we could address these questions.

Again, one gets the feeling that there is hesitancy at taking decisions where you have to bite the bullet as they say. But if you do not bite the bullet, you would end up with the “capsulars” again. How would we get rid of that in our society? From our young that I am speaking of here and our not so young. So the question of our human resource development is very important; the question of education for all and at all. I know it is a beautiful standard to set and definitely we look forward to working towards these elements.

Then our culture. The culture that I am speaking about is not specifically the culture which our lady is responsible for under her ministry portfolio. We are thinking in terms overall of bringing spiritual values. I am not speaking here about religion. Every human being is a spiritual being; we have to know how to

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build within our systems that we are using that appeal and the utilization of our spirituality. I am not talking spiritually, secular type thing, we are all in that mould.

If we do not follow that and follow that mould, it means to say that we are off track and we would not succeed. We have hurt some of the family unit which is the very foundation upon which civilization rests. Again, in many of these things, one gets the impression that there is an estrangement between the Government and who they service. This is not all true, but you get that feeling from the outside; how people look at the services that we are giving, and to get them involved. Some new initiatives and new rethinking will have to go in that direction. There might be need for redefining our classes, what has been referred to as the formal and informal value based education, and it is important, where our focuses are. Do not mind that we have a 2020, that is just when we have to do critical rethinking of the energy policies, the use of energy resources beyond 2020.

I had mentioned in the past year, the massive countries like Africa, India, China, even Europe which is a new boy on the block, they do think in terms of thousand of years and set this into play. It is true that who comes inside here thinks in terms of a five-year period. This is just an implementing phase, but we must build our nation within the strict parameters of government, but transcend that, to be part of ourselves, part of our ethos as has been said, part of our makeup, part of what we are, and part of belonging to it which is an important concept—very, very important—of owning. So, this is that.

The government's system for reform: I have touched on the question of the impact on governance that all these new changes—I did not get the feeling that we are responsive, even in the projects that we are doing. The question of being responsive and I am putting it on a mode that would definitely be in sync with what is required with modern techniques and what have you. We have it; Trinidad and Tobago is supposed to be the country in the West Indies with the highest, at least with a cream of technocrats. It is true that the system has shown up many of us not in that way, but we have plenty of that. How then could we mobilize ourselves for that?

Again, I think mention has been made of the question of the downstream industries and that has been knocking around for the longest while. so the high end of it—right now we might be in manufacturing, when they have gone ahead, so the question of catching up is one that they would be running a losing race, but we have to be firm on that and give the necessary motivation to the young, because I still do not think we have hurdled over it yet, that those who are in the

positions of leadership at the moment, that the young accept that and you would hear them. Of course, we are hearing talks in certain areas of social activities but really for the exemplars to come through in these areas, we have to do some work on that.

I had mentioned the deliverables in the utilities and I have used the “back road” example and I want to think that we would give some consideration to that.

Education: Much at least, in the framework structure has been achieved and the setting up systems, but the question of the ethics and morals which I know that this present Minister of Education has in relationship with certain NGOs, et cetera, has been very friendly towards bringing this into place. But, ethics and morals is one that should go into other areas of our activities and make that part of our area of operating it. Deepen the processes.

I had mentioned too that they make greater use of the religious instruction period on the curriculum. This might be a little troublesome to get going, but I do not think it is difficult once something is thought out and put into place. Because the old days of Sunday school and going to the *maktab*, these are the children’s schools and going to the Mandirs, et cetera, we could hurdle over this and, importantly, as far as the pre-primary education—I use that term pre-primary—this is before the five-year period comes to start it there. I am happy to see that there is an initiative to make the teachers of those schools—because I think in the past we have not been having that type of high-powered trained person.

You go on to a private school, nanny keeps you there, but you have to carry it to other heights which I think it is supposed to be online and greater use should be made of our denominational boards. This is something that should become inclusive, not only am I thinking in terms of the denominational boards, but in all other areas of activity. I think it is well on record that you cannot do it alone, but you have to form those alliances.

Also the question of pension arrears for public servants, this might be a perennial one. I am just bringing this example, Minister. I think it was in the '80s or thereabout, people’s salaries were stopped and cut. Some of them retired and there was supposed to be re-computation taking what they should have done to bring it even up to what is really due. Many, I think have passed away since this time because one got the impression that public servants after they retire, they do not last too long after. I do not know if it is the pressures they passed through on the job or the absence of not doing enough.

**5.15 p.m.**

Mr. Vice-President, if we could look at that, I would be grateful. It is not my style to pick out things like that, but I know it is so. I do not think this Government is on record for this, but with past governments, as far as I know, they acknowledge a debt and pay it. You might not have gotten it on time, but for all the governments that have passed, once they knew they had a debt, they paid it.

The question of kidnappings appears again. How to address this question is a great responsibility on behalf of the police. We are on record asking the nation at large to give full support to the police and the parastatal agencies, to ensure that safety is restored in our country and great fears removed. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Vice-President:** Senator, please, wind up.

**Sen. Bro. N. Khan:** Mr. Vice-President, these are some of the points I would like to recap:

- “1. That there be necessary changes in the method of implementation of programmes, activities, and projects so that they be achieved in a more effective and efficient manner without compromising accountability and transparency.
2. The bureaucracy is obviously cumbersome and there is need for a more goal-oriented approach with results being focused.”

I am reading from a letter that was addressed to the hon. Minister, Sen. Conrad Enill. I would start to read it again:

- “3. We laud your intervention over the years in the budget preparation where you held discussions with persons/organizations in the non-state sector. We wish to recommend that there be a half-yearly consultation/discussion/review of the national budget to which the non-state sector should be invited.

SPECIFIC AREAS FOR PRIORITY”

I suggested agriculture. We have had some inputs into that: fresh milk, meat production, food crops, cassava, tania, dasheen, complex carbohydrates, bananas, fruit tree production and rice. There was a time that Trinidad and Tobago was self-sufficient in rice. In the country areas, everybody had a big rice box. There is also the fishing industry; the sea element; pond, aquaculture.

Under health the letter states:

"We support the widening of the availability of the range of drugs in the CDAP programme, e.g. persons with eye, kidney, heart and cancer complaints."

Which I think is covered somewhat, and Alzheimer's, to widen the scope.

"We support the establishment of a dialysis centre (with approximately 34 beds) at the Mount Hope Medical Complex."

Under education, the letter states:

"We strongly urge the deepening of the Concordat in the education system.

In order to make more effective the Religious Instruction period on the curriculum, a stipend should be paid to persons providing the instructions.

#### **SOCIAL SERVICES**

We recognize that the family continues to be the first building block of civilisation. We therefore support programmes that will ensure that the dignity and sanctity of the family are maintained.

#### **CRIME**

We express grave concern at the appalling state of the occurrence of crime in our society. This is totally unacceptable especially the solving rate.

We note the attempts at changes in the Prison and Police Services which we had urged in the past.

#### **HIGH AND RISING COST OF LIVING**

We recognize that...fair and just wages to the workers of our country is their right and that they are entitled to pursue that they receive these."

I had also mentioned the question of pension and other reliefs and assistances.

Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, for allowing me the few minutes and may God bless us all. [*Desk Thumping*]

**The Minister of Health (Hon. John Rahael):** Mr. Vice-President, I thank hon. Senators for the opportunity to address this Upper House. Whenever I get this opportunity, I always remember that when I first actually entered politics it was through this honourable Senate that I was appointed. That was in 1992; since then I have not looked back. [*Desk thumping*]

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Health is a crucial element in the welfare and development of a nation. A healthy population is an important precondition for economic growth and competitiveness. An investment in health is, therefore, an investment in our future.

The hon. Prime Minister in his budget presentation last week noted:

"Over the past few years we have made significant strides towards improving our health services both in respect of our health infrastructure and the actual delivery of health care."

Because of the increasing allocation, we have invested in the public health sector over the past three years.

In the year 2000/2001, the budget for the health sector was \$117,358,000; today, in 2006, that figure is \$2,837,940,000 making it an increase over the 2001 figure of, approximately, 180 per cent. The percentage of the gross domestic product (GDP) in the year 2001/2002, the contribution to GDP, was 1.8 per cent; today, it is 3.3 per cent. This Government is serious about quality health care to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Indeed, we are proud today of the tremendous success achieved through the implementation of some of our current initiatives and that we are bringing quality and quantity care to the more vulnerable in our society who are unable to meet the enormous cost of private health care.

Mr. Vice-President, one such programme is our waiting list initiative; more in the news these days for the wrong reasons, than for the benefits of the early surgeries being provided to thousands of citizens. When we came into office, the hon. Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh came to this honourable Senate and indicated that there were over 11,000 persons awaiting surgery and he was holding this Government responsible for it. I think it was in his 2003 budget contribution; [*Interruption*] maybe it was 2004. I immediately investigated what was really the numbers of persons awaiting surgery for many years. That figure was more like 15,000. So we had approximately 15,000 citizens of Trinidad and Tobago awaiting surgery for as long as 10 years.

**Sen. Kangaloo:** Scandalous!

**Hon. J. Rahael:** Having recognized that, I set about to correct it, as being part of a government that cares for its citizens. One of the things we looked at was the question of the number of theatres we had in our hospitals, because many

of the doctors and consultants complained they did not have enough theatre time. I then started to enquire as to how many theatres we had operating. I heard the hon. Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh say that when he was in office he commissioned three theatres in Port of Spain. *[Interruption]*

**Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh:** We refurbished seven.

**Hon. J. Rahael:** Port of Spain does not have seven operating theatres.

*[Mr. Vice-President pounds gavel]*

**Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh:** They had four operating theatres.

**Hon. J. Rahael:** The fact of the matter is, when we came into office there were three operating theatres in the Port of Spain General Hospital. *[Interruption]* Main theatres; I am not talking about the eye theatre. I am talking about the main theatres to do main surgeries. So there were three operating theatres when this Government came into office.

Within a matter of a year, we were able to recommission the fourth theatre. *[Desk thumping]* For the first time in 15 years you had four operating theatres in the General Surgery Department of the Port of Spain General Hospital. For the very first time since the hospital was constructed, maybe 100 years ago, we have four theatres that are present now and, by the end of next week, we will have five operating theatres; never before. *[Desk thumping]* We were able to provide more theatre time for our doctors at the Port of Spain General Hospital.

In the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, when the previous administration was in power, there were three out of a bank of eight theatres operating. Again, to ensure that our doctors could get access to theatres to increase the number of surgeries they could do, we immediately embarked on increasing that number. Today, we have six functioning operating theatres at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. *[Desk thumping]* I have been given the assurance that before the end of next month, November 2006, we would have the additional two, making it eight. *[Desk thumping]* For the first time again, in its history, since the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex was built, we are going to have all eight theatres operating from the bank of eight. *[Desk thumping]*

I also heard Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh say that he opened four wards at that complex. Is that what you said?

**Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh:** Medical and two surgical admissions.

**Hon. J. Rahael:** Hospital wards. So that is four? Something seems to be wrong with the mathematics, because in 2003 when I went into the Ministry of Health and went to the Mount Hope hospital, there were two wards open. We

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then embarked on the whole question of making the facilities at the complex available to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, instead of it being a paying institution, we made it an institution that would deliver services at no cost to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

In order to accommodate the vast number of persons that would now access the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, and that came on stream on January 01, 2005, we then decided that we had to open additional wards. Having gone to the complex to make a tour of the facilities, I saw that there was a ward with thick iron chains wrapped around the door and padlocked. When I looked at it, I saw "Chaconia Ward". I asked, "Well, what is this?" They told me it was a ward and when I asked why it was locked up, they told me that they did not have nurses. That is a general problem, the shortage of nurses; not only in Trinidad and Tobago, but worldwide. There is a shortage of health care providers worldwide.

