

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

*Wednesday, October 10, 2018*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

**PRAYERS**

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**PERSONAL EXPLANATION**

**Madam Speaker:** Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*]

**Member for Oropouche East  
(Spurious and Untrue Allegations)**

**The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, pursuant to your leave, I provide this personal explanation in accordance with Standing Order 23. I am responding to spurious and wholly untrue allegations that were made against me in this House, by the Member of Parliament for Oropouche East during a contribution he had made to the House on October 09, 2018. The record needs to be set straight.

Madam Speaker, you would recall that on December 15, 2017 the Member for Oropouche East made an allegation that he immediately withdrew from when challenged by the hon. Attorney General to take ownership of. The allegation that the Member made was to the effect that a “very senior Government Minister” was involved in the matter involving A&V Drilling and Petrotrin. Madam Speaker, in the *Guardian* newspaper of December 16<sup>th</sup>, the following day, 2017, reporter Khamal Georges described the events in the House to which I refer as follows, and I quote here, Madam Speaker:

“Oropouche East MP Dr. Roodal Moonilal made a scandalous allegation against Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley and the owner of A&V Oil and Gas

Hanif Baksh in Parliament last evening. However, moments after making the statement, Moonilal was forced to”—withdraw—“it.”

I continue to quote, Madam Speaker:

“Earlier in his contribution, he told the House of Representatives that he recently visited Florida to ‘conduct research’—and I continue to quote—  
“and would later reveal his findings.

Moonilal read from an email after he said Attorney General Faris Al-Rawi ‘invited’ him to read the contents of the documents in his possession.”

—Mr. Georges’ reporting.

At the time, the Member for Oropouche East was asked to take ownership of his allegation that I was involved in some nefarious bank transaction involving the transfer of a sum of money to me in a bank account in Miami, and that the evidence of this was contained in an email that he, the Member, had in his possession which he purported to initially refer to, but immediately withdrew from, without producing a copy of the email to you or the House, Madam Speaker.

Of course, Madam Speaker, even though the Member ran from what he initially said on that day, and withdrew, the damage and harm that he intended to cause, in a most malicious manner, was already done. This particular Member for Oropouche East uses the fact that our proceedings are carried and broadcast live via radio, television and on the World Wide Web to a global audience to malign and attempt to damage me and other Members of the Government with complete fabrications of untruths, putting his malicious untruths out there and then withdrawing from same, with the damage to reputations already being done.

Madam Speaker, this type of behaviour is unparliamentary, unbecoming of any Member of Parliament and to be condemned. It is deserving of being brought before the Privileges Committee of the Parliament and dealt with appropriately.

Yesterday, Madam Speaker, October 09, 2018, the Member for Oropouche East once again, in this unacceptable manner, a manner that is wholly unacceptable, came to the House and engaged in this behaviour under the cover of parliamentary privilege. His colleague, one Devant Maharaj, just before the Member spoke, during the tea break, began circulating the following message via social media, and this, Madam Speaker, is clear evidence of collusion and malice. I quote the Devant Maharaj circulation:

Listen to Dr. Roodal Moonilal, MP, next in the budget debate. Dr. Moonilal promises fireworks in his contribution for the Opposition UNC.

Minutes later, Dr. Moonilal proceeded to enter the budget debate and tell this House, its Members and the listening and viewing audience, which includes the members of the public beyond the shores of Trinidad and Tobago, that he had been travelling to Miami—similar to what he said in December 2017—on few occasions because he “had wind of something”. He said that he had information—

“that pointed me to a bank in Florida, C&C International...Regions Bank, account...0229459435; ABA:062005690; swift code: UPNBUS44MIA; 8200 North West 36<sup>th</sup> St., Doral, Florida, 33166.”

He went on to state that he had a document, a bank document, that showed—

“a beneficiary account number, IBAN, foreign, with a number 114515. No purpose of funds, so it is a transfer document, beneficiary recipients, no purpose of funds, but additional instructions for attention.”

And then, Madam Speaker, he said:

“There are two names here, one is Vidya Deokiesingh and a bank in Florida. The second name I cannot call in Parliament. I cannot. The second name I cannot call. But you see, Madam Speaker, I cannot call the second name, but I asked a week or two ago, I asked the Member for Diego Martin West

whether he had any interest in A&V Drilling... Madam Speaker, Vidya Deokiesingh and another name, which I cannot call, is here on a piece of paper before me with a beneficiary account, Formula One Trading. Madam Speaker, all I am asking to Vidya Deokiesingh and another unnamed person is, ‘What business did you have with Vidya Deokiesingh’?”

Madam Speaker, at this stage, the malicious and damaging die was cast. The hon. Attorney General then intervened and asked that the Member take ownership of his allegations. There was gamesmanship displayed and reluctance on the part of Dr. Moonilal to bolt his allegations against me to his chest. Eventually, under much pressure, the Member for Oropouche East said,

“...that the two names I have here, ‘Additional instructions, Attention’, V-I-D-Y-A D-E-O-K-I-E-S-I-N-G-H and the second name, K-E-I-T-H R-O-W-L-E-Y. I have read it, Madam Speaker...”

The Member verbally identified me at this stage, Madam Speaker. He, however, intentionally failed to provide a copy of any single document to you, the House or even the public himself—

**Mr. Lee:** Madam Speaker, I draw to your attention Standing Order 23(2).

**Madam Speaker:** Prime Minister, the 10 minutes have now expired.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis):** Madam Speaker, I seek your leave under Standing Order 122(1) to move for the suspension of Standing Order 23(2).

**Madam Speaker:** My leave is granted. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Lee:** Madam Speaker, I object.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 122(1), I beg to move that Standing Order 23(2) be suspended for the Prime Minister to complete his personal explanation that will require a further five minutes.

Personal Explanation  
Hon. Dr. K. Rowley (cont'd)

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**Mr. Lee:** Madam Speaker, I would like that to be put to a vote, please.

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Whip, I am certain that you are quite familiar with the procedure under the Standing Orders. But thank you for the guidance.

*Question put.*

*The House divided:* Ayes 23 Noes 16

AYES

Robinson-Regis, Hon. C.

Rowley, Hon. Dr. K.

Al-Rawi, Hon. F.

Imbert, Hon. C.

Young, Hon. S. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, while the division is taking place, I would really require silence.

*Division continues:*

Deyalsingh, Hon. T.

Hinds, Hon. F.

Mitchell, Hon. R.

Cudjoe, Hon. S.

Garcia, Hon. A.

Crichlow-Cockburn, Hon. C.

Forde, E.

Dillon, Hon. Maj. Gen. E.

Webster-Roy, Hon. A.

Gadsby-Dolly, Hon. Dr. N.

Mc Donald, Hon. M.

Francis, Hon. Dr. L.

Personal Explanation  
Hon. Dr. K. Rowley (cont'd)

Jennings-Smith, Mrs. G.

Olivierre, Ms. N.

Antoine, Brig. Gen. A.

Leonce, A.

Smith, D.

Cuffie, M.

NOES

Lee, D.

Persad-Bissessar SC, Mrs. K.

Charles, R.

Rambachan, Dr. S.

Karim, F.

Tewarie, Dr. B.

Moonilal, Dr. R.

Newallo-Hosein, Mrs. C.

Gopeesingh, Dr. T.

Gayadeen-Gopeesingh, Mrs. V.

Ramadharr, P.

Padarath, B.

Bodoe, Dr. L.

Paray, R.

Ramdial, Ms. R.

Singh, G.

*Question agreed to. [Desk thumping]*

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Madam Speaker, I want to thank the Members for permitting me to put on the record in defence of my reputation. As I have said, as I

state here, Madam Speaker, and have already done elsewhere—no, I think I have—  
[Pause]

**Dr. Moonilal:** Not coherent.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Madam Speaker, I just—Madam Speaker, the Member verbally identified me at this stage of his contribution. He, however, intentionally failed to provide a copy of any single document to you, the House, or even to the public, himself, to support his allegations against me. However, minutes after he spoke in this House, pieces of the defamatory documents were broadcast worldwide by individuals and agents, including other Members of this House.

Madam Speaker, what the Member did was carefully, intentionally and maliciously, calculated to defame me, damage me and my reputation. He imputed impropriety to me and provided only bogus documents. This is unacceptable and cannot be left unchallenged.

I state here, Madam Speaker, as I have already done, that there is absolutely no truth whatsoever to what the Member for Oropouche East has stated and/or imputed. I have no bank account in Miami, USA; I was not party to any banking transaction with Mr. Deokiesingh, Formula One Trading, or any person or persons with respect to any bank in Florida in the United States, or any bank in the world, for that matter, Madam Speaker.

Let the Member for Oropouche provide the document—this bank document that he got wind of, that he made trips to Miami to get and has in his possession—to you, the House and to the media outside of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. I have observed, Madam Speaker, that as he has taken ownership of his performance within these walls, he has since confirmed his libel outside. The treatment of this development is for another place and another day.

Madam Speaker, I have today instructed my attorneys-at-law to write to the bank that the address he quoted seems to be at—Regions Bank,...8200 NW 36<sup>th</sup> Street, Doral, Florida 33166—to obtain from them confirmation that I have never done any banking with them, whatsoever, because this is the truth. The Member has a modus operandi that whenever he comes to Parliament and hides behind parliamentary privilege to malign me or any other Member, he does not provide any document to you or the House, but almost instantaneously, the allegation and any document that he purportedly has in his possession, appears on Facebook and on other social media. It is then circulated on social media by primed persons associated with the UNC Opposition and on Facebook pages controlled by the UNC Opposition. Additionally, selected sound-bite video recordings of his contribution, where he abuses parliamentary privilege, is also circulated on social media. Madam Speaker, I submit that this is calculated to damage, and to damage me in particular, irreparably.

I remind you, Madam Speaker, and the population, by extension, that this same Member, when he was Leader of Government Business in the House, between 2010 and 2015, told us that he approved that distasteful rant by the then Member for Tobago East, Vernella Alleyne-Toppin, when she came to this House and in the most vicious, vile, hateful and repulsive manner, cast all manner of aspersions not only on me, but on my deceased father. This is now becoming a habit of this Member for Oropouche East.

Madam Speaker, I reject, without reservation, the allegations made against me by this Member in his budget contribution yesterday, and I state in the clearest possible manner to you, this House and the public, that I have had no banking transaction of the nature suggested by my colleague from Oropouche East. I have no bank accounts in Miami, Florida. Many years ago, in the 1970s, I opened a



bank account in New York, USA, to change traveller's cheques. I am not even sure if it is still open or active.

But apart from that, I have had, and have no bank account in the United States and I was not party to any banking transaction with Mr. Vidya Deokiesingh and Formula One Trading. The email that the Member referred to, and that I have seen being circulated by UNC members, does not involve me. The email address is not mine. It is jrowley.rawlins@gmail.com. That is not my email address.

In these circumstances, Members of the House will pursue the appropriate action against the Member for Oropouche East and I will be seeking legal advice as to what action I can pursue outside of Parliament against those who republished these fabrications.

Madam Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Moonilal:** Madam Speaker, Standing Order 23, and the learnings of *May's Parliamentary*—

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member—

**Mr. Hinds:** Sit down!

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Laventille West, please contain yourself. Hon. Member, Standing Order 23 does not allow any right of reply. It is very different to Statements by Ministers.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Madam Speaker, on page—*May's Parliamentary Practice* provides for reply when a Member is involved—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Hinds:** Sit down. The Speaker is on her legs. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member for Oropouche East, I have ruled that Standing Order 23, as contained in our Standing Orders, does not allow what you are seeking to do. It is quite different to the Standing Order that relates to Statements by Ministers.

Personal Explanation  
 Hon. Dr. K. Rowley (cont'd)

2018.10.10

**Dr. Moonilal:** Madam Speaker, I agree with you, but personal statements—

**Madam Speaker:** Member, I do not recognize you! Please resume your seat!

[*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Member:** PNM dictatorship.

**Madam Speaker:** I do understand that there is a certain privilege attendant to Members here with freedom of speech, but where your expressions certainly reflect on the ruling of the Chair, that is beyond the limits of the privilege and I am not going to tolerate it. Clerk, please proceed.

**COMMITTEE OF PRIVILEGES  
 (MEMBER FOR OROPOUCHE EAST)**

**The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):**

[*Desk thumping*] Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move a matter directly concerning the privileges of this House. Madam Speaker, during the debate in this House yesterday, October 9<sup>th</sup>, the Member for Oropouche East made statements in this House which included false and wholly fictitious allegations against a Member of this House.