So we decided, "Listen, we have to open up these wards." The wards were there; in some cases, the beds were already there and the infrastructure was there. Therefore, we embarked on bringing in additional nurses from the Philippines. Because of the opportunity to bring in nurses from the Philippines, we were able to open the Chaconia Ward and three other wards at the medical sciences complex. There are more beds now than there have ever been before. In the entire complex there are just two more medical wards to be opened and by the end of this year we would have opened them, ensuring that the medical sciences complex, which was at one time called a "white elephant", is going to be fully functioning, fully operational with all services being provided. That is governance, Mr. Vice-President. [*Crosstalk*] [*Desk thumping*]

**5.30 p.m.**

**Hon. Senator:** You have the money.

**Hon. J. Rahael:** Between 1996 and 2001 the money was there also.

So in addition to increasing the number of theatres, and providing additional wards, we were able to increase the number of surgeries in 2005 and now 2006 from an average of 20,000 per year to 25,000 per year. So in two years we did 50,000 surgeries, Monday to Friday.

But again the numbers on the waiting list were huge and people were suffering. Citizens of Trinidad and Tobago with hernia, fibroids, cataract, prostate, you name it, people were suffering, they could not go to work, they were unproductive, they were a burden to their family and we decided we had to do something more.



Then, Mr. Vice-President, because of my background and because I looked at the assets and liabilities and so forth, I realized that we have very valuable assets which were three operating theatres at that time at the Port of Spain General Hospital, and there were four at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex about that time, and on Saturday and Sunday they would shut down except for emergency cases. [*Interruption*]

Well, we are talking about the general theatres and whatever we had at the Eric Williams Complex. But you had theatres not functioning on Saturdays and Sundays, they were closed and citizens were suffering waiting for surgery. Therefore, all that was required was to get the personnel who would be willing to work on a weekend—and of course who would be paid—in order to do surgeries. That is how the waiting list initiative came about.

Over the past two years, we were able to do 10,000 surgical procedures. [*Desk thumping*] We have now broken the back of that waiting list. We have stated, and I can do so categorically here again, that anyone who is waiting for surgery outside of cataract at this time for more than three months can call our surgical waiting list unit, telephone numbers: 627-2569; 623-4845; or 624-1592. Any citizen of Trinidad and Tobago who is awaiting surgery can call those numbers and get access to surgery at no cost. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, I am not aware of any country, not even in the United Kingdom, the United States of America, not even in Canada can they make that boast that citizens can get surgery at no cost within three months. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, we are talking about public health patients here now, I am not talking about private patients who have insurance like the Tim Gopeesinghs, and the Mary Kings. They have the wherewithal to access it privately.

**Hon. Senator:** The Rahaels.

**Hon. J. Rahael:** And the Rahaels, the Saiths, the Sahadeos, and the Ato Boldons. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Vice-President, you have to understand when certain doctors—and very few, because the majority of the doctors are on board with us, otherwise we would not be able to achieve that. Who do you think are doing the surgeries? I have the names of all the consultants. How do we identify the patients?

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I will explain because it is important for me to do that. We get the patients' names from the doctors who have the records of all their patients who are awaiting surgery. So we get those names, the patients' hospital registration number; address; telephone number, if we have it; and what type of surgery. We enter all that into our database and then we start to sanitize the list and call the patients.

Some patients have been waiting as I said for over 10 years, so some have had the surgery done maybe in the private sector or wherever, some of them died, which is very unfortunate because they could not get the surgery done. So we were able to sanitize the list, meet with the doctors, put a team together with theatre nurses, scrub nurses, anaesthetists, and all the support staff required to carry out those surgeries and we started doing surgeries on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays. By doing that we brought relief to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Senator:** Practical! Practical!

**Hon. J. Rahael:** This is delivering, Mr. Vice-President. So when you hear some of those quacks who claim that—

**Sen. Dr. Saith:** Ducks.

**Hon. J. Rahael:** Ducks, well, okay. [*Laughter*] We have no ducks here? Okay—making certain accusations and so on, it is because right now they can no longer make claims that you have to wait two years to get the surgery, but if you go to so and so place, you can get it done next week. When the patient goes to so and so place to get it done next week, guess who is doing it? Some of the same doctors who are complaining now. And again I repeat, they are the minority, small minority—if there is such a term.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to publicly thank those doctors, nurses, the anaesthetists, scrub technicians, the attendants and all those who have participated in our waiting list initiative. [*Desk thumping*] We are extremely proud of that accomplishment, and as I said, not even in developed countries they can make that statement. [*Interruption*] Well, it is very transparent. The point is, I will tell you what we are paying to get surgery done and it will blow your mind.

**Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh:** I know.

**Hon. J. Rahael:** Okay, fine.

Mr. Vice-President, we are providing that. When we came into office we realized that there are many citizens who suffer from many illnesses and when they get their prescription, a lot of them are unable to purchase the medication. Sometimes they would buy what they could afford; so they did not get the correct dosage.

Mr. Vice-President, as a caring Government as well, we had to address that. We could not leave it alone, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*] We cannot allow our citizens who need to access medication to not be able to do so because they do not have the financial wherewithal to get their medication. So what did we do? We did not leave it alone; in comes CDAP, the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme.

**Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh:** We started it.

**Hon. J. Rahael:** No, no, you all had no CDAP.

Mr. Vice-President, we introduced CDAP and 11 different illnesses are on the programme to date, and we have now included illnesses such as hypertension, diabetes, glaucoma, acid reflux, and Parkinson's disease.

**Hon. Senator:** Alzheimer.

**Hon. J. Rahael:** No, we do not have that yet.

Mr. Vice-President, let me tell you, and I am not very happy to report what I am going to report today. In CDAP, we have 262,000, 262,313—to be exact—persons accessing that programme. [*Desk thumping*] It goes to show how many of our citizens are on medication, and that is also very troubling.

Let me give you a breakdown as to the number of persons suffering from all the different illnesses. What I am reporting is the number of individuals who are accessing medication for a particular illness. Now there are some of us who will have to access more than one type of medication because we may suffer with more than one illness.

The leading number one on the list is hypertension. Mr. Vice-President, again I appeal to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago that they have a responsibility for their own health; each of us has a responsibility for our own health. [*Desk thumping*] Hypertension is something we can avoid; smoking tobacco, alcohol in excess; and, of course, gambling could never be good for you because that could give you a lot of stress.

So when we increase the taxes on tobacco and alcohol, quite honestly, if it were up to me a pack of cigarettes would be \$100 today. You see, tobacco smoking is poisonous. We are going to bring laws to ban tobacco smoking in all places except, of course, the streets and in your own home.

In Canada, the message on a pack of cigarette is: Smoking kills. It is as clear as that and the unfortunate thing about it is that if you smoke and want to kill yourself, you end up with end-stage renal failure so you have to go on a dialysis

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machine. You do not have the money to do that, so guess what? The Government would have to take care of you. Who is the Government? We, the people are the Government, all of us who are taxpayers. So you and I and all of us who are taking care of our own health, not smoking tobacco, not drinking excessively, not gambling all hours in the night and leaving our family at home unprotected—do you understand, Mr. Vice-President? Gambling does many things you know; it causes many problems, domestic and otherwise.

So when you want to insist on smoking your cigarette and you become ill and have to go on a dialysis machine, do you have any idea what it costs to go on that machine? You have to get your blood cleansed three times per week; sit for five hours every day; you are unproductive; you are a burden to yourself and family; you are a burden to the people of Trinidad and Tobago because you want to smoke. “I say ban it, I say tax it. Yuh want it, pay \$200 a pack for it.”

Why must I pay for your ignorance and your stupidity because you are addicted? There are things to do with people who are addicted; carry them on a retreat, we will deal with that, give them “de patch”, do whatever is necessary.

Mr. Vice-President, coming back to CDAP, you need to check your blood pressure regularly for hypertension. It is the sleeping illness. “What dey call it, Dr. Gopeesingh?”

**Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh:** The silent killer.

**Hon. J. Rahael:** It is the silent killer, because you may have it and do not know.

**5.45 p.m.**

But if you exercise regularly, as I do every morning, and some of my colleagues here—you could see how fit we look; exercise regularly at least 45 minutes a day, eat properly—a lot of these fast foods places, do not frequent too often.

**Hon. Senator:** Close them down.

**Hon. J. Rahael:** I would not go that far. We have to educate the population.

So, 162,277 persons have accessed hypertension medication. Running second is cardiac disease. You see, again, what do you think causes that? It is tobacco smoking and excessive alcohol again. You have 131,168 individuals accessing medication for cardiac disease, followed by diabetes where 101,832 persons access medication. Those are the three leading illness: hypertension, cardiac and diabetes.

The point I am making is that now that we are also going to fully computerize CDAP, we would be able to identify the areas in Trinidad and Tobago where that population may be suffering from a particular illness more than another part of Trinidad and Tobago. So we could now go into those communities and address those problems in a very scientific way.

**Sen. Dr. Kernahan:** After five years!

**Hon. J. Rahael:** But you were there for seven years! What did you do? You did absolutely nothing!

**Sen. Dr. Kernahan:** You were there for 35 years! What are you talking about, with an oil boom that—

**Hon. Senator:** “Doh” take her on.

**Hon. J. Rahael:** Mr. Vice-President, they talk about the quality of the drugs—

**Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh:** I just want you to review the efficacy of these generic drugs.

**Hon. J. Rahael:** I am coming to that. First of all, let me tell you how these medications come onto the programme. A steering committee provides the guidelines for the functioning of the programme. A medical subcommittee comprising the chief medical officer, the principal pharmacist, a representative of the National Drug Advisory Committee, a representative of the Pharmacy Board of Trinidad and Tobago and a representative of the Regional Health Authority, decide on which areas of treatment and which drugs are to be added or deleted from the programme. So the decision to put certain medication on the CDAP is determined by a competent group of people. In addition to that, I want to bring your attention to a document which states: “FDA Ensures Equivalence of Generic Drugs”. It goes on to say:

“Most people believe that if something costs more it has to be better quality.”

Because the brand name medication costs more, do not believe that that is a better drug. It went on to say:

“In the case of generic drugs, this is not true.”

The FDA’s office of generic drugs said:

“The standards for quality are the same for brand name and generic products.”

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So we make certain that when we talk about putting on generic drugs, that the proper research is done and the committee would sit, deliberate and then make the recommendation. So that is how we determine what medication should be on the programme. And, yes, it is constantly under review.

So here we are, taking care of those who are waiting for surgeries, making sure that those who cannot access—by the way, all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago can access the CDAP, regardless of age, gender or income level; making it universal, to every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago suffering from any of these illnesses. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Jeremie:** Tell them how to access it.

**Hon. J. Rahael:** It is very simple. You go to any physician and if you suffer from one of those illnesses, ask about the programme. He has a prescription pad to issue your prescription and with that prescription you do not necessarily have to go to the public health pharmacies alone; you can go now to almost any pharmacy in Trinidad and Tobago. We have 250 private pharmacies participating in this programme and 110 public pharmacies. So you have 350 pharmacies throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago. You go with your CDAP prescription and you can access it from those private or public pharmacies, making it convenient for everyone. So here again, reaching the people, touching their lives and making it better for them. [*Desk thumping*] It is all about the people.

Mr. Vice-President, let us talk about equipment. We have provided new equipment in all our public health institutions. Much has been said about what the esteemed Dr. Manning-Alleyne said to the commission of enquiry. Let me just tell you, that may have been so three years ago. Today, the neonatal units at the Port of Spain General Hospital and at the Mount Hope Women's Hospital are fully equipped with state-of-the-art equipment—fully refurbished. That statement would have been accurate if we were referring to the year 2002/2003, but today the Port of Spain neonatal unit has been expanded; there is new equipment in there and all the equipment that is in the Port of Spain neonatal unit was sanctioned by a tenders committee and approved by the board of the North West. I wish to also inform this honourable Senate that Dr. Manning-Alleyne was also a member of that tenders committee, so enough said about that.

As we continue to introduce more services in our health sector, I noticed an article that referred to, again, the honourable esteemed Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh, and I quote from this article in the *Express* dated Saturday, September 30, 2006 at page 22. I quote:

“Gopeesingh said even though the unit...  
referring to the tissue transplant unit—

“Gopeesingh said even though the unit had been established last year, not one organ donor transplant had been undertaken locally.”

He went on to say:

“Gopeesingh expressed concern that many citizens still had to travel as far as Pakistan to address their demands for either a kidney or cornea transplant.”

He went on to say:

“Not one organ transplant has been done as a result of his (Rahael) negligence. These are disturbing factors as far as the health sector is concerned.”

Dr. Gopeesingh, I know that you probably thought that was so when you said it, because I do not want to believe that you would maliciously lead the population incorrectly.

**Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh:** Let me correct it now. Mr. Vice-President, at that time I did not know that you had started and I believe—

**Hon. J. Rahael:** But you did not retract. Are you willing to retract this now?

**Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, that is the past. I believe now that about five or six have been done. If that is so, I am very happy. But they took too long to start it.

**Hon. J. Rahael:** The point is, this was dated September 30; that was just 20 days ago. This was not months ago. We started doing tissue transplant operations in July of this year. I looked after to see whether or not there was any retraction that said: “No, I was wrong at that time. I was not well-informed of the circumstances”—as most of the things said by the esteemed doctor. “I am not up-to-date.” Because he certainly was not up-to-date here, as he openly admits now.

**Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh:** How many have you done?

**Hon. J. Rahael:** We have done five, and let me tell you, one of them is a surgery that was done in Pakistan. The poor chap came back down to Trinidad some time ago, with complications. He went to a private institution where they claim to have the guru of urology and they tried to correct the situation, could not correct it and the person had to fall back, and thank God, our tissue transplant unit was up and running and we were able to perform the operation and the guy is happy and safe now at home. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh:** It took five years to start it—

**Hon. J. Rahael:** Which five years? Mr. Vice-President, do you think it is only tissue transplant? Again, when we came into office, there were hundreds and hundreds of people waiting for open-heart surgeries—citizens of Trinidad and Tobago; men, women of all races, on a waiting list because they could not afford to pay \$150,000 or \$160,000 to get their surgery. We had a programme in place where every other month we started to do 10 cardiac surgeries. So we did 60 the first year. By the third year we increased that number from 10 every other month to 10 a month. So instead of 60 per annum, we were doing 120.

I am very pleased to report, on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, that today at Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex there is a local team—full-time; 24/7—in Trinidad and Tobago that can do open heart surgery any time of the day or night. [*Desk thumping*] As of July this year, we are doing 20 a month.

**Sen. Seetahal S.C.:** For free?

**Hon. J. Rahael:** Yes, at no cost to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] It is no cost to the patients, but a cost to all of us. You remember that is why I said it is important for us to look at our lifestyle.

**Hon. Senator:** That is where the money is going.

**Hon. J. Rahael:** Do you want to know where all this money is going? It is to the people. We are doing 240 open heart surgeries at no cost.

All of this success is also becoming a burden on us, because what is happening now is that people are saying: “Well, if I could get this done in three months’ time, whether I have money or insurance, why do I not jump on to this waiting list? Why do I not jump on to the open heart surgery programme?” So we have to screen and double-screen patients now, because even people with insurance are trying to access our programmes, and when I discover it, I say: “Why? You have insurance. You are paying for insurance. Why are you coming here? You could go and claim against the insurance company.” They say: “Yes, but the insurance company is only giving me 80 per cent of the cost; I have to find the other 20 per cent, and since the Government giving it at no cost, then I want to access it.” I say: “Well look, first of all, we need to have a social worker interview you. If, in fact, you cannot afford the 20 per cent, then the Government will come and assist”—

**Sen. Seetahal, S.C.:** Really?



**Hon. J. Rahael:** Yes, to help. But a social worker will have to visit you. Now, if you do not have the funds, then the Government will take up the entire tab. So what is happening is that the more we do is the more we have to do.

**6.00 p.m.**

**Sen. Prof. Ramchand:** Mr. Vice-President, I wonder if the Minister can tell us if this is being paid for out of the health surcharge or the Consolidated Fund?

**Hon. J. Rahael:** Consolidated Fund. Any time somebody asks that sort of question I say whether it is from the right pocket or the left pocket it is from the same pants, so it really does not make much of a difference.

**Sen. Prof. Ramchand:** Mr. Vice-President, it matters because in matters of welfare, I think that the State has to ensure that when the economy declines and the prices of oil and gas drop, we can still maintain measures that we have established.

**Hon. J. Rahael:** One thing we also have to look at is the question of our Training and Scholarship Programme. The Ministry of Health has a budget of \$55 million for training and scholarships. The money is being spent the right way, developing our human resources, the people. We are taking care of them and want to educate them and ensure that they have the opportunity to have a skill when they reach of age so they can access the work market at a very high level. Never before have there been so many people training and accessing many of these programmes.

In addition to what the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education is doing with all these programmes, the Ministry of Health has also increased the number of nurses that we are training. For the first time we have 1,199 persons, the largest number, who are in training as registered nurses. Not only do we provide the facility and training which is at no cost to them, but we also provide them with a stipend. We have a Nursing Assistant Programme in which 150 persons are involved. You ever had a Pharmacy Assistant Programme?

**Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh:** We started that.

**Hon. J. Rahael:** “Coulda, shoulda, woulda! Dey was going to do dat. Coulda, shoulda, woulda!” [*Cros talk*]

**Mr. Vice-President:** Hon. Senators, I know that you are enjoying the presence of Minister Rahael, but I need to hear him, please. At this time I would like to inform you that the Minister's speaking time 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. Rahael:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President and hon. Senators.

We are looking at the question of health care in a very holistic manner. We are also looking at the question of the Council of the Medical Board of Trinidad and Tobago, another very important institution. Unfortunately, again, misinformed people are running their mouths all over the place not knowing the facts and making statements that are inaccurate, about how the Government wants to take control of the medical board and do this, that and the other. In Barbados and Jamaica there are non-medical people on their board. We are talking about continuing medical education for our doctors and nurses.

You become a doctor, qualify with top marks, you come to Trinidad to work and you never upgrade your skill. Like in many other areas with new technology, new methods and new illnesses, these doctors are uninformed, I would not say obsolete, geriatric in some cases and they cannot perform as how we think they should. We are going to introduce the Continued Medical Examination (CME) that doctors would have to sit. That is to be determined by the council of the board, not by the Minister. It is operated in the First World and more countries and something that I believe everyone will welcome.

Let me tell you what is being proposed. I would be coming to this honourable Senate and I hope that I will get the support to amend the Medical Board Act. I will go straight to it instead of belabouring the point. Having considered the views of the various stakeholders and Medical Board about the need to widen and diversify the membership of the Medical Council, the Ministry of Health proposes the following: the Chief Medical Officer of Trinidad and Tobago, a doctor. He would be on the board.

**Sen. Seetahal S.C.:** He?

**Hon. J. Rahael:** Or she. I beg your pardon.

Two medical practitioners with full registration appointed by the Minister of Health; four medical practitioners nominated by their peers; three members of other professions—we refer to them as three lay persons, non doctors—and one medical practitioner nominated by the University of the West Indies; a total of 11.

**Sen. Mark:** Who is appointing those three?

**Hon. J. Rahael:** The Minister, the Government. “Who you want appoint them?” You want to appoint them?

**Sen. Mark:** We are not supporting that. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Vice-President:** I am certain that there would be ample time for debating that and raising your objections. Allow the Minister to finish his contribution, please.

**Sen. Mark:** A point of order too, as you are on your legs.

**Mr. Vice-President:** You cannot stand while I am standing, Sen. Mark. What is the point of order?

**Sen. Mark:** It is wrong to anticipate a Bill and the Minister is aware that the Bill is coming before the Parliament. He is anticipating.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Mark, you are the person anticipating this. [*Laughter*] You were the person saying that you are not going to support. You are anticipating the thing.

**Sen. Mark:** But he is saying that.

**Mr. Vice-President:** He is saying what is proposed. Let the Minister finish his contribution.

**Hon. J. Rahael:** Basically that is what this is. I have already indicated and I think that seems to be reasonable. We have to understand that there is a very small clique that wants things to remain as they are. They want to have a waiting list for 10 years. They want to keep the status quo as it is.

Let me give you an example. Let me give you an experience. We have the Patient Care Assistant Programme. Every six months we introduce 500 persons into the health sector. They work there for six months. They are being exposed to the health sector so that they can consider if they want to make it a career. If the RHA is in need of patient care assistants they can select from those persons.

One of the patient care assistants, a member of my constituency who happened to be on the programme came to my constituency office; she did the six months and wanted six additional months. Of course, that is not available because we want new people to get the exposure. In a conversation with this constituent who did the Patient Care Assistant Programme for six months I enquired where she spent her time. She told me at the Port of Spain General Hospital. She said that she worked in one particular ward for the six months, it

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was very interesting, she liked the job et cetera and she was looking forward now to get the subjects required for her to enter nursing school. It was encouraging to see a young person aspiring because of the exposure and wishing to enter the nursing fraternity. Then, I asked her who was the consultant on the ward. She smiled. I said, "Why you smiling?" She said, "I never saw the consultant." I said, "You never what? You were there for six months." She said, "Yes." I said, "Well, you only worked one particular shift, maybe the night shift and you did not see the consultant." She said, "No. I worked different shifts." I said to her, "For six months you did not see the consultant?" She said, "No. I know him by name." I said, "Please tell me his name." She told me his name. For six months that consultant did not even show up in the hospital.

That is not an isolated case. In many cases these consultants, some of them, again, I am saying some. I am not casting aspersions on all the doctors because there are some whose hearts are in the right place; they are dedicated and the oath that they took they live up to. Of course, I hold them in very high esteem. The few that are causing the public health sector to have a bad name are the limited number of doctors and other health care professionals. We need to deal with that situation and we would be dealing with it. Those are the same ones who want to refer their patients to the private institutions and want a waiting list as long as their arm so that they could—

**Hon. Senator:** Profit.

**Hon. J. Raheal:** "Yuh understand?" Send the patients there! Those are some of the things that we have to guard against.