In making the statements, the Member for Oropouche East presented them to this House as matters of fact and freely and voluntarily took responsibility for them. Madam Speaker, the Member referred to cheque payments made, at or around June 2017 from a company named A&V Drilling Company Limited, to different contractors. He added and I quote:

“Deokiesingh has gone, but you see, Madam Speaker, one day almost I think in a humorous way, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, my very dear friend from Port of Spain North/ St. Ann’s West...jokingly said to me that he understood I was going to Miami a lot and the Americans he said,

or somebody was interested in my travel. So today, I want to explain to him the nature of my travel.”

I continue to quote, Madam Speaker:

“You see, Madam Speaker, I did journey on a few occasions...I had wind of something. And I had information that pointed me to a bank in Florida...

Madam Speaker, this bank has documents at the bank to a beneficiary account number, IBAN, foreign, with a number 114515. No purpose of funds, so it is a transfer document, beneficiary recipients, no purpose of funds, but additional instructions for attention. There are two names here. One is Vidya Deokiesingh...Now, what would this Petrotrin employee be doing with banking business in Florida? What?

The second name I cannot call in the Parliament. I cannot. The second name I cannot call. But you see, Madam Speaker, I cannot call the second name but I asked a week or two ago, I asked the Member for Diego Martin West whether he had any interest in AV Drilling and he wanted to fight me. He said, ‘Come outside on the pavement.’ Today,”—I say—“come inside in the House.”

**2.00 p.m.**

After he was challenged based on a valid point of order, the Member continued making allegations based on documents in his possession, the source and date of which he refused to reveal. Madam Speaker, again I quote:

“This document, Madam Speaker, suggests that there are some banking transactions and information involving Mr. Vidya Deokiesingh or one Vidya Deokiesingh. There is no Mr. or Mrs. there, but Vidya Deokiesingh and another name of a Member of the House. Would you wish me to call that name?...

...Madam Speaker, I really do have a couple more points to make, so I will just indicate, according to your ruling, that the two names I have here, 'Additional instructions, Attention', V-I-D-Y-A D-E-O-K-I-E-S-I-N-G-H and the second name, K-E-I-T-H R-O-W-L-E-Y."

He continued and again I quote, Madam Speaker:

"Madam Speaker, it has also been in the public domain before today. This is not the first time now, before today, it was in the public domain on a site, on a website of a reference in relation to the AV Drilling matter, a reference to one Charlie Diaz...Because it was in the public domain already that there was information being asked, purportedly being asked for, on Charlie Diaz. And information pertaining to the banking business of Charlie Diaz."

I continue to quote, Madam Speaker:

"It has also been in the public domain so what I am saying now is certainly not fresh, that, in an email from the Internet which was circulated months ago, there was an email from one Justin Soogrim. And Justin Soogrim is sending an email on an email address of Vivian Baksh."

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member, your time has expired.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Madam Speaker, I seek your leave under Standing Order 122(1), to move for the suspension of Standing Order 23(2).

**Madam Speaker:** You have got my leave to seek for a suspension of Standing Order 32(5), if that is what you are seeking.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** I am guided and I appreciate the clarification. Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 122(1), I beg to move that Standing Order 32(5) be suspended for the Leader of the House to complete her Motion that will require a further 10 minutes.

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:** Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. And Madam Speaker, I continue to quote:

“This was already in the public domain, so this is not new.

Good morning hon. Prime Minister,

The following is the banking particulars for Mr. Charlie Diaz as requested.

Bank information, C&C International Trading bank account, and all the accounts there. This is old information; this is not new information.”

Madam Speaker, a consideration of the Member's *Hansard* record will reveal a Member, who by his actions was plainly hesitant. Obviously, unconvinced of the veracity of his statements, but who was determined to mislead this House and cast negative aspersions on another Member and then run. Madam Speaker, that amounts to high contempt of this House. [*Desk thumping*] These statements by the Member have been covered by both the print and electronic media, including social media. They have gone far and wide. As you know, Madam Speaker, the Parliament has several platforms over which it streams and broadcasts its proceedings. So these statements have been widely published. Additionally, they have been the talking point of several radio programmes this morning.

Madam Speaker, the sole purpose of these statements, albeit incongruous and disjointed, was to seek to contrive allegations of a very serious nature against the Member for Diego Martin West. These allegations are all untrue. In making these statements:

1. The Member for Oropouche East wilfully and intentionally misled the House;
2. The Member for Oropouche East made injurious allegations against the Member for Diego Martin West when no substantive Motion was

before the House. Madam Speaker, that was intentional;

3. The Member for Oropouche East relied upon undated and patently fictitious documents which the Member, any Member, should have known were deceptive and false;
4. The Member for Oropouche East undermined the dignity of the House by abusing the privilege of freedom of speech in a most offensive manner.

Madam Speaker, in moving this Motion of Privilege today in this House, I ask you to consider that the Member sought to convince you and this honourable House that he had credible information. After all, in his own words, he journeyed several times to Miami to conduct an investigation because he had wind of something that led him to a bank. This bank had in his words “documents at the bank” inferring that he obtained documents from this bank. The Member chose not to share such documents with this House, but caused two slips of paper to be circulated on UNC Facebook sites and to be otherwise circulated by Opposition activists. And, Madam Speaker, these activists include UNC Councillor Marisa Ramlogan, attorney Darryl Heeralal and economist Patrick Watson. No responsible person could consider the information being circulated to be trustworthy, and today I am providing the Clerk with copies of these documents.

Madam Speaker, when you look at the information you will observe, they are nothing but flimsy pieces of paper. The so-called bank document is unsigned, unstamped, undated, unauthentic, and on its very face appears to be bogus. The other flimsy piece of paper is supposedly an email that the Member claims was found on the Internet, entitled “Banking Coordinates”. The privilege of freedom of speech is regarded as the most important of privileges and, Madam Speaker, I ask you to consider the seriousness of this matter which at first glance there can be no

doubt that a serious misleading of the House has occurred.

Moreover, Madam Speaker, this Member has brought this House into odium and ridicule by his reckless behaviour and sinister conduct which, notwithstanding the cloak of parliamentary cover, can be clearly seen to be no more than a wicked ungodly plot by dangerous and devious persons targeted at the Member for Diego Martin West. I therefore move that the statements of the Member for Oropouche East be referred to the Committee of Privileges as a serious matter of high contempt of this House for investigation and report.

I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, I shall reserve my decision on whether a prima facie case has been made out and I shall deliver my decision on a later date.

### **APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2019) BILL, 2018**

[Fifth Day]

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [October 05, 2018]:*

That the Bill be now read a second time.

*Question again proposed.*

**Madam Speaker:** When we adjourned, the hon. Minister of Finance was winding up. You have 43 minutes of original time left.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I indicated last night before we adjourned, I have seen a level of desperation setting in among hon. Members opposite. I have seen depression setting in to the extent that it is clear that they recognize the inevitability of their defeat in the 2020 elections. [*Desk thumping*] How else would one explain, Madam Speaker, the Member of Parliament for Oropouche East who as usual is absent, posting on his Facebook page the following words:

“This is the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago...that primary

Ministers of Government, including the Prime Minister, have declined to participate in a budget debate... This comes amid major allegations levelled by the Opposition...”—and this is the part that leads me to believe that there is some form of depression setting in—“in particular, documentary evidence by...Moonilal of gross financial wrongdoing by the Prime Minister.”

The Member for Oropouche East has actually posted this on his Facebook page.

**Mr. Hinds:** Send that to the lawyers.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Well, it is in the public domain, so it does not attract parliamentary privilege.

Madam Speaker, before I go into the comments made by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, and other Members opposite who made contributions, let me just deal with some statements made by the Member for Oropouche East.

Now, in his contribution based on the information available to me, I am satisfied that the Member for Oropouche East was absolutely reckless. In an attempt to “buss a mark”, the Member made certain statements about a matter related to the failed Beetham wastewater project, and he indicated that that project could be completed at no cost to the Government for US \$80 million, which is about TT \$540 million. He said four contractors want to do it. He also alleged that this PNM administration had engaged Ernst & Young without tender and paid Ernst & Young \$90 million, and he was so intent on putting that figure into the public domain, that he kept saying it over and over. I have his *Hansard* contribution here, of yesterday, and I would read:

“They paid \$90 million to Ernst & Young without tendering for that work. Without tendering for that, \$90 million paid to Ernst & Young”—and so intent on hammering in it is 90, he said—“nine zero”—in case you thought it



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was 19—“paid over a period of time to write this 21-page report.....some work, interview, 90, nine zero million. They paid a Senior Counsel, Deborah Peake, \$25 million to work with NGC to find corruption. Check that up quick—90 and 25, 115 gone.”

Then he goes on to say that the contractor and NGC are in arbitration in which NGC could lose and have to pay another \$200 million. So the Member for Caroni East chimed in, “That is \$300 million”. And then he goes on:

“Four contractors want to do it; 900 million spent already. The Government position is, ‘Do not do it, because dat had corruption’, which \$115 million cannot find.”

Then he goes on and on repeating these untruths, Madam Speaker. These are malicious untruths and I stand by what I am about to say.

There is malice because Ernst & Young was engaged by Indar Maharaj, President of the National Gas Company on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December, 2014. Nine months before the general election, a UNC appointed board, under the Kamla Persad-Bissessar Government, and I do not believe that the Member for Oropouche East was not aware of that and that is why I say his statements were malicious. And the UNC board of the NGC in December 2014, was concerned with the financial performance, the timeliness, the risk management with respect to that wastewater project, they too had concerns, and as a consequence sought independent review on the performance of the project from Ernst & Young. Ernst & Young provided written and verbal feedback at most monthly board meetings between December 2014 and September 2015, to the UNC appointed board, under the UNC Government. The reports identified significant areas of weakness, the findings provided recommendations on remedial action and proactive actions to be taken.

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Madam Speaker, during that period of engagement by the UNC appointed board, under the UNC Government, Ernst & Young was paid \$8 million by the UNC to investigate the wastewater project. When we came into office we met Ernst & Young working for the UNC board of NGC because the UNC had serious concerns about the project themselves. Not all of this old talk we are hearing from the Member for Oropouche East—

**Dr. Rowley:** Some people.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Yes, some, not all. You are absolutely right, hon. Prime Minister. Yes, some of them had no concern. And the NGC continued to engage Ernst & Young to assess the project because the project was going into litigation and arbitration. So Ernst & Young was engaged by the NGC, continued to be engaged. This is where this statement he made that Ernst & Young was engaged by the PNM without tender, is a monstrous untruth, Madam Speaker. Ernst & Young was engaged by the UNC. I do not know if it was with tender or without tender. That is irrelevant. The fact is that they were hired by the UNC and they continued to work for NGC under the PNM. They made a number of presentations, they collected evidence, they examined claims and they prepared a brief to assist the NGC in its litigation against SIS and the ongoing arbitration.

The total fees from December 2014 to September 2015, that is nine months, was \$8 million, and the total fees from October 2015 to July 2018, three years, was \$12 million. So the UNC paid Ernst & Young almost a million dollars a month before the general election to investigate the Beetham wastewater project, and then Ernst & Young continued to work for the PNM but at a vastly reduced rate, being paid \$12 million over a three-year period, where the UNC paid them \$8 million over a nine-year period.

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**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Nine months.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Nine months. Eight million for nine months is what the UNC paid them. UNC hired them and the PNM continued with them and paid them \$12 million over a three-year period. Vastly reduced fees. So this allegation from the Member for Oropouche is a monstrous, deceitful untruth. He must know that the UNC hired Ernst & Young. This allegation about no tendering is a terrible untruth. Let us come now to Senior Counsel Deborah Peake. That was equally horrible, equally horrible. What does he say about—and you had the Member for Caroni East adding up 90 and 25 is 115, like an echo down next to the Member for Oropouche East. Let us see what he had to say about Senior Counsel Peake. He said—top of page 14 of the *Hansard*:

\$25 million paid to senior counsel Deborah Peake—“to work with NGC to find corruption.”

That too is a monstrous, deceitful untruth, Madam Speaker. The fact of the matter is that Deborah Peake SC has been paid from October 2015 to date, to deal with litigation including a freezing order that went all the way to the Privy Council and then went back to the High Court, and arbitration, \$2.6 million.