I want to move on to another area to show you that this Government works as a team. [*Desk thumping*] The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health are working together to ensure that we can reach the young minds of our people. [*Desk thumping*] What are we doing? We have programmes together where we would be going to the secondary schools and exposing our young minds to the whole question of health care and lifestyle. We are going to primary schools as well, all schools and start educating our young minds about health care and lifestyle. Let them know what would happen if they do certain things. Let them know the importance of exercise and not smoking; be graphic and show them and tell them the consequences of that. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health are working together as a team for the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

**6.15 p.m.**

Mr. Vice-President, we have already started other programmes. We have already gone into many schools. We have already tested for hearing and vision. I will give you the statistics. We have tested over 33,000 young children for hearing. That is a process: initially it is a screening programme; if you fail that

screening test then you are identified and you get another screening test; if you need to, then you are referred to an audiologist. You would then do the screening for your ear and it is determined whether or not it is a wax problem or whether it is something more serious; whether you need a hearing aid or whatever is required. For vision it is the same.

In addition to all that—*[Interruption]* Please, Sen. Mark, please!

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

That is only one area, Mr. Vice-President. We are going to mount a health fair with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health. The venue has already been identified; it will be over three days. We are going to have an educational health fair where we would bring in school children from all over the country, exposing them to the various areas in health care so they can now look to determine if that is something in which they would like to get involved; if it is something that they would like to study.

We are going to let them know what the requirement to enter university is. We are going to have some pieces of equipment. We are going to have those who are working in those areas so that they can inform these young minds of some of the procedures that are required.

What that would do, Mr. Vice-President, is expose our young men and women—form two and three students—so that they can determine what subjects they need to take to get into the health care system to become a doctor, nurse, pharmacist, radiologist or whatever area they may wish to get into. *[Interruption]*

**Sen. Mark:** We want you to tell us about Faith Williams.

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

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Mark and Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh, I know that you really do not mean to do what you are doing. I do not even want to think that you cannot help it. *[Laughter]* I am asking you to desist from interrupting the Minister. Please carry on, Mr. Minister.

**Hon. J. Rahael:** Mr. Vice-President, we know in this honourable Senate that with every surgery there is a risk. This particular Senate has lost someone, for what was supposed to be a simple routine surgery. We are all saddened by deaths of a loved one when we did not expect that that person would have been in danger of losing their life. But, again, with every surgery there is an element of risk.

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It is not only in Trinidad and Tobago that you have deaths which should have been prevented. I have met with the family of Faith Williams. My heart and soul cry out for that child. I am not making any excuse for anyone. Of course, I have offered it privately; I have offered it publicly and I will offer it again: Our condolences on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for the loss of this child. Tomorrow we are going to have a press conference and certain things will be said there and I would like to leave it at that.

Mr. Vice-President, I have made the point that in health care there should be no politics. I have said this here before—any one of us, when we leave here and God forbid that we get into an accident and we call the ambulance service—no one can complain about our ambulance service—that is another success story, but we will leave that for now.

Mr. Vice-President, do you know that when an ambulance picks you up that they will take you to the nearest public health institution, regardless of whether you are Dr. Gopeesingh, Dr. Saith, John Rahael or whoever you are? They are going to take you to the nearest health institution, even if you were to request to go anywhere else they will not take you there. I appeal, therefore, to all our health care providers to step up to ensure that we treat our fellow human beings in the way that we will like to be treated; with care and with the attention that is required. I call on all of us to work together for a better health care system in Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you, Mr. Vice-President.

**The Minister of Public Administration and Information and Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith):** Mr. Vice-President, that is a very difficult act to follow and I am hoping that Tweedledum and Tweedledee—[*Laughter*—] will allow me to make my contribution.

**Sen. Mark:** Who are you talking about?

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. L. Saith:** I said Tweedledum and Tweedledee!

**Sen. Mark:** Who are you talking about?

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. Saith:** I do not know!

Mr. Vice-President, I am the last speaker before Sen. Enill wraps up the debate and I take this opportunity as Leader of the Senate to congratulate the Members of the Senate. [*Desk thumping*]

**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 Senate continue its sitting until the conclusion of the debate.

*Question put and agreed to.*

**APPROPRIATION BILL  
(BUDGET)**

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. L. Saith:** Mr. Vice-President, I want to congratulate all the Members of the Senate. I think it has been a very constructive, interesting and sometimes entertaining debate. We have worked long hours and I think people looking at it on television would recognize that, at least, this Senate worked, worked long and we did not duck and run. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, let me start by going back to what Sen. Cropper said in her contribution about the format of how we debate or how we deal with the budget, and to Sen. Prof. Ramchand, who wanted the Minister of Finance to give more details in his presentation; to Sen. Seetahal, S.C. who said that she expected more details. I think, experience has shown over these four days that Ministers are finding it difficult, even in one hour, to report on their ministries. The question of how we debate and how we provide information really needs to be looked at. I suggest that Sen. Cropper may wish to make a contribution to the debate that will take place in the country, on the way of a new constitution for the country, because I think it has to be part of that.

I also want to make one more comment, Sen. Cropper. I hear your call for more analysis, more information on some of the things that have been done. As Ministers of Government and as a Government, we are always walking the thin line between “analysis” and “analysis paralysis”; that is, you can analyze to the point where you could get paralyzed, and judgment has to be made sometimes on how you move forward. Your point is taken, however, and where it is possible to do more analysis, we will do it. I will also indicate that where it is not possible or where paralysis will set in, the Government will move.

I mentioned that Ministers are finding it difficult in one hour to even say what they have to say and assuming that I get an extra 15 minutes, Mr. Vice-President, I now have 55 minutes to report on two ministries. You will find that I may not

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have the opportunity to go into some of the details that I would have liked to go, in my contribution. Please, it is not because I do not recognize what has been said by Senators with respect to the information that they require, it is just going to be difficult.

Mr. Vice-President, I will start by commending the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance for his budget presentation. This budget is people centred and financially sound. It is all part of the Vision 2020 objectives that this Government has set itself.

The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, therefore, in 2006, as part of pursuing that Vision 2020 really focused on three things: building our oil, gas and minerals resources. I think Sen. Ali made a point, that has its key, true: How do you diversify the oil and natural gas subsector that is, do we go downstream? Have we reached the point where primary products must not be where we are? How do we go downstream? How do we expand the infrastructure for the further development of this sector?

Let me start with building the oil, gas and mineral resources. To do that, Mr. Vice-President, and given the fact that much of the investment in finding new resources come from the private sector, the Government must, therefore, put the right investment climate to have that done. We need to have more investment in exploration and production.

In 2006, the average oil production was 148,000 barrels of oil per day, compared to 136,000 barrels in 2005. With respect to natural gas, production average was 33.7 billion standard cubic feet per day, or 640,000 barrels of oil equivalent. For fiscal 2007, we anticipate the production of crude oil at 142,000 barrels per day and 4.1 billion cubic feet of gas per day, or 706,900 barrels of oil equivalent. You will note that our natural gas is now, in terms of barrels of oil equivalent, almost four times our oil production. This is truly a gas economy.

Our last independent assessment of our resources, the three Ps: proven, possible, probable, shows a resource base of 2.4 billion barrels of oil and 35 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.

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

In order to sustain the level of reserves and activities, we need to continuously explore for new resources. The Ministry has started work for selecting an independent consultant to undertake annual audits for reserves over the next five years, so that it will be able on a yearly basis to audit where we are and where we are going.



At the current prices for energy, we are initiating exploitation of our heavy oil resources. It now makes economic sense. We believe that the heavy oil resources of this country are estimated in excess of two billion barrels and if you look at what our three Ps resource is—2.4 billion barrels of crude oil—it will almost double and for the first time we are going to work together with Petrotrin, other experts and oil companies in looking at our heavy oil resources in this country.

We recognized, as I have indicated, that there is need to continuously explore our resources. The way we are doing that, is first of all, looking at new areas for exploration. We are doing it in three ways. We are rationalizing our onshore licence. We had onshore licences over the years with very little exploration. In fact, we had 54 onshore licences, and very outdated terms and conditions. We have rationalized that, we have taken some out for new exploration, new bids and we have given 13 new licences with the existing operators, seven with Petrotrin, three joint-ventures with Petrotrin, and three with Primera, and all these licences I have recently signed.

Mr. Vice-President—and very interesting—what we have basically done is released a fair amount of acreage for bids and, therefore, we have put out in 2006 bids in three phases: eight blocks in phase one located onshore or near shore, in the southern basin and in the south coast marine area. The phase is three blocks, block 2 off the east coast and north coast marine area two and three located in marine areas off the north coast and these are blocks where adjacent to them are already some finds, so that the chances of finding additional resources are very good. And we have gone to phase three which is going further than we have gone before and that is, the deep acreage, deep water, 1,700 to 3,000 metres off the south-east coast of Trinidad and Tobago.

For phase one on the onshore, we needed to focus on stimulating activity in this area. The year 1967 was a record year for onshore production; it was 112,000 barrels per day. Since then it has been gradually declining and in 2005, it was 24,200. What we are seeking to do with this new round is to bring new technology, new investment, proper 3D-seismic surveys, hopefully to begin to take that up. There is oil there. The question is: we now have to get it out.

I mentioned phase two was in areas that are close to and adjoining existing exploration areas that do have some resources. The new frontier is the deep water. That is important because if we are to continue to develop new resources we have to move into new areas. We have to bid rounds out. We have been able to generate much interest by people taking documents and we are very optimistic

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that we will be able to attract companies to do this kind of exploration. Having put the blocks out we now have to develop the environment, the licensing and fiscal regime that would attract people into it.

Mr. Vice-President, you would recall last year we made amendments to the Petroleum Taxes Act and the Income Tax (In Aid of Industry) Act to rationalize our take from the industry. We changed the rates for the supplemental petroleum tax; we changed the depreciation mechanism and we put in some incentives for drilling and exploration wells in deep water. We have looked at the existing production-sharing contracts and have also reviewed and come up with a new production-sharing contract based on the work done by our own people, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries and the Ministry of Finance reviewed by international experts, with a mandate to say what we wanted was a regime that maximized the returns to the people of Trinidad and Tobago but at the same time, made it attractive for people to invest in this kind of exploration, especially in the deep waters where substantial sums are required and where the risks associated may be high.

So there is a new production-sharing contract, which includes the direct payment by the contractor of the petroleum profit tax, withholding tax, employment and Green Fund levy. In other words, we have changed it from where the Government picked that up to where a contractor must now pick it up and the Government will meet the share of its profits from the contractor's liability for royalties, petroleum impost, the supplemental petroleum tax and the petroleum production levy. We have put in a formula to optimize the returns to the country when there is high petroleum prices, and we have put in a formula that where the price levels are above \$40 per barrel or \$4.00 in natural gas a new regime kicks in. If it is below then it does not. We have dealt with how do you consolidate expenses and the new model will allow for separate consolidation of profit and loss in respect of operations for land, shallow marine areas and for deep water separately.

A re-opener clause has been put in the production-sharing contracts. There would be a limit to when you can re-open and there is a formula where either side can re-open. If the contractor finds himself in difficulty given the formula, he can then ask for it to be re-opened after a period of time. If the Government feels that its take is less than it should be getting in light of prices, the Government could re-open. So we have also put in a re-opener contract clause. We have as part of what is happening and people wanting to share their risks, contractors or bidders getting a block and wanting to assign some of it to other partners, we are putting

an assignment fee where you want to assign, you would have to pay a fee. The value of the transaction will be determined by an independent consultant and the fee will range between 1 and 2 per cent of that transaction. We have put into production-sharing contracts an escrow account from the first date of production for the cost associated with well abandonment, pollution and environmental cost that may be associated.

So no longer will it only come into effect when you are ready to abandon, from day one you will start and you will put \$.25 per barrel into that escrow fund for the period that is required. We hope that this new contract will encourage companies to invest while at the same time protecting the Government's revenue.

Cross-border reserves. I think it has been mentioned here that there is a potential of the fields that are Venezuela's. The Government remains committed to that. We have a joint steering committee with Venezuela and they have been meeting regularly. So far, they have achieved the following:

- They have formulated the terms of reference for the reservoir technical working group, that is, for the technical people to be working together.
- They have developed a procedure for exchanging ideas and information.
- They have established two reservoir technical working groups, one for Loran/Manatee and one for Kapok/Dorado.

The technical work on Loran/Manatee has been completed and now there is an agreement on both sides, and the number of resources that are there and the entitlements of each party. We have been able to define in that field what is there and how much belongs to each party. And we are now working on the Kapok/Dorado field trying to do the same thing. We also have a team working on the framework utilization treaty, that is, the treaty will be the framework under which any sharing will take place. It will form the basis for each field, we will work out the utilization and by the end of next year we expect that most of that will be completed. It continues to be a work in progress but we are very optimistic that notwithstanding all that is being said, that at the technical level serious work is taking place and progress is being made.

For 2007, the work programme. We have recently signed some production-sharing contracts for areas that were awarded previously. We are doing about 5,000 square kilometres of 3D-seismic data. There is new drilling to take place as part of these activities and we have approved as many as 12 wells for the year 2007.

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Onshore, the Gulf of Paria north coast marine area, south coast marine area and the east coast marine areas. So there will be a rev-up of drilling activities in 2007.

As I indicated, I would like to expand—Let me take the mineral sector, quarrying especially. We have said before that it has now become a problem. The main objective here is to make additional lands available and as I indicated to this Senate, we have, in fact, allocated 1,268 acres to five large contractors.

**6.45 p.m.**

As I indicated to this Senate, we have allocated 1,268 acres to five large contractors. We have taken 200 acres and given it to five small contractors/operators at Tapaná. We have just concluded an evaluation of four bids, four blocks at Plantation Road, Valencia and have made recommendations. Yesterday, I signed a note making recommendations to Cabinet. We have the quarry at Cumaca—30 acres—and that went out for bid. The bids have been evaluated and yesterday I signed off to submit to Cabinet an award.

Scott Quarry, we are still seeking an operator to manage it on behalf of National Quarries Limited. It has taken a little time; the bids came; they were not accepted. We are looking at it again, but we are also seeking to raise the level of what we want out of that quarry. We have taken away the import and export system for aggregates to enable aggregates to be imported.

We have sought to deal with the illegal quarry menace. We have gone through an exercise and we have now regularized 91 small operators and licences have been awarded for existing operators and eight for new quarries. We have sought, in this Parliament, pending the development of the quarries legislation to at least raise the fines to enable us to deal with those people who do not have a licence.

What are we hoping to do in 2007? As we said, in 2006, we are looking at the legislative framework. We promise to move the Green Paper to a White Paper to be laid in the Senate. We promise to look at repealing the Minerals Act and replace it with a quarries authority act and to introduce a new geological survey act, which will be the basis of the establishment of a geological survey department charged with the responsibility of mapping our mineral resources in the country, so that we will have, for the first time, good information on all the mineral resources in the country.

Mr. Vice-President, I am happy to report that the Quarry Policy White Paper, the Geological Survey Act and the Quarries Authority Act have been completed and will be presented to Parliament later this year. [*Desk thumping*] We will lay

the White Paper of the industry in this Parliament and the Draft Quarries Authority Act, the Geological Survey Act and the proposed quarries authority and geological surveys department will be established as autonomous bodies. The legislation is now with the Attorney General and he has assured me that it is short order.

What we also want to do is to establish mining zones in the country. We will do the survey; we will establish these mining zones and we will talk to all agencies, so that once we determine the mining zones, in collaboration with everybody, there will be no need for continuous moving between agencies in respect of approval for mining. We hope to do an impact study, an EIA, for all these mining areas.

What happens now is that if there is a mining area of 1,000 acres and you give five persons 200 acres, each has to do a baseline study. We will do the study for the entire 1,000 acres and have that as the baseline from which individuals can now make their application.

Part of the problem of the EMA is not that it takes time, but that we suffer from lack of baseline data and we really do not have many competent groups that can do EIAs. Therefore, when you are doing all of this, you have few people that you can go to locally, the price goes up—supply and demand—but more than that, the capability to do them simultaneously disappears and people are waiting in queue to get it done.

We want to evaluate our mineral resources. We have commenced limestone mapping exercises in the Northern Range and we are surveying 1,400 acres at Tapaná, Matura and Wallerfield. As we complete that, we will be able to make more quarry lands available, on a regular basis, to the industry. We are going to request proposals for a further 300 acres of land to Tapaná during the first quarter of next year. National Quarries Limited has installed a new 400 tonne power processing plant and this will double the production for National Quarries Limited. My expectation is that by the end of next year the amount of quarry material that is available on the market will almost double.

Let me talk a little about the diversification exercise. We now have a lot of capacity. We are producing 5 million tonnes per annum from 10 plants of ammonia; 6.5 million tonnes of methanol per year from seven plants and LNG is 15.3 million tonnes from the four LNG trains. The Government has taken some decisions in respect of this future development. One is that we are now recognized as a highly attractive and mature investment location and tax holidays will no longer be given to investors—corporation tax that is. They will come to get VAT and customs duties but there will be no more corporation tax holidays for investments. [*Interruption*] Effective yesterday.

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The second policy decision is that we will not consider any proposal that does not take us downstream. Every project must include an element of the output to be utilized to produce value-added products that can either be exported for higher value or used locally; not all of it would be used locally, but at least they should go down enough that the export is of a higher value product.

So ammonia, methanol, aluminium and steel must all go downstream and in the projects that we are setting up now in the priority, they must provide substantial downstream potential: they must come on stream within the next three years—we do not want to allocate gas and they are taking their own sweet time to develop their project. Come with your projects and when we allocate the gas you can come on stream within three years.

As we have indicated, ammonia must go to urea, methanol to propylene, acetic acid to [*Inaudible*] That is the way we are moving. To give some statistics, Mr. Vice-President, today we use about 4 billion cubic feet of gas per day broken up as follows:

LNG	59 per cent
Petrochemicals	29 per cent
Power generation	7 per cent
Iron and steel	3 per cent
Other gas processing activities	2 per cent

By 2016, 10 years from now, we anticipate that we will be using approximately 6 billion cubic feet of gas per day. LNG will be 53, down from 59; power generation 8, up from 7; petrochemicals, including plastics and the new downstream products, 29 per cent; iron and steel and aluminium and derivatives, 8 per cent and other users, 2 per cent. So we will diversify the portfolio, but LNG will still remain the major use of our gas.

Talking about LNG, I have made it clear on many occasions both here and internationally that the next train will only come after we have satisfied domestic demands. We have, in the meantime, set up a company, T&T LNG, to manage our investments in LNG because we want to go further into the [*Inaudible*] to maximize our return on assets; to evaluate new business opportunities and to identify strategic LNG investments. Because there are so many things we could do, we need to pick which one we want to do where.

There is a small gas-to-liquid effort being done at Petrotrin. We have 49 per cent and Petrotrin has 49 per cent and we really want to see how it works before we bite the big one. This project is a relatively small one—US \$110 million—but when it comes on stream, it will upgrade Petrotrin's production of diesel and, should it be successful, we would look seriously to further GTL products.

Petrotrin as you know is upgrading its refinery for two reasons. One is to get products that are easily exportable and secondly to make sure that we are not vulnerable to only the Caribbean market for our products.

If we are going to do all this, we have to have somewhere to put them. We have to have the port facilities and the NEC and NGC are working on gas pipelines. We have the 56-inch now that comes across the country, which will bring gas to La Brea and onward. We have the Beach Field Upstream Development Project, which is 63 kilometres of pipeline offshore bringing gas from offshore to our platform at Galeota to ensure that we have the capacity to bring the gas to the land.

At the moment we have identified four sites for industrial estates: Union Estate at La Brea, 400 hectares; Point Lisas south and east, 1,400 hectares; Cap-de-Ville, 910 hectares and the Oropouche Bank, which is a reclaimed site, which will go just off Mosquito Creek, 1,400 hectares.

### **7.00 p.m.**

The Union Industrial Estate will accommodate First UAN, which is a plant by Ansa McAl Terra, or anybody else who is making ammonia, and also the Alutrinc smelter. There is room for two more plants and then that site would be full.

In Point Lisas south and east, SAL will go there with their stay-over facility. Westlake will go there, because they need to be close to the Phoenix Park processing gas plant. We expect to start work on that soon, and that will require a new port. We expect that port to start by the end of this year. The expenditure for that estate is \$291 million for the site development and \$550 million for the port.

With respect to Cap-de-Ville, applications are before the EMA for a CEC and applications are before the Town and Country Planning Division for outline approval. The EIA studies have been completed and, subject to approvals, we expect to start work on the port in 2007. That will cost approximately TT \$250 million.

With respect to the Oropouche Bank, we have identified the area. We now have—*[Interruption]*

**Sen. Prof. Ramchand:** Did the Minister mean subject to the approval of the EMA or subject to the approval of Parliament?

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. L. Saith:** Subject to the approval—I do not think the Parliament gives out certificates of environmental completion.

**Sen. Prof. Ramchand:** The Minister said subject to the approval, they will begin.

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. L. Saith:** Subject to the approval of the EMA in respect of the environment and the Town and Country Planning Division, in respect of land use.

I do not have much time because I still have the Ministry of Public Administration and Information. I have already been accused by the Ministry of Public Administration and Information of giving too much time to the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries. [*Interruption*]

**Sen. Prof. Ramchand:** You are wasting your time.

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. L. Saith:** At the Oropouche Bank, there is going to be a new estate. We will have to reclaim land. We have estimated at this time that the cost will be approximately \$900 million, but the work has now started and we will, again, have to prepare the applications for approval.

We have to put some new ports in this country. We are considering one at Galeota, basically to service the industry out there. We expect to begin that in 2007, at an estimated cost of \$500 million. For clarity, what I am saying here is all subject to the necessary approvals.

We need to put a new port in Brighton because as we develop the La Brea Industrial Estate we need a petrochemical pier. We expect that this project will cost approximately \$900 million and we expect to start in 2007.

Cap de-Ville will require a new port. The design is now in progress and it will cost approximately \$460 million. You have your plants and your use of your energy; you now have to develop the sites to put them and the shipping facility. All that work is going on simultaneously. I give the Senate the assurance for the umpteenth time that it will be done, once approvals have been obtained.

I have every confidence that projects, once properly designed and proper mitigating measures are put in place, will satisfy the requirements for the development of these projects. There is a reason why it is called the Environmental Management Agency. It is to manage the environment.



I am looking forward, with a lot of optimism for next year to more ENP activities; new projects taking us downstream in the use of our gas; and new raw materials being made available for industrial development, whether it is plastics, steel or whatever. I believe that we will break the back of the quarry problem and increase the supply in a more structured manner, during the course of the year.