So the Member for Oropouche East has converted \$2.6 million for work done over a three-year period, into a payment of \$25 million; just like that. And slander and tarnish someone who not is not a member of this House and does not have privilege and cannot come in here and refute and rebut that monstrous untruth from the Member for Oropouche East. It is disgraceful. So Ernst & Young was hired by the UNC, not by the PNM without tender. Ernst & Young was not paid \$90 million, that is totally untrue. And Ms. Peake was paid 2.6 million, not \$25 million. But the Member for Oropouche East in his quest to somehow try to sanitize that

corrupt Beetham wastewater project, came with all of these bogus figures, bad information, wrong information. Let us go now to what the NGC has put out in press releases.

The NGC on July 16, 2018, issued the following press release:

“Today the High Court of justice granted an interim freezing injunction against the assets of Super Industrial Services Limited (“SIS”) up to a value of TT\$180M, pending the hearing and determination of NGC’s application for relief from sanctions. The matter next comes up for hearing on December 13, 2018.”

And NGC goes on to make these very telling statements, and they made these statements outside, not inside.

“In granting previous injunctions against SIS...in 2016, the High Court found...

- There was a good and proper basis for the continuation of the...injunctions.
- There is a real risk that SIS will dissipate/secrete its assets so as to hinder/defraud NGC should NGC receive an award against SIS in arbitration proceedings...”

But most importantly, because the Member for Oropouche East tried to sanitize this whole thing, this is what NGC had to say publicly, that a High Court found:

“The mortgages and debenture which form the subject matter of the High Court claim were executed with fraudulent intent and registered to deceive creditors of SIS.”

A finding of the High Court.

Let me repeat, Madam Speaker. In July 2018, the National Gas Company issued a

public release, in the public domain, outside this Parliament, and made the point that the High Court had found that:

“The mortgages and debenture which form the subject matter of the High Court claim were executed with fraudulent intent and registered to deceive creditors of SIS.”

On July 18<sup>th</sup>, two days later, the NGC made another statement and in this statement, Madam Speaker, the NGC made the point that it is seeking to recover the sum of, in excess of \$400 million from SIS because the case against SIS is that they over-invoiced, they overbilled, and they were paid more than 400 million—it is in the public domain—more than they should have been paid, and for that reason the court has issued an interim injunction freezing \$180 million of SIS assets. But, I have to sit in this Parliament and listen to the Member for Oropouche East talk about this project in such glowing terms and say the value of the assets on the ground is \$900 million.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, Standing Order 53(1)(e). I cannot hear my colleague because of Oropouche East’s continuous—

**Madam Speaker:** I just want to issue a general warning to all of us. I would like to hear the Minister of Finance. I think we are engaged in serious business and I would like all Members to accord the business by their conduct, the seriousness that it deserves. Please continue, Minister.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Despite the fact that it is in the public domain based on audits, based on investigations by Ernst & Young and others, that there is a case to be made that SIS has over-billed the country \$400 million, the Member for Oropouche East said, “Oh, you have assets on the ground worth \$900 million”. Madam Speaker, that was not all, you know.

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That was not all. He then went after the hon. Prime Minister and let us see what he had to say because I have done my research.

He said, and I read from page 20 of the *Hansard*, that AV Drilling is linked to a company in bankruptcy. There are strange cheques paid for an individual of an account of AV Drilling. Then he goes on to list the cheques, 22<sup>nd</sup> of June, 2017; 21<sup>st</sup> of June, 2017. Then he adds up the cheques, he says one was to Persad Rohit, one was Jokhan General Contractors. He adds it all up, he says \$4 million over two days by way of cheques. He was laying the ground for his slander. He then goes on to say:

“...I did journey on a few occasions because I had wind of something. And I had information that pointed me to a bank in Florida, C&C International Trading, Regions Bank, account number”— so and so— “8200 North West, 36<sup>th</sup> St., Doral...”

And then he goes on to talk about this bank has documents to a beneficiary account. Then he names one of the persons who is listed—this is what the hon. Member for Oropouche East said, Madam Speaker. I am reading from the *Hansard*. [*Desk thumping*] I am responding to the slander that the Member for Oropouche East put on the record. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Moonilal:** Madam Speaker, 48(6). Nobody has said anything about slander. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Diego Martin North/East, in terms of a particular word, I would like you to say it a different way. All right? Please.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** That is fine, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, he continued to read from these bogus documents he had in his hand and he was referring to documents that are widely available on the Internet, posted there by UNC activists

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including a UNC Alderman, and what he was doing when I did my own research, he referred to some bogus email to an email address that has no relationship whatsoever to the hon. Member for Diego Martin West. When one looks at the document that is posted in the public domain on UNC pages, one sees it is written to an email address jrowley.rollinston@gmail.com. There is nobody in this Parliament that has such an email address, including and most especially, the hon. Member for Diego Martin West, and in that email which speaks to nothing—it speaks to nothing—there is this email to this email address—we do not even know if that is a real email address, but what we do know, it is not the email address of the hon. Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*]

There is a reference to one Charlie Diaz and these are the banking details for one Charlie Diaz, and this is the name of the bank, and this is the account number, and so on. Then there is another document that is floating around on the Internet, but they have been very, very clever. That particular document, they leave out piece of it. They leave out the top and that is the one that the hon. Member read from.

**2.30 p.m.**

It has beneficiary recipient information; purpose of funds, blank; Formula One Trading, and has the two names below that he read out: Vidya Deokiesingh and Keith Rowley. But no address, no name of bank, nothing like that. He mixed the two together, Madam Speaker. So he takes the email that is sent to an email address that we do not even know if it is a real one, but certainly it is not the email address of the hon. Prime Minister. He mixes up the information in that bogus email and he mixes it up with this “half ah piece ah paper that where yuh doh have name of the bank and the address ah de bank” and he commingles them with the

clear intent to give any observer the impression that the hon. Prime Minister—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, Standing Order 53(1)(e).

**Madam Speaker:** Okay, so hon. Members again, I caution with respect to silence and excessive crosstalk. Please continue, Minister.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Let me just summarize. The Member for Oropouche East had two scraps of paper in his hand. One “scrap ah paper have some bogus email address”, it is not the email address of the hon. Prime Minister, and on that scrap of paper is a reference to some fella called Charlie Diaz and gives his bank account information or his alleged bank account information. The other “scrap ah paper is ah half piece ah paper” with the name and address of the alleged bank left out and below that, two names: Vidya Deokiesingh and Keith Rowley and some blank spaces and so on. What the hon. Member did is take those two pieces of paper and put them together and create the impression that he has documents that link the hon. Prime Minister to that bank account to that bank in Miami and to some alleged transaction. The clear intent of the Member, Madam Speaker, was to deceive. That was the clear intent. Clear intent. [*Crosstalk*]

And I have noticed in his desperation, he has actually published reference to this on his Facebook page. Well, I wish him luck, I wish him luck. I find what the Member did was despicable, reprehensible, shameful, and you have to ask yourself why. Why come into this House with bogus documents, with false allegations, with fraudulent claims? Why do that? Why pretend you have documents when do not have documents? Why do that, Madam Speaker? And the conclusion I come to is that they had to do something because when one looks at the response of the Leader of the Opposition and the response of a couple of Members opposite, they had no substance. It was weak. [*Desk thumping*] It was pathetic. Fumbling and



mumbling. They had no answer to the budget.

In fact, Madam Speaker, when I was reading the budget statement, as I came to the end and I announced the fiscal measures, “if yuh see dey face”. “If yuh go back and watch the video recording, if yuh see dey face.” They were in shock and they blurted out: “This is an election budget.” Well, they have two more budgets to come eh. So the fact is they have not dealt in any way with the fiscal measures. They have tried to belittle what we have done for the poor and disadvantaged people of this country.

And I can tell you, Madam Speaker, since the budget was read, the number of senior citizens who are now about to benefit from the \$1,000 increase per month in the cap between NIS pension and the senior citizens’ pension, the thousands of them who are due to benefit from that and their dependants and their families, and all of the people that depend on senior citizens’ pension, when that extra \$1,000 a month becomes available to those persons, numbering almost 30,000, the response we have received, on this side, is that this is a caring Government, [*Desk thumping*] that we are interested in people’s welfare, that we are focusing on those who are at least able to help themselves. We are redistributing wealth. We are giving back to the population. It has been a hard three years, the last three years have been tough after coming into a situation where the previous Government had virtually bankrupted the country, [*Crosstalk*] bankrupted the country. Madam Speaker, coming into a situation where the former Governor of the Central Bank, the former Governor, visited me in September and told me that if we do not—[*Interruption*] Madam Speaker, the crosstalk is childishness over there man.

**Madam Speaker:** Any Member who wants to make an interruption would be guided by Standing Order 47. If not, Members, understand and appreciate

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Standing Order 53. I am not going to rise again on this. Minister of Finance.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Let me read into the record what we are doing for the poor and disadvantaged and the elderly. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] “Dey cyah handle it.” Will read it into the record, Madam Speaker; read it into the record.

We are increasing the value of the food card [*Desk thumping*] from \$410 per month to \$510 per month for households with one to three persons; from \$550 per month to \$650 per month for households with four to five persons; from \$700 a month to \$800 per month for households with six and more persons, and in their weakness, they have attempted to belittle these increases, but how much increase did “allyuh do in all five years”? This is only our third year and we are already increasing these benefits for the poor and disadvantaged [*Desk thumping*] and I can assure you they are very grateful.

With respect to public assistance, Disability Grant, Madam Speaker, currently, special needs children, there are 1,024 of them. That is the information I have; 1,024 disabled and special needs children who currently receive grants of \$800 under the Special Child Grant. We are increasing that to \$1,500. [*Desk thumping*] “Almost ah 100 per cent increase” and they and their parents are eternally grateful. [*Desk thumping*] And for adults who are unable to work and who have been certified as being disabled and eligible to receive a disability grant, we are increasing the grant from \$1,800 to \$2,000 a month [*Desk thumping*] and they, the 23,245 recipients of the Disability Grant, are very grateful to this PNM administration.

With respect to public assistance, we are increasing the grant for one person from \$1,050 to \$1,300; [*Desk thumping*] for two persons, \$1,400 to \$1,550; [*Desk*

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*thumping*] for three persons, from \$1,600 to \$1,750; for four or more persons, from \$1,750 to \$1,900. “How much all yuh ever increase?” [*Desk thumping*] And we are helping 22,861 persons with this measure.

For young families who want to own their first home, we are waiving \$37,000 in stamp duty on the purchase of a home for first-time homeowners. [*Desk thumping*] They are going to save \$37,000 courtesy the PNM. For persons who are in receipt of NIS and senior citizens’ pension, we are increasing the cap from \$5,000 to \$6,000, Madam Speaker, helping 27,263 individuals. For persons who have their children studying abroad, this allowance has not gone up for 10 years, we have increased it from \$60,000 to \$72,000 a year. [*Desk thumping*]

I can assure you, Madam Speaker, these measures are going to benefit over 150,000 people. In fact, the number is 156,322, is the number I have. [*Desk thumping*] Those 156,322 people will benefit from these measures, they are grateful. They think it is a good budget and they know, on that side, it is a good budget and that is why you have to come and try and “buss mark buh when yuh bussing mark, come with truth, doh come with lies.” [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Diego Martin North/East, there is a particular word, I would ask you to withdraw that particular word and please continue.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Oh certainly, Madam Speaker, I will withdraw the word “lies”.

**Mr. Hinds:** Just say Roodal Moonilal. [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

**Hon. C. Imbert:** So, Madam Speaker—

**Dr. Moonilal:** “Da is why Snake have some lead for you.”

**Hon. C. Imbert:**—let us look at the comments—

**Mr. Hinds:** What!! Madam Speaker [*Crosstalk*]

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*[Madam Speaker rises]*

**Hon. Member:** 48(6).

**Mr. Hinds:** Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** I am on my legs. *[Crosstalk]* I am on my legs.

**Mr. Hinds:** What! I am being threatened. *[Continuous crosstalk]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order! Order! Order! *[Continuous crosstalk]*

*[Madam Speaker remains on her legs]*

**Mr. Hinds:** “Yes, that is what de man now say.”

**Madam Speaker:** Members, order! *[Continuous crosstalk]*

**Mr. Hinds:** Liar!

*[Madam Speaker remains on her legs]*

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Oropouche East and Member for Laventille West, I will invite you both to leave the Chamber. You all can return in 10 minutes. When the House breaks out in this mayhem, I hear very little. All right. So I would ask you both to leave the Chamber for 10 minutes, resume your composure and you all can come back. Both Oropouche East and Laventille West. Thank you.

*[Members for Oropouche East and Laventille West exit the Chamber]*

Minister of Finance.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. When I look at the—

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Forgive me please, on 48(6). Madam Speaker. I do appreciate, subject to you allowing me to elucidate, but the *Hansard* is very, very close to the exchange, and whilst I appreciate that there may have been some disturbance, I am concerned under 48(6) that the Member for Oropouche East’s reference and he said specifically, for your consideration, “Snake have lead for you”. *[Continuous*

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*crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** I would like to tell all Members that sometimes I hear very many things on both sides. All right. And I have said already, I have not heard it. [*Crosstalk*] Member for Siparia, I really do not need any echo or back up, please.

**Mr. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Sorry, Ma'am.

**Madam Speaker:** I have not heard it. I have heard other things that nobody objected to. I have asked both Members to leave and they have graciously left. I would prefer that we move on. I hope we all learn from this. Minister of Finance.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have asked my staff to summarize points made by Members opposite. It was hard. Only two pages or three pages but let us see what the hon. Members said. Increases to various grants by a few dollars that do not amount to much. Well, I have dealt with that already; 156,000 people and their families are very happy. Does not agree, the majority of vehicles use diesel. Madam Speaker, one of the problems in this House is that Members opposite do not read or if they read, they do not understand. The statement with respect to diesel was referenced to goods vehicles that transport food and materials and public transport vehicles such as maxi-taxis that use diesel. And there are 207,000 goods vehicles on the road and I do believe at least 200,000 of them use diesel last time I checked. So the problem with hon. Members opposite is that they either do not read or they do not understand when they read something.

The hon. Member for Siparia also tried to attack the figures but the figures were produced by the Central Statistical Office, not by me. That is the data. And as I indicated over the last year, the CSO has received assistance from CARTAK and has improved its accuracy and its timeliness of reporting tremendously; a far

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cry from where it was under the UNC. The Member for Siparia said that 30,000 persons would have lost their jobs since September 2015, obviously did not consult with the Member for Caroni Central who said 55,000 people had lost their jobs. So whether the number is 30,000 or 55,000, both wrong. If the Members opposite would take the time to read the *Review of the Economy*, the *Review of the Economy* gives you, at Appendix 11, the population, the labour force and the employment going back to 2012. And, Madam Speaker, in 2015, there were 623,000 persons employed and there are now 605,000 persons employed; 623,000 minus 605,000 is 18,000; not 30,000, not 55,000, Madam Speaker, and the methodology has not changed. The same methodology that was used in 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016 and so on, to measure the number of persons employed, has remained the same. So according to the CSO, only 18,000 persons less are employed now, not 55,000, not 30,000. They just love to say these things. By next year, we will hear it is “ah hundred thousand”. [*Crosstalk*]

The Leader of the Opposition also tried to perpetuate the falsehood about Petrotrin’s situation, saying that Petrotrin is paying its taxes. That is a figment of the hon. Member’s imagination. We received an age payable report from Petrotrin as a state enterprise every three months and the last age payable report we received from Petrotrin confirmed—this is just a about month ago—that Petrotrin currently owes the Treasury in unpaid petroleum levy, unpaid oil royalties and unpaid supplementary petroleum tax, \$4.1 billion. Those are the facts. Those are the facts. Everybody in Petrotrin knows that. [*Crosstalk*] The entire Opposition knows that.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Caroni East, do you wish to make an interruption under Standing Order 47?

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**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yeah. I wanted to see whether he would reveal how much the—

**Madam Speaker:** “So yuh gonna ask the Member whether he is gonna give way?”

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Are you willing to give way?

**Hon. C. Imbert:** No.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** All right.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Let me read into the record now a letter that I have received from Petrotrin dated the 8<sup>th</sup> of October, 2018:

Request for additional Government guarantees

I trust you have received our requests for several Government guarantees as backing for loans from Republic Bank, Citibank and Deutsche Bank or any of its affiliates. I have spoken to my Chairman. I write this email as a matter of grave urgency re: the cash situation at Petrotrin. The realization of losses for the past several years—

[*Crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, really, it is so childish. Madam Speaker, I beg your protection. Constant from Naparima.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Naparima, I will therefore guide you to Standing Order 47. If I have to rise on that again, I think we are all seasoned here enough to be familiar with what are the rules of engagement. So if you wish to rise on Standing Order 47, I will recognize you. If not, please be guided by Standing Order 53. Minister of Finance.

**Hon. C. Imbert:**

I have spoken to my Chairman. I write this email as a matter of grave urgency re: the cash situation at Petrotrin. The realization of losses for the past several years has culminated in a monthly cash position that is

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unsustainable and entirely supported by loan financing. Over the past year, Petrotrin has been borrowing to largely repay loans and finance the month's operational shortfall as our free cash flow is constantly negative.

And I read in the papers, I see all sorts of people making all sorts of statements that Petrotrin has millions of dollars in free cash available to it. It is simply not true. This is a letter from Petrotrin to the Ministry of Finance dated the 8<sup>th</sup> of October. [*Crosstalk*]

All our banks are now withdrawing their financing and asking for guarantees or not submitting bids to finance Petrotrin. We have been able to push back one of the loans, Republic Bank, by one week and they have threatened loan default procedures if a letter of guarantee is not in place by this Friday, October 12, 2018.

That is two days from now.

A default on one bank triggers a series of defaults and credit-rating issues which we have been careful to avoid. The current request for additional Government guarantees is to allow us to access loans until we could substantially reduce our operating costs.

A few of our costs that are now due are: one, past due payments to suppliers, approximately US \$30 million; two, US \$22.3 million to Deutsche Bank due on October 15, 2018; US \$58.9 million to Admar Trading SA for crude due on October 16, 2018; US \$20.7 million interest and principal to Deutsche Bank on October 17, 2018; US \$43.17 million to Deutsche Bank on October 26, 2018. Weekly and monthly wages are fast on the heels of these payments and approximately US \$22 million on average.

Madam Speaker, when you add up all of that, you get almost US \$200 million, a



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US \$196 million as a matter of fact.

We are not generating any positive cash flow to settle these amounts. We have only requested US \$172 million—only eh, US—in guarantee and we are trying to find other ways to finance the shortfalls during the transition.

However, as we continue to operate in a high-cost model, this situation will follow the same trend as it has been for the last 12 months. Banks are showing interest in our future operations but that support—

Let me repeat that.

The banks are showing increasing interest in our future operations but that support will only be cemented after we have established a new model of operation.

Petrotrin is asking for your support in granting the guarantees as lack of loan financing will lead to us not paying banks, suppliers and employees in this month.

—Madam Speaker. Those are the facts. That is the Petrotrin reality, not the stuff that is outside there that this is a profitable company that have endless money that could pay everybody, and the Government just making it up. This is the reality, Madam Speaker, and I will be seeking the approval of the Cabinet to provide these guarantees. Because I know if I do not provide these guarantees to Petrotrin by Friday, in the amount TT \$1.3 billion, the company will collapse. I know that. Government guarantees in the amount of 1.3 billion Trinidad and Tobago dollars and I will make my case to the Cabinet and the Cabinet will decide what to do about that.

Madam Speaker, I also was very disappointed in Member for Chaguanas East yesterday. I saw an online newspaper report in the *Express* which alleged that

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the Member for Chaguanas East had accused me of firing him when I was the Minister of Tertiary Education. I saw an online *Express* report last night to that effect by a reporter called Leah Sorias, I believe. I could not believe what I was seeing. I was not in the Chamber when the Member was speaking. I came back and I asked what is going on and for myself, I asked for the *Hansard* and then I looked at the video tape, Madam Speaker, and what I saw distressed me. These were the words of the Member for Chaguanas East. The Minister of Finance used to be:

“...my boss.”

**Mr. Karim:** Yes.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** He said that. Then he said:

“...they fire...”—me.

“...PNM fire me...”

**Mr. Karim:** “Buh I never say you.” [*Laughter*]

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Madam Speaker, Madam Speaker—

[*Madam Speaker rises*]

**Madam Speaker:** Please continue.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Madam Speaker, as the hon. Attorney General has told me, “he playing smart with foolishness”. When you say those words, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, the Minister of Finance “was my boss” when he was Minister of Tertiary Education and PNM fire me, what do you expect the fair-minded observer to conclude? That is why the *Express* reporter wrote that article saying “PNM fire me”.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay, Minister of Finance, your original speaking time is now spent, you are entitled to 10 more minutes to complete if you wish.

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**Mr. Karim:** Madam Speaker, would the Member give way?

**Hon. C. Imbert:** No. That was heinous.

**Mr. Karim:** “It was 2007, you was not the boss.” In 2007, you were not my boss.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Heinous, Madam Speaker.

**Mr. Lee:** 48(6), “who he is referring to as being heinous”?

**Madam Speaker:** Members, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, I overrule. And again, I caution, if Members observe Standing Order 53 and listen in silence, they may not miss very crucial words in what is being said.

**Mr. Karim:** Would the Member allow me to correct the record?

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Noooo, you should have corrected it last night.

**Mr. Karim:** You “was not” my boss in 2007?

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Madam Speaker—

**Madam Speaker:** All right. So, Member for Chaguanas East, I know you understand the procedure, I could only allow an interruption in a particular way. The Member has the discretion not to give way. Please continue, Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Karim:** I am asking for the Member’s discretion, again.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Madam Speaker, I am being disturbed. I am relating my understanding of what transpired yesterday. I am stating a fact that the Member said I was his boss and PNM fired him and that led a reporter to write a story that he was fired by me. And, Madam Speaker, he also said that “he cried like ah baby”. Let me tell you what the facts are now. The National Training Agency was established sometime in the 1990s.

**Mr. Karim:** 1999.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Madam Speaker, I am being disturbed by the Member for

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Chaguanas East.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Chaguanas East, this is really not your temperament from what I have observed before and it may be just that today is a last day for a long period for all of us so I will be a bit tolerant but—

**Mr. Karim:** I apologize, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Thank you very much. Minister of Finance.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. The National Training Agency was established in the 1990s under the Panday administration. The hon. Member for Chaguanas East was made its Chief Executive Officer in and around 1999. In the year 2001, we had the 18:18 situation where in December 2001, the then President Arthur N.R. Robinson appointed Mr. Patrick Manning to be Prime Minister. So the PNM became the Government from December 2001 to October 2002 when we had to go back to the polls because we could not pass a budget. We could not elect a Speaker and pass a budget. We won the election in 2002, the PNM and I believe it 20:16 at that point in time. There was another election in 2007 where we got 26 seats to 15.

The fact of the matter is, Madam Speaker, when the PNM came into Government in December 2001, the Member for Chaguanas East was the General Secretary of the United National Congress and was left in his position as Chief Executive Officer of the National Training Agency in 2001, in 2002, in 2003 when I was assigned to that Ministry and I remained there until May 2005. He remained as Chief Executive Officer from 2003 to 2005 and in 2006, and it is in May 2007 that the board of the National Training Agency for whom he worked, took the decision to terminate his employment. He was the General Secretary of the UNC and was employed in as a CEO in a state enterprise for almost six years under the

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PNM, almost six years under the PNM and then come here and say “he cried like ah baby”.

**3.00 p.m.**

Ashton Ford, General Secretary of the PNM, was given three weeks to pick up his belongings and “buss it” out of London in 2010 when the Government changed, Madam Speaker. Given three weeks to pick up everything, uproot his family out of England, and come back to Trinidad, three weeks. But the Member for Chaguanas East, was left in his high paying job for almost six years under the PNM and then come and cry and say he cry like a baby, and I fire him, Madam Speaker. That is reprehensible. Reprehensible. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, it is clear to me that the fulminations, and the untruthful, deceitful, dishonest statements made in this Parliament by the Member for Oropouche East were a tactic, because they have nothing to say about this budget. They cannot handle this budget, they cannot take this budget. [*Desk thumping*] They know, they know, that we have overcome the hard times of the last three years and now the country will grow, the economy will grow, and citizens of Trinidad and Tobago will benefit from what they justly deserve from this benevolent PNM administration. [*Desk thumping*] That is why I say depression is setting in on that side because they are facing another seven years in Opposition.