The energy sector in this country operates in the context of a global energy sector. It is not locked into Trinidad and Tobago and, therefore, it is influenced by what happens outside: international market conditions, world economic growth, political uncertainty, security of supply and natural gas price. We have developed a reputation here of stability and consistent policy, through changes of government. It is the one area where even with changes of government, investors now feel confident that there is a predictable—[*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. [*Hon. J. Yuille-Williams*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Sen. The Hon. Dr. L. Saith:** I will take one minute to conclude mainly to say that because of this and because of the nature of our Caricom countries and their dependence on energy, we are heading a task force looking at a regional energy policy. The overriding rationale behind our development is to use our energy sector resources in building and developing the country in a way that when these diminish, there is a sustainable level of development in the country.

I have 15 minutes, plus the 4 minutes you gave Sen. Brother Noble Khan, to quickly touch on the public sector.

Public sector reform: We have been able, in the last year, to place what we call “new system facilitators”, in ministries to act as internal change managers. One of the things you have to do, if you have to change it, is to begin to put into Ministries somebody who has the responsibility, working the Ministry, to ensure that takes place.

We continue the work of the Opinion Leaders Panel because, having set the baseline of what expectations are out and where the system is today, we need to continuously measure whether we are doing better or worse; what are the areas we need to look at.

Unless you have, as Sen. Cropper will tell you, good information, you cannot make good decisions. One of the problems in this country is that the reliability of information, especially now being collected by the CSO, needs to be looked at.

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Fourteen days ago, we started a project with Stats Sweden, an agency of the Government of the Republic of Sweden, to work with us on looking at CSO. They will identify an appropriate model for restructuring CSO and recommend a comprehensive plan of action for the transition of the CSO, from its present status, to an organization more capable of carrying out this important role of the collection of data.

They will also offer technical assistance through the transfer of knowledge and know-how for the development of the country's statistical capacity.

We need to put CSO on a strong sustaining footing because, with national data, we need to have it done professionally and bring them up to a state. It is a key to decision-making in the future. We have looked at CSO as the first element of the Government, where we will directly go for public service reform.

We have started a pilot project in three ministries to introduce a performance management system for Permanent Secretaries. We are beginning to introduce into the public service, performance management concepts and measurements and concepts.

As you know, Sen. Mark likes to think that it is his idea, the Prime Minister's Innovative Awards for Excellence, now in its third year and is beginning to have an effect. Some of the things that Sen. Kangaloo spoke about are leading in government and they have been winners of this award. It is stimulating in the public service.

We have two projects that we are looking at. I want to put it in the context that public service reform is large, but you have to pick projects, begin to deal with them and demonstrate.

We are looking at the payment of public service pensions. There is a project called TT Serve, which is the delivery of specified services and information and government services throughout the country. On the Pension Reengineering Project, we are working with IHRIS, the automatic human resource information system, which is now operational, to ensure that approximately 1,200 public officers, annually, will receive their separation benefits on the date of their retirement. That is the target.

All new retirees will receive their monthly pension payment from the end of the first month after retirement. This, believe it or not, is a significant movement forward, especially for people who retired from the public service and for months, years, they cannot get their benefit. Using the database that IHRIS has, the mandate is as they retire, give them their severance and at the end of the first month, pay them their pension.

With TT Serve, we want to set up service delivery centres in communities, where citizens could go and access a range of government services and information. It is a way of moving government delivery to the communities, rather than the communities coming to the Government.

I have great hope for this project. We want to introduce two pilot projects in the coming months, to test the concept and if it is—not if it is successful, we know that it will be successful, but we will work out the kinks and then roll it out throughout the country.

Human resource availability in the public service is a problem. We have set up a company called the Human Resource Services Company with the following mandate:

- To develop systems and processes to integrate international hires into our local culture. We need to bring people in.
- To establish a network of Trinidadian professionals living abroad, who may wish to work at home on some basis; some may want to come back fully, some may want to work using the Internet and some may want to work using short term consulting. We need to put that data in place to tap the diaspora outside to contribute.

We want to develop where we have to bring an expatriate in an operating process to ensure the knowledge transfer, not just say, have an understudy, but set out clearly, an operating process.

### **7.15 p.m.**

We want to also develop a regional international skill database of candidates who want to work here and to develop a portal in our government portal where people can constantly get information of what is available. Finally, this company will work with the private sector to develop a mentorship programme. It will also have as a part of its responsibility the providing of outfitting services for government offices, coming back to the point about giving proper accommodation and services for our people.

We are transforming the Government Information Service into a company to give it the flexibility to employ the creative people that it needs, at salaries and conditions of employment. The mandate of this company is for the production of public information and in educational features and it will strengthen the capacity

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of the Government in communications, marketing, branding and imaging. The Ministry will only deal with policy, strategy, coordination, monitoring and evaluation. This company will go out.

Public service personnel scholarships are becoming an important part of our development. Last year we spent \$55 million in our scholarship programme. We recognize that the annual scholarship which we gave with respect to A level and CAPE, and so forth, cannot adequately supply. We reintroduced what was known then as the development scholarship where you are picking areas. Instead of picking people and letting them go and that is what they want, we are picking areas and saying, if you want to do it, we are going to give you scholarships: e-government, strategic planning, financial and economic modelling and professional areas in things like archiving and quantity surveying. We have started the programme and last week we have approved the first 13 public servants to go and get Masters and PhDs. In five years we think that we will spend about \$70 million on this programme.

As you know, I indicated that we were doing a classification and compensation exercise. We have completed it for the police, prison and fire service, seeking to clearly define what people have to do and begin to benchmark against the private sector. We implemented a new grade structure for hourly and daily-rated employees. I think we have gone from a 30-something grade to nine. We have done a revised pay system for the defence force, and we are seeking to develop a system where meritocracy would be the basis for promotion and rewards, so that we can have our performance results and be performance driven, because we now have IHRIS which is giving us the database of what we have.

I am skipping. Let me talk about physical infrastructure, and this is the big tall building syndrome. I sit in the ministry every day and see coming across my desk the escalation in rent that the Government is paying to the private sector. Therefore, not only do we have a problem of getting space, but the space that we are getting is expensive. I have one across my desk now where the landlord is asking for \$12 a square foot. We have to build offices.

We are building offices at Park and Richmond Streets: Customs and Excise, the Board of Inland Revenue, the Ministry of Legal Affairs, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Development. We have started work on the administrative complex in San Fernando. We are going to do work at Salvatori Building—Sen. Prof. Ramchand is going to love this. The building at St. Clair which the Ministry of Public Administration and Information is erecting, will be

used by the Prime Minister's office in the interim; we are building administrative buildings at Siparia, Tunapuna and all over. I think Minister Dumas also indicated that we are also erecting buildings for the Ministry of Local Government.

The Government's communication backbone: We have got the first phase in. We have collected 230 sites and by the end of 2007, we would have concluded 1,000 sites. The portal that we are putting in to access government information, we are hoping to have all government information on it by the end of this year and all services in 2007.

I know my time has come to an end. Let me just read the headlines of what you missed: the IHRIS project; the fast-forward part for community access centres; the small business marketplace; telecommunication; broadband; NALIS and CNMG, the new radio station. Like Sen. Cropper, I wish I could have more time to present.

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

**Sen. Mark:** I just want to make a request, through you, Mr. Vice-President. I think that Sen. Dr. Saith has a lot more to say and I would like to ask him if he could make available as a paper, the document in terms of his effort at public service re-organization. He has a number of things that he would have liked to say but time is against him. So, I would like to ask him if he could make the document available and have it circulated to Members of Parliament.

**Sen. Dr. Saith:** I have to tell the hon. Senator that when I first got what they wanted me to say, it was 64 pages. They have cut it to 34 and I have only been able to deal with 17 pages. But I would make, in due course, information available. Some of it he will hear on the platform. [*Laughter*]

**The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill):** Mr. Vice-President, let me, on behalf of the Government, thank all those who contributed to this debate. I can wrap this debate up right now because the quality of the information that came from the Government side, in terms of the issues raised on the other side, was complete. But there are some things that I believe we should put in perspective, because during the course of the debate the information or the sentiments that were expressed seemed not to have considered the process that got us here today.

Mr. Vice-President, a lot has been said about delivery; a lot has been said about implementation; a lot has been said about this being done and that not being done, and for the benefit of Members of the Senate, I want to briefly outline what

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is involved in getting us here. Because, you see, there are some who talked about impossible timeframes, and talked about it, I think, irresponsibly, to give the impression that the thing works without a particular framework.

Mr. Vice-President, on April 19, 2006, the Minister of Finance issued his call circular and that is really the document that determines what ministries will do in the context of preparing for this particular exercise. Very briefly, what it says is that ministries should do a number of things. It says that the budget must be circumscribed by the policy of the Government; by the strategic plan of each ministry, and if the ministry does not have a strategic plan, a customer service delivery plan. That is the framework.

In the documentation that comes to the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Planning and Development who are the lead ministries in this exercise, each ministry must provide strategic plans and objectives, recurrent expenditure, including capital receipts; recurrent expenditure of ministries and departments; recurrent expenditure of statutory boards and similar bodies and the Tobago House of Assembly; capital expenditure programmes and directory of services.

The Minister of Finance tells accounting officers that they should carefully scrutinize all items of expenditure to ensure that services which are no longer essential are eliminated; that all necessary services are provided at the lowest cost possible and that public funds are spent to the best advantage. Under no circumstance must provisions be made in the draft estimates for unforeseen expenditure. So, Mr. Vice-President, there is a framework.

When the ministries provide you with the strategic plans, there are three elements that are required: One is the element of continuous improvement and reengineering. That is a component of the plan. The other is the development of the human resource plans within the ministry, and the third is the information management strategies. Those are important elements in moving the Government's agenda forward, because in a real sense these are the instruments, the tools, the documents that provide for the planning by the Government and, therefore, for the implementation of its programmes.

Mr. Vice-President, during the course of this debate a number of commentators believed, erroneously so, that this Government has lost its way. But no one was able, on the basis of the information that they provided, to substantiate that claim and, therefore, we on this side do not accept that at all.

This Government, on coming into office, came with a particular plan, a particular vision, a particular objective for this country which, quite frankly, was developed and coordinated by the leader of this party, the hon. Patrick Manning.

[*Desk thumping*] In all that we have heard during the course of this debate, whether it was in housing, whether it was in health, whether it was in agriculture, whether it was in national security, the focus was on the poor man.

Mr. Vice-President, one of the issues that I face every single week is the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance making it abundantly clear that one of the reasons that he holds the portfolio is to ensure that the social services agenda is not short-changed by the Ministry of Finance. He says that because he believes—and we believe—that a country cannot move forward simply on the basis of economics and simply on the basis of the numbers that we provide. The numbers that we provide is a measure of what we are doing as it is measured in terms of a country's development and in terms of what we are accustomed to looking at when we evaluate our position against other countries.

This is a Government that continues to spend a significant amount of our resources on ensuring that the vulnerable in our society is taken care of. There are commentators who talk about the question of expenditure, but we make the point again that the expenditure that we are spending is an investment in the future of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and if the administration that preceded us did that—and they did not, and we will talk about that—then some of the issues that we face today, we would not have had to deal with.

### **7.30 p.m.**

Many of us on entering ministries found that there was absolutely no development as it related to human resource skills to run a country that was part of the global environment and the skills that were in fact necessary to move forward. Those who do not understand the issue, talk about it in a particular way.

The issue of moving a country forward and the issue of the implementation have to do with the human resource; the way the human resource is structured and the systems for delivery. The Government is continuing to ensure that we do the things that are required to give our human resource individuals the necessary tools to move forward.