I thank you, Madam Speaker, and I beg to move. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 81(8), I beg to move:

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That the Appropriation (Financial Year 2019) Bill, 2018, be referred to Standing Finance Committee for the consideration of the Bill together with the Estimates.

**Madam Speaker:** The House shall now go into the Standing Finance Committee to consider the Bill and the Estimates.

*House resolved itself into Standing Finance Committee.*

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Order 81(2) and (8), the Estimates containing the details of the financial requirements along with the Appropriation Bill have been referred to this Committee for consideration.

The documents before the Committee therefore include the *Draft Estimates Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* which identifies:

1. The Heads of Expenditure;
2. The chart of accounts and classification of expenditure Sub-Items under Personnel Expenditure, Goods and Services and Minor Equipment Purchases, Sub-Heads;
3. The summary of the total allocation to each Head of Expenditure;
4. The Sub-Item details relevant to each Head of Expenditure for the current fiscal year and the two fiscal years immediately preceding.

The *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly* which identifies:

1. The statutory board or body for each Head of Expenditure;
2. The abstract of estimated revenue and expenditure for the year ending September 30, 2019;
3. The abstract showing the Government subvention for 2017 Actual Expenditure, 2018 Estimates, 2018 Revised Estimates, 2019 Estimates

- and the increase or decrease of the 2019 Estimates over or under the 2018 Revised Estimates;4. The chart of accounts for income and expenditure;
5. The classification of expenditure Sub-Items under the Personnel Expenditure, Goods and Services and Minor Equipment Purchases, Sub-Heads; and
  6. The Sub-Items details relevant to each statutory board or body for the current fiscal year and the two fiscal years immediately preceding.

The *Draft Estimates of Development Programme* which includes:

1. The summary of estimates of the Development Programme for the financial year 2019 for Part A, the Consolidated Fund;
2. The summary of the total allocation to each Head of Expenditure for Sub-Head 09, Development Programme Consolidated Fund;
3. The Sub-Item, Project Group and Project Description details relevant to each Head of Expenditure for the current fiscal year and the two fiscal years immediately preceding;
4. The summary of estimates of Part B, the Infrastructure Development Fund for the financial year 2019;
5. The summary of the total allocation to each Head of Expenditure for Sub-Head 701, the Infrastructure Development Fund;
6. The Sub-Item, Project Group and Project Description details relevant to each Head of Expenditure for the current fiscal year and the two fiscal years immediately preceding.

The Appropriation (Financial Year 2019) Bill, 2018: The Bill provides for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th of September, 2019. The Bill seeks to authorize the sum of \$43,672,921,405 from the

Consolidated Fund. The Schedule details the sum to be approved for each Head of Expenditure.

In accordance with Standing Order 85(1), the consideration of the clauses of the Bill will be postponed until after the consideration of the Schedule which lists the Heads of Expenditure to be approved. The Heads will be considered in the order submitted by the Leader of the Opposition.

The proposed work schedule: Hon. Members, there are 41 Heads of Expenditure to be considered over a five-day period. I have been advised that we shall start with the examination of the list as submitted by the Leader of the Opposition, shortly hereafter. I therefore propose that after today, the Committee will meet each day from day to day. Starting again tomorrow 10.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m., or for so long thereafter, to consider a minimum of nine Heads of Expenditure on day two, and a minimum of eight Heads of Expenditure on the days that follow subsequently. Consideration of Tobago House of Assembly.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Chairman, for tomorrow can we start at 1.30 please.

**Madam Chairman:** So that today we will start—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Today we will start immediately.

**Madam Chairman:** Today we will start a time because—

**Mr. Lee:** Madam—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Just a minute please.

**Madam Chairman:** What I propose, or what I would like to propose is that once we finish this set in the table of exercise, that we take a short break for the organization of the Chamber for the technocrats and then we resume. And then what is being further proposed is that tomorrow we start at 1.30? [*Interruption*] I am just saying and I will come to you, Whip. I am just saying—I am laying out



what is being proposed so that when you answer, you will answer in a fulsome manner. Okay.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Chairman, may I indicate that given what you said previously about beginning at 10.00, we will agree with what you are saying. We will start at 10.00 tomorrow also. Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** All right, so that Whip, you understand what is being proposed?

**Mr. Lee:** No, can I interject here.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes.

**Mr. Lee:** Madam Chairman, we just heard the wind-up of the budget by the Minister of Finance. We were under the impression that this Committee would have started on Friday. We had laid out a schedule from the Leader of the Opposition to your office of a schedule of Heads that we would have liked to interview the order for over the five days.

All right, we have in the past started on—never started after a budget debate wind-up. We always start at 10.00 the following day so we were assuming—a lot of my members did not come here today prepared to get into any Standing Finance Committee. So a lot of our books we did not walk with our books, all right. We were under the impression that given that this was winding-up today, we would have started at 10 o'clock tomorrow morning. So, most—[Crosstalk]—can I speak, Madam Chair. I am being interrupted by the Attorney General.

**Madam Chairman:** Members, just let us hear what the Whip has to say. If other Members catch my eye, we will have a discussion to see how the Committee goes forward. Yes.

**Mr. Lee:** I am not finished as yet, Madam Chair.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes, continue.

**Mr. Lee:** So a lot of my Members did not walk with their books to start interviewing and questioning the different Heads based on what we had submitted to your office. So we would have felt that this would have started tomorrow, to be fair to all Members even on their side. So, please, Madam Chair, can you—I would like to object and adjourn this House to see if we can start tomorrow at 10 o'clock.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes, Member for Arouca/Maloney.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Thank you very kindly, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, contrary to what the Chief Whip, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, has said, when we got the Standing Finance Committee timetable, all it said was, day one, day two, day three, day four, day five. It was not dated.

So, Madam Chairman, under normal circumstances whenever the debate ends, we move into Standing Finance Committee. And, Madam Speaker, in the circumstances where those on the other side chose to field no more speakers, we are quite ready today to start Standing Finance Committee. They had notice that we were ending today and we are ready to start Standing Finance Committee once you set the table.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, so I think that there is agreement that we start today.

**Hon. Members:** No agreement. “They in charge.”

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** They are in charge. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, as regards the consideration of Tobago House of Assembly? Based on the listing as set out by the Leader of the Opposition. Tobago House of Assembly would have been commencing on day three. So that I just want to know, so that for the purposes of us communicating to Tobago House of Assembly, I just want to know if it remains on day three.

**Mr. Lee:** Madam Chair, I do not know what is day three now, because what are

we doing today. What are we trying to complete today?

**Madam Chairman:** Well, I cannot say what we are trying to complete today. What I can say is today will be day one.

**Mr. Lee:** Today will be day one. And day one ends when? [*Crosstalk*] No, I am talking to the Chair.

**Madam Chairman:** I would want some concurrence by the Committee on when we will end. I think that will determine where we have reached and then the days—take from there. But my point is barring tomorrow which may not provide sufficient notice for Tobago House of Assembly coming here, first thing in the morning. We can agree on any other of the days.

Today is day one, if we start today, [*Crosstalk*] and that is day three. Okay? So that the order remains?

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** The order remains, whether— I would think therefore the sense it makes is, whether we reach there or not, on day three we begin with Tobago House of Assembly, all right. I think that is the sense—

**Mr. Lee:** And day three is?

**Hon. Members:** Friday.

**Mr. Singh:** I just want to be clear, we are starting at 3.14 today, and the agenda, you indicated when you start at 10.00 is to end at 8.00 for my own personal organization. I want to know what time we are ending today.

**Madam Chairman:** As I have indicated, Member for Chaguanas West, that I would expect that both sides have a certain commitment to this process that I would leave them to agree and guide me with respect to what time. So maybe your Whip may have a discussion with the Leader of the House and communicate to the Chair. And that is why I said after this, we would break for a little while and then

resume. All right?

Let me ask, you all have an agreement for the time for ending?

**Hon. Members:** No agreement.

**Madam Chairman:** All right, so while you all get the agreement, can I continue in the interest of time. Member for Tabaquite, you would like to raise on—

**Dr. Rambachan:** I just want to clarify something. We have five days set aside for this?

**Madam Chairman:** Yes.

**Dr. Rambachan:** In normal circumstances, 10 o'clock to 8 o'clock gives you ten hours.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes.

**Dr. Rambachan:** So, that is why I think it is very important we clarify, otherwise if you go to 8 o'clock today you are cutting off five hours of deliberation time of the five days. That puts the Opposition at a disadvantage to make sure that we have the allotted time in order to complete five days.

**Madam Chairman:** And Member for Tabaquite, I am not making any judgment on this. If it is that Members want to go through both sides to 11 o'clock, I have no determination.

**Dr. Rambachan:** I just want to make it clear.

**Madam Chairman:** And I guess you can speak to your Whip so that he can factor that in to any discussion that he is going to have with the Leader of the House and then guide us. Okay? And that is why I said in the interest of time, let me go on with the procedure. We can break for 10/15 minutes. All right? The Chamber will be prepared in the meantime and both sides will have an opportunity to say whether we leave at 11.00, 6.00, midnight, I am here.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Madam Chair, with your leave, I feel the concern is

that we do not end up as day one being a shortened day and then the Opposition does not get its full time. Because if we are to get the 10 hours, we will go till whatever 10 hours from now. [*Crosstalk*] Yes, fine you can go all day and all night.

Madam, clarification through you, Madam Chair, I think that is the concern raised by my colleague, that we do not short change the number of hours. We count today as day one, that it is not short changed. The Government side is saying they will go all night. So can we have it clarified, please?

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Chair, if I may, as you rightly said, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre and I will discuss this. But we are quite willing if they would like 10 hours, we are quite willing to stay here for the 10 hours. So that they are not short changed. But, we will have that discussion.

**Madam Chairman:** All right. So, [*Crosstalk*] Members, I am going to suspend so that all sides can have a very fulsome discussion on this. I will resume—would 15 minutes be sufficient? All right. So, I resume at 3.30. This meeting is suspended.

**3.18 p.m.:** *Standing Finance Committee suspended.*

**3.41 p.m.:** *Standing Finance Committee resumed.*

**Madam Chairman:** This meeting of the Standing Finance Committee is now resumed.

**Mr. Lee:** Madam Chair, before we start, just some housekeeping clarity. Parliament we started at 1.30 p.m., what time would we adjourn for tea?

**Madam Chairman:** Whip, I would have expected you all would have settled all that, you know, so maybe if you all have not settled it, maybe you all are not having tea. I do not know. Was all of that not discussed?

**Mr. Lee:** No, we did not discuss the time for tea. But maybe, we can say tea can

be taken at 4.30/5.00? Is that okay?

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Chair, we did not discuss that. I had really thought given that it is Standing Finance Committee, that we would flow in and out for tea, but if at this point the Opposition would like to suggest a time, we would have no difficulty.

**Mr. Lee:** I would like to suggest 5 o'clock.

**Madam Chairman:** Five o'clock.

**Mr. Lee:** And also, Madam Chair, for your own appreciation, in discussion with the Leader of Government Business, we have decided to do all eight Heads today on day one, which is our agenda from the Ministry of Finance to the last Head of Ministry of Communications. In keeping with what the Leader of Government Business said, a day consists of 10 hours. So, we are prepared to do 10 hours in day one from today. So, I hope all the technical people from the different Ministries are called.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So, hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Order 45(1), the speaking time in Standing Finance Committee shall not exceed five minutes on each intervention. Each Minister will be invited to make a brief five-minute opening statement on the Ministry's or Department's priority areas for the upcoming Head.

Procedure for each Head: Hon. Members, the procedure for each Head of expenditure shall be as follows:

1. The Head and the amount to be appropriated will be announced by me as Chairman;
2. The Minister will then be invited to make a brief opening statement;
3. The Chairman will then propose the question, that the sum proposed stand part of the Schedule;

4. For each Head of Expenditure, I will call the Sub-Head followed by the Item. I will not call the Sub-Items. Discussions can ensue on the Item called or the relevant Sub-Item and clarification sought. Once the Committee moves to another Sub-Head, questions from a previous Sub-Head will not be entertained.
5. The Chairman will repeat the procedure for the Development Programme.
6. Once this is concluded, the Chairman will then put the question that the sum stand part of the Schedule.
7. The procedure will be repeated for each Head of Expenditure.

And, so that I am certain that I understood what was agreed. The meeting will be suspended at 5.00 for tea and resume at 5.30 and we shall continue until we are completed with the Ministry of Communications. Yes?

**Mr. Lee:** Yes.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Yes, Ma'am. But, just to reiterate. But, no longer than 10 hours.

**Mr. Lee:** Ten hours from the start of the finance committee, correct?

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Yes.

**Mr. Lee:** Okay.

**Mr. Padarath:** You backing out now?

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** No, we said that. That is the normal arrangement.

**Mr. Padarath:** Why are you raising it for?

**Madam Chairman:** Members. Member for Princes Town, Member for Port of Spain South and so on. I believe the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre and the Member for Arouca/Maloney have hammered out on our behalf taking into account our collective interest, how we shall proceed. All right, so.

We are at Head 18: Ministry of Finance, we are at page 76, Draft Estimates, Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure.

*Head 18: Ministry of Finance, \$5,885,096,330.*

**Madam Chairman:** I will now invite the Minister the Finance to make a brief opening statement, not exceeding five minutes.

**Hon. Imbert:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, as will be seen in the Estimates and elsewhere, the Ministry of Finance has the responsibility for ensuring that the salaries of public servants are paid, of managing the Government's finances, of raising revenue through taxation and other revenue-raising measures such as borrowing and asset sales.

The Ministry of Finance has responsibility for a number of divisions. The Budget Division, which is a key division in the Public Service machinery. The Budget Division is responsible for receiving applications for the disbursement of funds from various Ministries and agencies, reviewing these applications and making recommendations for releases or releasing funds on its own behalf.

The Ministry of Finance also contains the Treasury Division which is the division that actually processes payments and authorizes the writing of cheques.

The Ministry of Finance also has a number of statutory authorities and/or state enterprises that report to it or are associated with it in some way. For example, the National Insurance Board, the National Lotteries Control Board, Caribbean Airlines, now the Eximbank that used to be with the Ministry of Trade that is now in the Ministry of Finance. First Citizens Bank is also associated with the Ministry of Finance, as is the Securities and Exchange Commission.

The Ministry of Finance also has the responsibility to liaise and collaborate with the Central Bank in terms of ensuring that the country's finances are in order. The Customs and Excise Division is a very important division of the Ministry of



Finance, responsible for the collection of customs duties and then we have the Investments Division, which is responsible for oversight over approximately 100 state enterprises that report to other line Ministries. As I indicated, there are just about five for six state enterprises that report directly to the Ministry of Finance. But the Ministry of Finance also has the responsibility to oversee all 100-plus state enterprises and their subsidiaries.

The Financial Intelligence Unit is also in the Ministry of Finance as is the Insolvency Department.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you.

**3.50 p.m.**

*Question proposed:* That Head 18 stand part of the Schedule.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$5,885,096,330 for Head 18, the Ministry of Finance is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, the *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly* and the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*.

We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01, Personnel Expenditure. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla. Item 001, General Administration.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** This is page 77?

**Madam Chairman:** 76. Under Item 001? Yes?

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** No, no, no. It will be under 002. It is okay.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Madam, am I to understand that we will deal with all the line Items under 001?

**Madam Chairman:** Yes.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** So, I can deal with—

**Madam Chairman:** Anything under 001. You just say what the—

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** No, under 01.

**Madam Chairman:** No, we are dealing with—we are under 01, Personnel Expenditure; 001, General Administration. All right?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Okay, fine.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes? Okay. Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Singh:** Under 01, Personnel Expenditure. Given that there is an increase of \$4 million, what are the changes in fiscal year 2018/2019 that are expected?

**Madam Chairman:** We are on page 76? We are under 001, General Administration.

**Mr. Singh:** Yeah.

**Hon. Imbert:** Just repeat the question?

**Mr. Singh:** Okay. Do not worry. I am a bit ahead of myself.

**Hon. Imbert:** Clearly.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. All right. So, can we go on to Item 002, page 77? This is Budget Division. Okay. Item 003, Customs and Excise Division. Member of Siparia.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Yes, thank you. Customs and Excise: What changes are to be expected in fiscal 2018/2019 given the increase in the sum of \$4 million? And I have a second question, but I will pause. What changes are expected in fiscal 2018/2019 given the increase here in the budgeting of \$4 million? What are we going to do with the \$4 million, Customs and Excise?

**Hon. Imbert:** Well, if you look at the Revised Estimates for 2018, it was 56. The 2019 Estimates is 60. It is \$4 million more, but there is no anticipation that there will be anything extraordinary at Customs that would create any issue. That is just

an estimate.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Madam Chair, I am not hearing the hon. Member.

**Hon. Imbert:** The \$60 million is merely an estimate.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Yes, so what is the estimate? What is the intention? We cannot just budget numbers and do not know what it is we intend to do with it.

**Hon. Imbert:** Okay, since you insist.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I insist.

**Hon. Imbert:** It includes a provision for newly appointed customs guards and arrears of acting and increment payments to customs officers. It also includes a provision for increased contribution for national insurance due to recently filled posts of custom guards and customs officers. In terms of vacant posts, it includes the provision for filling 17 posts of customs guards and 140 customs officers. As I said, it is merely an estimate. So, we will see how it goes as we go along.

**Hon. Member:** Can I ask that the Minister hold the mike closer because—

**Hon. Members:** We are not hearing you.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** We are not hearing you. You may have to repeat it.

**Hon. Imbert:** I am finished.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Princes Town.

**Mr. Padarath:** Thank you, Madam Chair. To the hon. Minister: Hon. Minister, with respect to the operations of the Customs and Excise Division, the Auditor General, in this last report, the most recent report, has indicated several inefficiencies in this particular department. Could you indicate—which also includes the issue of staffing—with the decrease by \$8.9 million whether or not the effective operations of Customs and Excise will be affected in any way and what sort of anticipation—whether or not the recommendations of the Auditor General's report was considered in terms of this particular decrease?

**Hon. Imbert:** That was a one-off payment of arrears. The reason why the provision is less in 2019 on that particular line Item, which is overtime, is that there were arrears which were cleared off in 2018 which are not required to be carried forward to 2019.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Madam Chairman, I have a second question on that same.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Princes Town.

**Mr. Padarath:** Ma'am, to the hon. Minister. Could the hon. Minister categorically state whether or not under this particular line Item, the management of the Customs and Excise Division, whether or not the Auditor General recommendations were taken into consideration?

**Hon. Imbert:** Yeah, but Member, you have specifically referred to a decrease of \$8.9 million. That decrease relates only to overtime. So I have answered you in the context of your question. You asked about what is the reason for the \$8.9 million decrease and I told you. There were arrears of overtime payments due, which were paid in 2018, which are not required to be paid in 2019.

**Mr. Padarath:** And therefore, Minister, if—*[Interruption]*

**Hon. Imbert:** If you have a question on 04, 05, 08, no problem. But ask it on the line Item, please.

**Mr. Padarath:** So, Minister you are saying you envisage, based on this decrease from last year, that it will not, in any way, severely impact the operations of Customs and Excise with their added duties this year. Is that essentially what you are saying?

**Hon. Imbert:** Because it was back pay that was cleared off last year which is not occurring this year.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Item 003/03. We noted that the estimate in 2018 was \$51.920

million but you only spent \$48.920 million. What was the reason for the decline? Did you control overtime or what is happening there?

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes.

**Dr. Rambachan:** You controlled overtime?

**Hon. Imbert:** I have answered you.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Thank you, Madam. Can the Member tell us the number of persons employed as at September 30, 2018, in this department?

**Hon. Imbert:** In Customs?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Customs and Excise.

**Hon. Imbert:** I do not know if I have that information with us, but that will be easy for us to get and provide to you by tomorrow.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Tomorrow?

**Hon. Imbert:** Mm-hmm.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you. On the same line Item, hon. Minister, can you indicate what type of duties require overtime in this particular instance?

**Madam Chairman:** Excuse me?

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** If the hon. Minister can indicate what type of duties require overtime?

**Hon. Imbert:** There are within the Customs Division a number of out-stations at various ports of entry. The Customs and Excise Division is not confined to its administration building in Port of Spain. You have a number of ports of entry, both air and sea, and when customs officers, for example, are stationed at Piarco and an aircraft comes in at one o'clock in the morning they would be on overtime. So overtime is an essential part of a customs officer's duties because of the fact that they are dealing with transportation which does not have any association with normal working hours of 8.00 to 4.00. Boats and ships will come in at any hour of

the night, planes will come in at any hour of the night, so that is why overtime is required for Customs and Excise.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you so much. Thank you. It is precisely for this reason we are asking the question, how will the division effectively manage its operation with a decrease in the sum of \$8.92 million?

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I have answered that already. I get the impression that the hon. Member was not listening. That was a one-off payment for back pay in fiscal 2018 which is not required to be paid in fiscal 2019. I said that three times to the Member for Princes Town.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Couva North.

**Ms. Ramdial:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item 08, Vacant Posts. Can the Minister say how many Vacant Posts exist because I am seeing an increase by \$6.35 million for Vacant Posts?

**Hon. Imbert:** In answer to a question from the Member for Siparia, I said that we will seek to fill posts of 17 customs guards and 140 custom officers. I do hope you are the last person to ask that same question.

**Ms. Ramdial:** Okay. Do not get hot and bothered.

**Hon. Imbert:** I am not hot and bothered, you seem rather bothered to me, the fact that I have pointed out you are asking the same question you already asked.

**Madam Chairman:** All right, Members. Members, let us, you know, be very clinical about what we are about.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, with your intention to form the Revenue Authority, which includes Customs and Inland Revenue, there is a Vote in each Item, there is 003 and 004 for salaries and wages. If that Revenue Authority becomes a reality, how do you propose to manage the Vote for salaries and wages in both these areas? What is the future for that?

**Hon. Imbert:** When you vote for it and the House approves, we will cross that bridge when we come to it.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** You do not have any clear idea?

**Hon. Imbert:** We have to wait on you to support the Revenue Authority?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** You do not have any clue?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Thank you, Madam Chair, same Items there, Customs and Excise. Is there a policy governing these overtime? And if the answer is yes, can you describe briefly what is the policy?

**Hon. Imbert:** A policy governing overtime? I will have to get that for you.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** What is the estimated numbers of persons—employees—who work overtime on a monthly basis?

**Hon. Imbert:** I would have to get that for you.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** What types of duties require overtime? I think you touched on that when you talked about the ports. You will get that too?

**Hon. Imbert:** Dealing with the transit of goods and people at various ports of entry.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Sure. If it is that overtime has now become a regular fixture within the service—the Customs and Excise—because of flights, ships and planes coming in all different hours and so on—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Imbert:** And also—[*Interruption*]

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—I ask please, Sir, the overtime policy is very important.

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes, I know. I said I will get it for you. How many times will you ask me for it?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Well, when you get it. I cannot ask you anything anymore.

**Hon. Imbert:** I will try and get it for you by tomorrow.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** So can we defer it?

**Hon. Imbert:** I will try and get it for you by tomorrow.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Chaguanas West. I have asked Members to be quite clinical having regard to what we want to achieve today, please.

**Mr. Singh:** Item 05, Government's Contribution to N.I.S. There is an increase from \$4.5 million to \$5.5 million. What is the justification for this increase in NIS?

**Hon. Imbert:** All right. I will forgive the hon. Member for not hearing that we appointed 20 new customs guards recently. It is for recently filled posts which are going to carry into 2019, which were not catered for fully in 2018 because they were appointed during 2018. Okay?

**Mr. Singh:** I could live with that.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Mayaro.

**Mr. Paray:** Thank you very much. Minister, just on the Item of the NIS. I heard before in one of your responses, you spoke about an additional 150 plus 17 additional vacant posts, and you have now added another 20 guards. If you do a quick calculation in terms of the NIS contributions, you are looking at a million dollars increase for NIS. That works out to a little over \$1,500 per person per week, that is if you take those numbers based on what you said in terms of the new hires that are going to come in. That figure seems awfully high based on the highest classifications for NIS weekly. Can you give an account for that?

**Hon. Imbert:** Your calculations are wrong.

**Mr. Paray:** Could you educate me into the calculations?

**Hon. Imbert:** I will give you a worked example tomorrow.

**Mr. Paray:** Sure, look out for me.



**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Still on Customs and Excise. How many posts are currently vacant?

**Hon. Imbert:** I will give you that tomorrow.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** What is the classification of these vacant positions?