This Government has a plan. When I listened to Sen. Angela Cropper I must confess that everything that she said I could relate to, except her last ten minutes and I will come to that in a minute. She talked about the budget process and the budget as an instrument; the approach to planning; the character of the society and all those issues. Let me at the outset say that this Government over the last three to four years has been working diligently on moving to a new platform of

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planning and a new platform of delivery. And for those who would listen, we have at last found ourselves in a situation where in developing Vision 2020 and in doing that which is necessary for us to achieve success, we have a plan that is coordinated; that is cohesive and in the context of delivering and developing that plan, it was necessary for us to bring together different ministries to deal with the same issue.

So that, for example, in looking at the issue of enabling competitive business, it was necessary for us to bring together a team of multi-disciplined individuals from the Ministries of Tourism, Finance, Foreign Affairs, Trade and Industry, Planning and Development, Energy and Energy Industries, Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development and the Tobago House of Assembly. Because these Ministries are all involved in the business of creating and enabling competitive business environment, which as we say, is a necessary requirement for moving this country forward and therefore, she would in due course, have the information that is available to demonstrate that and to make sure that the process is a little more coherent; and that I agree with.

What I do not agree with, Mr. Vice-President, is the definition as it relates to a caring society and the inference in that statement that says, and let me just say it:

“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...and ignoring those who do not.”

Mr. Vice-President, I know for a fact, that our Prime Minister, every single week, leaves Cabinet, goes down to his constituency office and leaves at whatever hour it is in the night—because he calls me all kinds of strange hours, 1 o'clock in the morning—dealing with people who come into his office, and therefore in those circumstances the other statement about the Prime Minister not being in contact with the citizens of this country is really not true. [*Desk thumping*] And I just wanted to put on record that as it relates to my Prime Minister; as it relates to our Prime Minister, the inferences here about the fact that he is not caring is absolutely without merit. [*Desk thumping*]

This Prime Minister, as far as I am concerned is the one who drives the activity and the performance that you heard over the course of the last four days and the work that we are doing here is because he has decided that a caring society is an important part of our future objective and he has put in place the mechanism to do so and I want to deal with that completely. [*Desk thumping*] I just wanted to make the point, Mr. Vice-President.



There is another issue that was raised which I take some objection to and it has to do with the security of the Prime Minister. I do not know if you are aware of it, but a Prime Minister is a very risky individual. I happen to know that the job is a job in which there are those in the society who, because they want to disrupt the society, will in fact put his life in danger. And in a real sense, the fact that he moves from point A to point B is a security function rather than a function in the way that it was put. Therefore, we cannot, as a growing society, take the view that because the security services have decided to protect not only the Prime Minister, but the President as well, that we are not caring; it just does not sound as though we understand the issue. But let me leave that as it is and just say that I wish to put on record that those statements made by the other side are really statements that I consider we should put on the record and I have done that.

There are some other serious issues that I would want to deal with; my colleagues would have dealt with most of the others. First of all, let me deal with something that my colleague in the Ministry of Finance dealt with, but which I think requires a little more information, because I think it is still an ongoing issue and this has to do with the much discussed issue of the Stock Exchange of Trinidad and Tobago, and the decision by the financial institutions inspector some time ago.

Let me set the record straight. First of all let me acknowledge that the decision of the inspector has undeniably had a negative impact on the market, but I want to add that this is not the only source of the market's decline. Let me put it into context. When the inspector informed fund managers that there would be increased attention paid to compliance with the 50 per cent statutory limit on equity investments in December 2004, the market was still enjoying the fantastic growth rates that it had been experiencing since 2002. At the time of the inspector's notice to fund managers, almost 25 per cent of the 208 active pension plans, representing 80 per cent of plan assets, were showing average equity investments of 58 per cent, while the law set a limit of 50 per cent. We must remember, as well, that in previous years, the legal limit for this prudential requirement has been raised from 20 per cent to 40 per cent and now to the current level of 50 per cent.

In response to similar appeals and concerns as are now being expressed by some commentators, we need to therefore ask how are the immediate concerns of the commentators and the industry for perhaps, greater exposure to assets with the highest risk profile to be balanced with the interest of pensioners, who may be severely damaged by the risk posed by the market; that is the question.

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The question is, what do we do? The ultimate question which the Government and the regulator continue to struggle with is, should you be looking at prudence in the interest of future pensioners versus short term support for stock market prices? Let us consider the behaviour of the stock market in the recent past.

Since the inception in 1981 there has been little growth in the number of companies listed on the stock exchange or in the number of market actors actively trading on it. In 1981, there were 35 listed companies with a total market capitalization of \$2.3 billion and eight brokerage firms; 25 years later there are 32 companies, 11 licenced brokers and eight traders licensed to trade on the floor of the exchange. So that in over 25 years absolutely not much has happened.

There are a couple of other points that I want to make in terms of what we are doing, but let me just give you, Mr. Vice-President and the Senate the undertaking that this is a matter that we are working on with the stock exchange to try and find the solution; but let me make one other point. We invited the IMF to do a Financial Sector Assessment Programme (FSAP) earlier in mid-2005. What we were seeking to do then, in looking at the Caribbean financial market was to determine what were the risks that the country was facing as we sought to move towards creating for ourselves a premier financial sector. When the IMF conducting its FSAP, as they call it, in mid-2005 prior to the fall in the market, it observed the following. It said:

"The sharp increase in stock market capitalization is not reflected in earnings..."

something that my colleague spoke about.

"The IMF estimated that share prices of firms in the three principal market sectors, financial manufacturing and conglomerates have been increasing faster than earnings but the difference in rates has been most remarkable in the conglomerate sector."

What it basically says is that large spreads such as these are usually interpreted as suggesting either that the market expects large future earnings or that share prices have been driven up by speculative demand. In the case of Trinidad and Tobago, imperfections in the market such as poor supply of equities; high liquid stocks; trading systems that allowed significant price increases on unmatched bids at the tendency of institutional investors to buy and hold securities also contribute to the fantastic increase.

There are a number of issues inside here that we are dealing with and at this point in time, we are seeking to address it both from a technical point of view and from a stock market point of view, and we will be dealing with that.

This Government has been accused on a number of occasions of doing absolutely nothing on the one hand, and then on the other hand, of doing too much, you need to slow down. For the benefit of all, this year we produced a document "Government at your service: Highlights of Achievements" and the population and Members of the Senate can look at it and tell us, in which areas you think the Government should not be spending as much as it is. Is it in housing? Is it in health? Is it in education? Is it in providing for our people street lights? Is it in national security? Because the fact is that these are all requirements that our citizens need and they need them now, and to the extent that there are opportunities for us, as a government, to do it, we will do it and we will continue to do it recognizing that there are some things that we will have to deal with in the interim.

If you look at the correlation between unemployment and inflation, you will find some very interesting things. This Government took the view that what it was going to focus on was to get the unemployment issue out of the way. That is to say, in a situation where you had the kinds of revenues that we were having, you could not have a 12 per cent unemployment rate and therefore, the Government put in place a number of programmes and a number of situations—and we said we were going to do it in construction, and we did—to bring the unemployment rate down in the short term. We also put in place a number of institutional arrangements to move our people from the lower levels into higher level sustaining activity.

**7.45 p.m.**

We have reached the stage today where we think we have achieved the objective on the unemployment side and therefore we have stated that inflation is the issue and we are now going to try to get the balance right between how much unemployment and how much inflation. I really think that we have a handle on doing that. We are going to deal with supplies side issues and we are going to be dealing with a number of the things that we know must be done in order to achieve that particular objective.

Let me just deal with a few issues that people focused on me directly and then I will move on. Sen. Ali asked a question as it related to the revenues and basically he was saying that the difference between \$35 and \$45 represented an increase and he is right. The way the Government moved this particular year is

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that we looked at our expenditure, we looked at our revenue and we determined that in order to ensure that critical programmes continue, based on the plan that we had, the benchmark that we would use is \$45 in the first instance, but we also reduced the benchmark for gas. It is now \$3.50 instead of \$3.75. So in a real sense, if you consider Sen. Dr. Saith's contribution, in terms of barrel of oil equivalent there is more that we will gain as a result of this differential on the gas side, and therefore, that will be more actually going into the Revenue Stabilization Fund. We basically decided that anything that is additional to our planning price would basically go into the Revenue Stabilization Fund directly and we will, in fact, do that.

He also asked some questions on procurement and the procurement sector reform. In September 2005 a White Paper on the Reform of Government's Procurement Regime was laid in Parliament; this paved the way for the new comprehensive approach to Government's acquisition of goods and services. The establishment of the procurement system will require the repeal of the Central Tenders Board Ordinance with its subsidiary legislation and its replacement by a new Act. This regime will ensure a greater flexibility upon completion and will deal with ethical and fair dealings. The current status is that in order to deal with that we have to put the infrastructure in place. It requires a fully decentralized procurement regime; it requires the establishment of a single, legal and regulatory framework based on the underlying principles of value for money, transparency, accountability, establishment of a regulatory agency and an independent regulator with a monitoring and auditing function. At this point in time, interviews for the position of procurement regulator have been conducted and a nominee is expected to be announced soon. Insofar as the legislation is concerned, a draft bill has been completed but will not be circulated until the procurement regulator is on board and is able to review the draft legislation. So that there is, in fact, action taking place on this particular matter and we should be concluding that very shortly.

Mr. Vice-President, Sen. Munro spoke a lot of things, but he asked a question which I want to answer. He asked: "Where is the care for the poor and the underprivileged by the PNM Government in this budget?" I do not know which Minister he wants to answer this: Is it health? Is it housing? Is it national security? Or is it education? But I think that we have demonstrated, clearly, that in a real sense this Government is extremely concerned about the people that it purports to represent. [*Desk thumping*] And he made another interesting statement which says: "The policy of reducing the choice of the poor man to own a vehicle is a step backward."

Mr. Vice-President, I ask the question: Is owning a vehicle by the poor man an asset? An asset should make money for you, you should not really be having to spend money on an asset, and in a real sense, I think that I would have much preferred if the poor man had a transportation mechanism that allowed him to travel in comfort, wherever he wanted to go and in fact to put his money in a savings vehicle or an investment vehicle that when he wants it down the road he can get it. Therefore, I have a different view in the context of the poor man and moving him from where he is into wealth creation activity and therefore we just have a different view on how we get our people out of poverty and it is really not on the basis of conspicuous consumption. It is really an understanding of the choices you have to make and it is really about making different choices, so that, when you get to that age you have things there that have been sent forward that can now work for you instead of simply creating some other kinds of it. That is a different discussion and we will try to deal with that in the course of our issues.

I have no difficulty with beating up on the Government or on us here as it relates to what we do and how we do it. But I have a real difficulty when the Government, in attempting to deal with the number one problem in this country which is the issue of crime and the issue of national security and in circumstances where we try to get the best for people, I have a real problem with a Member of this Senate taking something that we have done and representing it in this way. Let me explain what he has said: "Every night I see this big white elephant flying overhead. The big white elephant has no eyes. One eye in the sky is in Port of Spain and the other eye in the sky is yet to be found; how can it fight crime?"

Mr. Vice-President, the police in this country takes a lot of licks. This Government has decided that we will give them whatever is required to fight crime. I cannot associate myself with "us" as parliamentarians creating the impression that the hardworking police service in this country should be dealt with like this. These are tools that are being used by the security services, by men and women who go out every single day and help us to fight the crime in this country. I can imagine them listening to us making statements like this. I think it devalues what they do. Mr. Vice-President, I would like on behalf of all of us to continue to ask our police officers and our security forces to continue to do the work that they are doing because in a lot of instances they take a lot of licks but we do not give them any support. I want them to know that some of us basically support them. [*Desk thumping*]

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Mr. Vice-President, Sen. Dr. Eastlyn Mc Kenzie says: "It baffles me that despite all the money spent over the years and all the efforts put in place by various administrations, so many of our people are still poor. Some are hungry, some are unemployable, some of our communities are still protesting over bad roads and unreliable water supply. We are still turning out illiterate students and we have plenty money. Why and what must we do differently?" I want Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie to know that there is a lot that we can do. There is a lot that we have done and there is a lot that we intend to do because this is not acceptable to us. On the basis of the information that is available to us, I think we are doing something.

I could not, but be extremely pleased at our efforts, especially, in the area of poverty because it was everybody's favourite topic to talk about Trinidad and Tobago with all this money having a 30 per cent poverty rate. Today, when on the basis of the information that is available to us, it is trending downwards and it is at 17 per cent, we have commentators saying: "The number wrong, the figure wrong, it can't be right". Mr. Vice-President, it is right! Because we see it. We see it in the consumption patterns; we see it in the quality of life of some of our people and we see it in employment. We see it! And therefore since we see it and we believe it, we know that it is happening and we commend all those who are doing it and we reject all those who, basically, say differently.

Mr. Vice-President, Sen. Ato Boldon was dealt with comprehensively, so I would not deal with that. Sen. Mary King, I have absolutely no difficulty with some of things that Sen. King said and in many instances I believe she is right. However, we have to find a way in which its goes beyond simply talking about it and expecting that something will happen. I was making the point to her sometime ago that while all of these things are good, we have to move the country in a way in which people are on board with these issues and they understand these issues. The most difficult issue we have is taking people along as we move on, because if we do not do that then what we would be guilty of is increasing the gap between the haves and the have-nots. I think in a lot of instances what is happening is that timing is an issue and I believe that we are dealing with that by putting in place a lot of the issues that we need to put in place, and we will continue to deal with that.

I am sorry that Sen. Mark is leaving because I left him for last, I had a number of things that I wanted to tell him.

**Sen. Dumas:** You are running, come back.

*[Sen. Mark returns to his seat]*

**Sen. Mark:** I want to hear my friend.

**Hon. Senator:** You duck and run.

**Sen. Mark:** No, that is not for me, that is for my friend. [*Inaudible*]  
[*Laughter*]

**Sen. The Hon. C. Enill:** I just want to tell Sen. Mary King to keep on keeping on; the work that she is doing, and the things that she is engaged in have not escaped us and she would be happy to see when we provide her with the Vision 2020 plan that some of the comments are inside there.

Mr. Vice-President, I left Sen. Wade Mark for last because I wanted to deal with two aspects of Sen. Mark's contribution. One had to do with information that in the course of his contribution he provided to us. Let me tell you the first bit of information. He says: "New information has revealed that the pension plan for public officers, if fully funded will require \$40 billion to be deposited. Is the Government aware of this?"

The Government is not aware of this new information available to Sen. Wade Mark. Perhaps he would share with us this information. The current and future pension plan liabilities of public officers will be determined by the actuarial consultants as part of the pension reform exercise. The reason that there has been some difficulty, is that the exercise needed the records to be correct and the difficulty we have been having over the last 20 years—he knows it as well—is because anytime we got an actuary to sit and look at it, the base numbers were not available.

This exercise would entail a lot of things: The development of a modern occupational pension plan, the quantification of the current and future liabilities and how these liabilities should be recognized and funded in a cost efficient manner. The tender for the pension consultancy closes on November 02, 2006 and we expect to have the consultants on board in the first week of January 2007. This matter has been going on for 25 years now—

**Sen. Dr. Saith:** He has done the work for you.

**Sen. The Hon. C. Enill:** If he has done the work, well he should give it to me. Sorry, Mr. Vice-President. This is a matter that has been going on for about 25 to 30 years now, it is a matter that we are uncomfortable with and it is a matter that we are doing something with, and as of January 2007 this matter would be moving in a particular way.

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The other issue he asked was, “Were oil prices to decline substantially, how would the Government meet its pension obligations, by depreciating the currency to those hard-working public officers?” Pension payments are a direct charge on the Consolidated Fund, and therefore, have a first call on the resources of the Consolidated Fund. “When we were there we submitted...” Sen. Mark “a proposal to address this unfunded liability.” I checked with the Ministry of Finance and they have said that they do not have any records of this proposal, and if the Senator would wish to resubmit those proposals we would be most happy to look at it then. However, we have our own proposals on how this liability could be funded and these would be discussed with the pension consultants and a financing plan agreed and implemented.

**8.00 p.m.**

Mr. Vice-President, Sen. Mark went on. “There is a rule in the International Accounting Standard which requires that the surplus or the deficit in a pension plan must be shown in the accounts”. The current public service pension plan is an unfunded plan whose liability is a direct charge on the Consolidated Fund. There is no pension fund, as such, there is no surplus or deficit. The international accounting standard applies to companies and in fact, IAS 19 applies specifically to the accounting treatment of private sector pension funds, including the treatment of fund surplus or deficit which must be shown on the organization's balance sheet.

He went on; “The UNC accuses the PNM Government of failing to fully disclose its pension liability to the country and to the people.” This liability did not arise during the PNM administration; it has been there since the pension plan was first put into effect in 1934. Did not his Government, the UNC, when it was in Government disclose to this country and to the people? How was this liability paid during his administration? Why did they not put in place a financing arrangement for this liability? Why did they leave it for this administration to deal with it, especially when they already had the proposals as to how the liability should be funded?

He continues:

“This growing cost of old age pension, now dubbed senior citizen’s grant is a direct result of government's policy failure to implement a pension plan for government daily rated employees.”



Mr. Vice-President, the growing cost of the senior citizen's grant is the result of a number of factors including: an increase in the number of senior citizens; an increase in longevity; increases in the senior citizen's grant; and increases in the income qualifying ceiling. In the case of the pension plan for daily rated employees, negotiations and discussions are currently being held between the Ministry of Finance and the representative union, the NUGFW. The most recent meeting was held yesterday evening, Wednesday 18, 2006, and another is scheduled for tomorrow, Friday, October 20, 2006 at 8.30. That is one element of Sen. Mark's contribution that I wanted to deal with. The other element that I wanted to deal with, is basically some contradictions which I would just like to identify.

Sen. Mark talks about the question of the Government basically losing its way and the Government not being able to determine what is happening as it relates to the governance of this country. Mr. Vice-President, this particular administration has had a history of being in Government and has an organization that is 50 years old, and therefore, we have basically built this country on a number of plans and programmes over a series of years, and therefore, we have the ability, we have the wherewithal, we have the knowledge, and we have the experience to move this country forward and I can say with certainty, that he and his administration do not have it.

Sen. Mark says, in closing:

"The good book says, weeping may endure only for the night, but joy comes in the morning. The sun will rise again and the balisier shall wither and eventually die."

We say, [*Laughter*] Mr. Vice-President, from success to significance, the good book says:

"For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not harm you; plans to give you hope and a future—Jeremiah 29:11"

[*Laughter and desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

**Sen. The Hon. C. Enill:** Mr. Vice-President, in accordance with Standing Orders 63, I beg to move that the Bill be not committed to a committee of the whole Senate.

*Question put and agreed to.*

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

*Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.*

*Adjournment*

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#### 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 adjourn to Tuesday, October 31, 2006 at 1.30 p.m. At that time, we will debate item 2 on the Order Paper, “An Act to make provision for the transmission of advance passenger information respecting persons travelling to Trinidad and Tobago and for matters related thereto.”

#### Divali and Eid Greetings

**The Minister of Public Administration and Information and Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith):** Mr. Vice-President, before I take my seat, let me take the opportunity, we have two religious holidays coming up, one I believe on Saturday and on Tuesday. Although they represent holidays in the faith of the Hindus and the Muslims, I think the whole country celebrates what has now become in my view, national holidays. I want to take the opportunity to wish all Hindus a happy Divali, all Muslims a happy Eid and the whole country, happy Divali and happy Eid.

Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President.

**Sen. Wade Mark:** Mr. Vice-President, I would like to take the opportunity on behalf of the alternative Government, to extend Divali and Eid greetings to the national community. These two auspicious and holy occasions have many common trends; they are occasions with more social than religious connotations. They are people oriented occasions during which enmities are forgotten and families and friends meet and rekindle.

Divali and Eid ul Fitr symbolize the unity in diversity as every home celebrates in its own unique and special way. And so as we prepare to celebrate these occasions, let us not forget their common message of universal love to all mankind; for it is love alone that will bring peace and admit us to the heavenly regions. With this lesson in mind, may the goddess, Mother Lakshmi, and Almighty Allah, continue to shower their light of love and bless us all, illuminating our thoughts and propelling us forward, always to act in a positive manner for the welfare of our nation and towards a much better society in this material world of mundane existence.

Mr. Vice-President, in closing, it is our hope on these benches and in our party that the national community would seek to remove darkness in favour of light, injustice in favour of justice, ignorance in favour of knowledge and, most

certainly, to triumph for the good and betterment in their lives and so cleanse themselves from the evil that surrounds us all. Eid Mubarak, Shubh Divali [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Prof. Kenneth Ramchand:** Mr. Vice-President, on behalf of my colleagues on the Independent Bench, I would like to endorse the very significant opinion of Sen. Dr. Saith, that these two festivals are fast becoming national festivals and indeed for most of us, they are national festivals. Nevertheless, I wish to offer greetings to the Hindu and Muslim communities who have kept these festivals alive and made the meaning of them available to the whole community. We would like to wish that the whole nation enjoy the holidays and reflect on the meaning of the occasions that are being celebrated. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Vice-President:** Hon. Members, before I put the question on the adjournment, I almost said that I would begin my contribution, [*Laughter*] but fear not, I am not going for an hour. I would like to thank all Members of this august Senate for what I consider a very, very good debate. We have had some very, very good moments from Monday until this evening, and apart from a slight down here and there, it was really good.

I think whatever happened with the West Indies yesterday, must have inspired those leaders who selected the team for yesterday. Yesterday would stand out as probably the best day, except for a little turbulence here and there. I think it was very good. I want to thank all for the lengthy hours that they put in. I want to thank the security service for being here with us right through. I must thank the parliamentary staff. [*Desk thumping*] I must thank all those people who were present in the public gallery, members of the media and our own technical staff. [*Desk thumping*]

You would notice that the public gallery was well supported over the last few days, please do not let us chase the people away. As I said, I thank you all for a very good debate and it is good that we could bring the debate this evening to completion.

In terms of Divali and Eid, I myself would like to offer sincere greetings to the Hindu community and to the Muslim community. The festivals are in truth and fact, very, very widespread now and they are not only celebrated by these two communities. They are both considered national and this is why we have national holidays for them. You may be surprised that Tobago lights up for Divali.

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

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**Mr. Vice-President:** You are not surprised. Okay. Tobago lights up for Divali and the people there celebrate Eid also and it is really a national occasion. I only hope that we will exercise a lot more tolerance for each other at this time and while we talk about the peace and the love, while we talk about it, let us all try to spread it. [*Desk thumping*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Senate adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 8.17 p.m.*