**Hon. Imbert:** I beg your pardon?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** What is the classification of the vacant positions?

**Hon. Imbert:** So, what I would undertake to do by tomorrow, I will circulate it—the numbers of vacant posts and the actual posts themselves.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Are these posts essential to the running of the division, the department?

**Hon. Imbert:** I would think so, yes.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Then why is it the money is never used every year? 2018, 2017, zero.

**Hon. Imbert:** The hon. Member for Siparia is a very experienced parliamentarian—[*Interruption*]

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Thank you. Thank you very much.

**Hon. Imbert:**—and will know that the filling of public service positions is under the control of the Public Service Commission and not this Minister. We cannot compel the Public Service Commission to fill vacant posts. All we can do is ask, plead, urge, try to use moral suasion, but we cannot compel them to fill posts. So every year we put the provision and we make our best effort to persuade the commission to fill the posts. But it is not this Minister who fills posts; and you know that.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Okay, through you. Has any needs assessment been conducted to determine whether these vacant posts are critical to the Ministry? Has any needs assessment been done?

**Hon. Imbert:** These posts would have been approved when you were Prime Minister.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Has any needs assessment been done?

**Hon. Imbert:** Any needs assessment would have been done under your tenure.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** So none has been done under your tenure?

**Hon. Imbert:** The posts are already established. These are establishment posts that are on the establishment on the estimates that have been there for years, probably since you were in the Panday administration.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** My question please, through you Madam, has any needs assessment been conducted to determine whether these posts are critical to the Ministry?

**Hon. Imbert:** I am sure that successive governments have done so for the last 20 years.

**Madam Chairman:** Just let the question be asked. I know you are eager to get on, but let the question be asked and then you can answer, please. Member for Siparia, please ask the question.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Has any needs assessments been conducted by your Government—your present Government—to determine whether these vacant posts are critical to the Ministry?

**Hon. Imbert:** It is a sine qua non of the creation of an establishment post that it is justified.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** The answer is no? All that run around to say no.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Are we moving on? Item 004, Inland Revenue. Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** I am looking at 01, Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, and I see an increase \$12 million. And in the context of the transitioning to a Revenue

Authority, why would there be— One would anticipate that the Inland Revenue Division would be in a holding position, pending the establishment of the Revenue Authority. In that context, why a \$12 million increase in Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance? And in 21, Contribution to Group Pensions, it is only 10,000. Or, one at a time.

**Madam Chairman:** So I think the first question is: Why an increase in \$12 million under 01, Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance?

**Mr. Charles:** Yeah.

**Hon. Imbert:** That is a provision for outstanding increment payments and payments for persons acting in higher posts.

**Mr. Charles:** Item 21, Contribution to Group Pension—Daily-Rated Workers. Given the fact that one may anticipate a large number of daily-rated employees being terminated in the context of the Revenue Authority, is this figure adequate to meet the potential needs of those who would be terminated in the context of the Revenue Authority?

**Hon. Imbert:** I am afraid I am unable to make the connection between daily-rated workers who would be terminated and a provision for pension.

**Mr. Charles:** If they are working, Minister, in the Inland Revenue Division and there is a likelihood that given the Revenue Authority that they may be terminated or transitioned, the question is: Is this figure of \$10,000 adequate to meet the pension needs of the daily-rated workers in the Inland Revenue Division?

**Hon. Imbert:** Again, as I said, I cannot make the connection. But there is something you should know hon. Member, and I am surprised that you are not aware. There is no daily-rated pension at this point in time.

**Mr. Charles:** So, therefore, what is the meaning of this group pension? What is the meaning of this allocation?

**Hon. Imbert:** That is in anticipation of reaching an agreement with the majority union with respect to a pension for daily-rated workers.

**Mr. Charles:** Well, then why in 2018—in 2017, you had no provision; 2018 you had 10,000. So it means this has been ongoing.

**Hon. Imbert:** That is not correct. You are not reading the documents correctly. This is not a bank in Estoril Miami.

**Mr. Charles:** In 2018 estimates—

**Hon. Imbert:** You are reading the wrong column. This is not a bank in Estoril Miami.

**Mr. Charles:** No. Come on, come on Minister, come on. Item 21, the Government's Contribution to Group Pension—Daily-Rated Workers. Is that not—**Hon. Imbert:** You are reading the wrong column. This is not a fraudulent email.

**Mr. Charles:** What nonsense is that? I am reading the right column.

**Madam Chairman:** Members. Minister of Finance, could you just add some clarification so that we could go on?

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I would expect hon. Members who have received these documents on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October, which is about nine days ago, and who have been experienced Members of this House now for at least three years in the case of the hon. Member for Naparima, would know that the column that you have to look at—because we have gone through this before with this hon. Member on numerous occasions—is the Revised Estimates and you will see there is a zero expenditure there. So there was no expenditure for pensions.

**Mr. Charles:** The question arises. You allocated estimated—and I could read and I could see—10,000 in 2018 which meant that you made a provision for. Am I correct or not?

**Hon. Imbert:** What is the question?

**Mr. Charles:** So the question is: Is the provision of 10,000 in 2019 adequate to your anticipated needs, pension needs for daily-rated workers? Simple yes or no.

**Hon. Imbert:** Obviously.

**Mr. Charles:** Good. Thank you. I move on.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Minister, in your allocation for 2018 for Salaries and Cost of Living, you had estimated \$92 million and the revised estimate is \$80 million, so you did not spend \$12 million. In 2019, now you put back the \$92 million. Could you account for what happened? Why the \$12 million was not spent? And you are putting it back now. What are you putting it back for?

**Hon. Imbert:** I answered that already.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No. What is the answer?

**Hon. Imbert:** You have to check the *Hansard*. [*Crosstalk*] It is obviously too much for the hon. Member to listen and retain the following words which I said just a few minutes ago. I do not know if the hon. Member was asleep. That \$12 million is a provision for outstanding arrears of increments and acting payments. There is problem here with intellectual capacity.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So you did not pay it last year. You are paying it this year?

**Hon. Imbert:** Obviously, the word “arrears” means back pay.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Well, if it was arrears last year, why was it not paid last year?

**Hon. Imbert:** It is arrears accumulated from last year going into this year. That is obvious, Member.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Why did you not pay it last year?

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Speaker, [*Laughter*] the answer to the Member’s question is the same answers I answered to the other Member. The additional \$12 million is a provision for arrears of increments and payments for persons who have acted in a

higher position. Those arrears will be settled in 2019. That is standard practice and would have occurred in every one of the five years that you were Minister of Education. So stop asking these kinds of questions please. It is clear? It is clear to you now? You wake up now?

**Madam Chairman:** All right. So, members, just, you know, for our collective assistance, if Members look at the classification of expenditure Sub-Items which is in the same draft estimates at the beginning, in those pages with the roman numerals, certain explanations are given. So it may assist all Members to refer to that to help them craft their questions and answers. Okay. So we go on.

Item 005, Treasury Division, page 79. Item 008, Investments Division, page 79. Member for Siparia.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** There have been a number of instances where serious questions arise for the state sector—the state enterprises sector. Is this Investments Division sufficiently staffed to provide effective oversight of the state enterprise sector?

**Hon. Imbert:** We could always do better.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And can you tell us how many persons are in fact employed in this Investments Division?

**Hon. Imbert:** We will get that information to you tomorrow, but I am told it is approximately 59.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I, what ways can you do better?

**Hon. Imbert:** Well, once the Public Service Commission fills the posts.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** No, I am not speaking about filling of posts. I asked you a question first and you said you can improve. So I am saying, in what ways can you improve?

**Hon. Imbert:** I just answered you. Once the Public Service Commission fills the

posts, we will have more bodies in the posts and we can always do better. Once you have more people you do better.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Really?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Mr. Minister, on that same point, are you saying that if the Public Service Commission does not fill the posts that you are in no position to take any action to improve the quality of personnel required to supervise hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayers' moneys invested?

**Hon. Imbert:** No.

**Dr. Rambachan:** You are not in a position to do anything?

**Hon. Imbert:** I said I am not saying that. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Chairman:** Members. Members. Could we just please confine our statements on either side to the matters before us?

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chair, I was asked a question, but I was in no position to do X, Y, Z and I said no. That "no" was in the negative. It meant I reject that question. That is what that "no" meant.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Has any analysis been done, Mr. Minister, of the skill sets and the professional competencies of the persons in the Investments Division now in relation to what have been described at several levels of the committees of the shortcomings of the quality of supervision of the state enterprises? Have you in mind any programme in order to improve the quality of such personnel so that we can get a better use of State's funds in these state enterprises?

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes.

**4.20 p.m.**

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Meaning what by, yes?

**Hon. Imbert:** You asked a question, I have answered in the affirmative. You

asked whether we have done an assessment, you have asked whether we are going to try and improve the skill set to provide better supervision of the state sector and I have answered, yes.

**Dr. Rambachan:** But what specific actions have you then taken, Mr. Minister, in order to support what you have just said, yes? What specific actions have you taken?

**Hon. Imbert:** We have determined the number of persons that we need and the particular skill sets we need, and if we form the view that the Service Commission is taking too long to fill the establishment positions we will approach Cabinet, as is normal, for the employment of persons on contract to perform the functions while we await the appointment of persons for the establishment of the public service posts. That is the standard procedure that has been used by governments for the 27 years I have been in Parliament.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Are you as the Minister of Finance in charge of this very large segment of the operations of the Government in state enterprises? Are you satisfied that you are getting from these people the quality of supervision that you require, given what we have seen emanating when these state enterprises come before parliamentary committees and the really, really, bothersome kinds of discoveries that are being made?

**Hon. Imbert:** I am satisfied that the staff of the Investments Division go beyond the call of duty.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Despite the kinds of losses we are seeing, despite the kinds of inefficiencies we see, despite all of this; despite what took place at Petrotrin with A&V Drilling, and so on, that you are satisfied that the people you have they are doing the quality of job in terms of the supervision required to make sure that we get value for money, and that the efficiency and effectiveness of these investments



are realized?

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Mr. Minister, I would not go so far as to be disrespectful to say that I am disappointed in your answer, but I am.

**Hon. Imbert:** That is not a question, Madam Chairman.

**Madam Chairman:** That is a statement. Can we go on to the Member for Siparia?

**Dr. Tewarie:** Could I ask a question on this?

**Madam Chairman:** Just one minute. Member for Siparia, would you give way to—

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Yes, certainly, Madam.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes, Member for Caroni Central.

**Dr. Tewarie:** I was going to ask, in this particular Investments Division, Minister, how many employees do you have?

**Hon. Imbert:** You know, Madam Chairman, it is very difficult, and I notice a certain habit on the part of the Members opposite, one person will ask a question, the question would be answered, then five minutes later another Member would ask the identical question and put forward a theory that that question was never asked before, and never answered before. That identical question was asked by the Member for Siparia and answered.

**Dr. Tewarie:** I am sorry, Minister, I missed it. Could you help me?

**Hon. Imbert:** Well, that is okay. No, there are 18 of you, suppose every single one of you ask the same question over and over, we will be here until next year. The answer is approximately 59. That is the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Siparia.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay. I am sorry I missed it.

**Hon. Imbert:** But all of you all seem to be asleep.

**Dr. Tewarie:** I am sorry I missed it. The reason I am asking that is that I heard you say just now, hon. Member, that there are approximately 100 state enterprises, is that right?

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay. And I note that there seems to be an interest in developing additional state enterprises. I heard that from the Minister of Works and Transport.

**Hon. Imbert:** Could you ask the question please?

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yes. I know that the NIF has been created and identified as a state enterprise, what I am asking really is, are the 59 employees that you have—I imagine some are at supervisory level, some are lower down, is that adequate? And I understand that there are boards for each enterprise to keep the Ministry of Finance informed and on top of what is happening in the state enterprise sector.

**Madam Chairman:** Member, I believe that was the very first question in substance that was asked under this Head. That question was asked in substance, maybe in not as many words but in substance, it was.

**Dr. Tewarie:** I am speaking to the changing nature of the state enterprise sector under the Government.

**Madam Chairman:** Member, as I said, in substance that question was asked and answered. That took us down the line of, “could do, we can always do better”. It was asked in terms of numbers versus, it was. So I am just asking for all of us in the interest of what we would like to achieve, let us all sing from the same hymn book. Member for Siparia.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** No, Madam, it is on Valuation Division, not this one.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Mayaro, is that all right? Okay. Good. Can we go on to 009, Central Tenders Board, page 80. Member for Mayaro.

**Mr. Paray:** Thank you again, Madam Chairman. Minister, I just want to ask this question, and I know the response—I do not want to be anticipatory for the other sections, but for instance 001, and you see the increases in salaries that are provisioned for vacant posts with incumbents, I just want to find out if the incumbents who are holding on to these positions, when you make these increases, are there promotions, or what you call confirmations guaranteed during the fiscal year when you make these allocations for those vacant posts with incumbents?

**Hon. Imbert:** Public servants are entitled to increments and promotions.

**Mr. Paray:** It is the reason why I am asking.

**Hon. Imbert:** But I am telling you, it is an entitlement.

**Mr. Paray:** So when the provisions are made they are entitled for the confirmations in the positions?

**Hon. Imbert:** Public servants are entitled to promotion and appointments. That is done by the Public Service Commission. What the Budget Division will do and the Ministry of Finance will do is make its best estimate of what will occur in the coming fiscal year based on historical trends, and determine that perhaps in this year X number of persons may be promoted, Y number of persons may receive increments, and they come up with this number.

**Mr. Paray:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Madam Chair. To the Minister, in line Item 01, Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, and the 009 as a Sub-Head, Central Tenders Board, what would become of this Head, the Central Tenders Board, when the procurement regulation or the procurement office comes into full flight or it is activated?

**Hon. Imbert:** That is catered for in the Public Procurement and Disposal of

Public Property Act which was piloted through this Parliament by your Government, and at the end of that piece of legislation it states that the Central Tenders Board Act would be repealed.

**Mr. Lee:** And what would become of the employees that Item 01 relates to?

**Hon. Imbert:** That is also in the legislation, your legislation. I suggest you familiarize yourself with it, it was yours. The transitional provisions are all there. Perhaps you could ask the Member for Caroni Central since he piloted the legislation.

**Mr. Lee:** It is his legislation now. I thought it was yours.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** My colleague asked the question but there was no answer for it.

**Hon. Imbert:** Is that a question or a statement?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** A statement.

**Hon. Imbert:** Were you awake?

**Madam Chairman:** Item 010, Valuation Division, page—[*Interruption*] Yes, sure.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Thank you. I note that the 2019 Estimates are very close to the 2018 revised, and just about for the 2017, if it is, will the Minister tell us—in other words, this being the same over the three years with the proclamation, full proclamation of the new legislation, I do not see here any decrease in your estimates which gives me then the impression that fiscal 2019 will not see full proclamation. Is there a proclamation proposed date for the legislation?

**Hon. Imbert:** Yeah, I put that in the budget statement.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Like you said in fiscal '19, to the best of my memory.

**Hon. Imbert:** I did not say that. Your memory is defective. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Well then tell us what it is. You want us to really

stay here until tomorrow morning?

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Speaker, are there multiple questions coming at me?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** It was just one.

**Hon. Imbert:** But I am hearing a noise to your left.

**Madam Chairman:** I believe there are urgings, multiple urgings.

**Hon. Imbert:** I said, based on the information that we have received in the Ministry of Finance from the Procurement Regulator with respect to training and other proprietary work being done to allow the full proclamation of the Act that we expect that in the first quarter of calendar 2019 that the Act can be proclaimed. That is what I said.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Calendar '19.

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes, calendar as opposed to fiscal. Well, I will explain since others may not understand, January to March, 2019.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Princes Town.

**Mr. Padarath:** Thank you, Madam Chair, to the hon. Minister, line Item 01, the increase of \$1 million on this particular line Item, and it was an issue that I raised earlier and the Minister referred me later down, so I am going to ask the question, how would this increase affect the recommendations of the Auditor General's Report with respect to the Valuation Division in Chapter 5 of the Auditor General's Report?

**Hon. Imbert:** You will have to be more specific than that.

**Mr. Padarath:** So is the Minister saying he is not aware of any recommendations of the Auditor General's Report with respect to the Valuation Division?

**Hon. Imbert:** No, I am saying I want better and further particulars.

**Mr. Padarath:** Okay. So the hon. Minister is not aware of any staffing challenges identified by the Auditor General?

**Hon. Imbert:** I am not saying that, I am saying I want better and further, Madam Chairman, I cannot answer an obtuse question that refers to something else that may not even be accurate or truthful. I do not accept anything the Member is saying.

**Mr. Padarath:** Madam Chairman, I would be very specific.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So therefore, if you maybe break down your question you might advance us a little further.

**Mr. Padarath:** Sure. Madam Speaker, the payment of salaries and cost of living allowances to officers, permanent, acting or temporary in established public service posts, the Auditor General's Report speaks about the Valuation Division in Chapter 5 and specifically refers of the inefficiencies in some of these same positions outlined. Whether they are permanent, acting or temporary, there is an increase of \$1 million here. We are asking whether or not this increase would have any impact in terms of the recommendations made by the Auditor General. It is either that, Madam, or the Minister is not aware of the Auditor General—

**Madam Chairman:** Let the Minister understand, digest the question and hopefully give us an answer that we can move on.

**Hon. Imbert:** They seem rather hot and bothered on that side. It is a provision for vacant posts.

**Mr. Padarath:** So therefore, Madam, the hon. Minister is admitting that this does not address the recommendations of the Auditor General's Report with respect to specific staffing issues in the Valuation Division?

**Hon. Imbert:** I do not accept anything you are saying. I reject your assertion entirely.

**Mr. Padarath:** Well, Minister, but you should have come better prepared because you keep promising too much—[*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Chairman:** One minute. Member for Princes Town—

**Mr. Padarath:** Your answers are irrelevant. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Chairman:** All right. So can we go on? Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Thank you, Madam—

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Diego North/East, Member for Princes Town, let us move on please.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Hon. Minister, given that you have a lot of citizens in the country who express dissatisfaction and are very often caught in conflict with the Government over valuation of properties, why is it that you have not placed some significant money in the Valuation Division for the training and updating of the skills of valuation officers? I see nothing here for training.

**Madam Chairman:** Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Imbert:** You are looking in the wrong place, which is not unexpected from your side. Look in the PSIP and you will find it there. We have not reached there yet, by the way.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni Central. No? Okay.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Are you still on valuations?

**Madam Chairman:** Valuations, yes.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** We see what appears to be an increase for the Valuation Division, what changes are you proposing to spend that extra money you are now allocating?

**Hon. Imbert:** It is not an appearance, it is a fact.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** It is an appearance, you know, but—

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I cannot deal with that, it is an increase.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Yeah. All right. So it is listed as an increase of 6.5

and I am asking what the Minister proposes this money be spent on, this extra money?

**Hon. Imbert:** So you are asking questions on line Item 01, 03, 04, 05, 08, 27, all those line Items all in one question?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** No, I am speaking of the Valuation Division.

**Hon. Imbert:** I am speaking also of the Valuation Division.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** All right, 10, 010.

**Madam Chairman:** So, if maybe I could just interject here, Member for Siparia, if I am correct, the 6.5 you are looking at is the total at the end of the page?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Increase, yes, an increase of about six-point-something million.

**Madam Chairman:** So I believe what the Minister of Finance is saying is that the 6.5 is an aggregate of what appears [*Crosstalk*] above it, yes, and therefore that is what he is asking if your question is really aimed at each of the Sub-Heads.

**Hon. Imbert:** The point I was making is that the \$6.5 million increase is an aggregate of 03, 04, 05, 08, 27.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Sure. Okay, let us do it another way if you want to do it line by line.

**Hon. Imbert:** It is not for me, I am answering your question.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** The increase that has been read—that is what I said—it appears to be an increase, and that increase is shown, 03, 04, 05, where it is allocated each year and then in the revised you do not spend it. So if you look that is why it is just there in the book and it is never used, \$5 million.

**Hon. Imbert:** What is your question?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** So the increase of 1.3, 1.5 is really an increase, is really a question of what you intend to do with it.



**Hon. Imbert:** If the hon. Member would address her gaze to 010, 08—

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Vacant posts?

**Hon. Imbert:** Correct, which have to be filled by the Public Service Commission.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Sure, so we will not spend it again, every year.

**Hon. Imbert:** So we live in hope that these posts would be filled.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** So it is not a real increase. That is the point. It appears to be.

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, it is an increase, we provide for vacant posts and we try our best throughout the year to get the Public Service Commission to fill the posts. That is how it is in this Government, your Government, and all the other Governments before that.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Thank you, hon. Minister. Given that the Valuation Division is now going—given then that this was just for the vacant posts, each year put and not happening, what are you going to do to deal with all the work that is going to be given to the Valuation Division with the coming into force of the new law? Is that also under DP?

**Hon. Imbert:** If the hon. Member had been paying attention the hon. Member would be aware that during this last 12 months the Cabinet has approved the hiring of over 300 persons on contract to deal with the fact that there are so many vacancies for establishment positions. So we have moved aggressively and proactively to hire over 300 persons on contract.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** So where would I find, please, through you, that line item under the Valuation Division?

**Hon. Imbert:** I beg your pardon?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Where would I find an allocation—

**Hon. Imbert:** We are dealing with page 80, Head 18, 010, Valuation Division,

and the Items here.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** No, you are say you are bringing in 300 contract—

**Hon. Imbert:** When we get to that we will deal with that. We are not dealing with that here.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Okay.

**Hon. Imbert:** So which line Item are you talking about?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I am speaking of none, Sir. Thank you very much.

**Hon. Imbert:** Clearly, you are speaking of no line Item.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Just to add another question in relationship to the Valuation Division in the same 08, the definition of the Vacant Posts-Salaries and COLA (without incumbents), \$5 million, when you go to the definition of the vacant posts is says:

“To cater for posts which are vacant without incumbents but which are critical to the operations of the Ministry, Department or Agency.”

So I am asking the Minister, what is happening in this Valuation Division that they cannot fill these vacant posts that are critical to running the Valuation Division?

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, that has been answered four times already. I do not intend to answer the same question over and over and over, we have just begun. I have made the point that the filling of vacant posts is the purview—  
[*Crosstalk*]

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Madam Chair—

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I am speaking. No, I can speak. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Chairman:** One minute, please. Member for Diego Martin North/East, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, Member for Siparia; Member for Siparia, you might be being disturbed but I am sure that also certain people to your

left are talking also, and they are much closer to you. Now, I want us to also put “a brakes” on where we are going. I expect that the questions we are asking are all legitimate and sincere questions to be answered. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, the question that you have asked has been answered repeatedly in terms of how hiring is done in the public service, and a supplemental question with respect to, if it is critical, what you are doing, has already been answered.

**Hon. Imbert:** And answered.

**Madam Chairman:** Well, I said answered, I did not say, asked, answered. So I would ask Members to please, I know it is difficult for us to keep focus and attentive, because remember we all have important business to complete. I may start to think that we are being a little too, you know, frivolous, and I am sure we do not mean that. So let us go on. So we are now at Item 011, National Insurance Appeal Board Tribunal, page 81. Item 014, Financial Intelligence Unit, page 81. Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Bearing in mind the necessity for a strong FIU, the salaries, a total of 1.7, \$1,700,000, would the Minister indicate how many employees that would cover? Possibly from my calculation, possible about seven or eight, and is that enough to staff a highly efficient FIU unit, thus rendering the unit almost ineffective. How many people are employed in the FIU unit?

**Hon. Imbert:** Thirty-five.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** And lowly paid. All right, thanks for answering.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. No? Item 017, Office of the Supervisor of Insolvency, page 82; Sub-Head 02, Goods and Services. Item 001, General Administration, pages 82 to 84. Member for Chaguanas East.

**Mr. Karim:** Thank you very much, Madam Chairperson. Might I be able to get some explanation as to line Items 16 and 17, please, as to the substantial increase?

**Madam Chairman:** So we are at page 82, Items 16 and 17?

**Mr. Karim:** Yeah, page 82, line Items 16 and 17. There has been a substantial increase in both line Items.

**Madam Chairman:** Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Imbert:** It includes a provision for the filling of 12 posts in the IT Unit, 13 posts in the Tax Policy Unit, and 41 posts in the Programming Policy Unit.

**Mr. Karim:** With respect to the training, that sum of 3.3 increase, is that our local training or does it include a percentage of foreign?

**Hon. Imbert:** Both.

**Mr. Karim:** Could you say what is that percentage?

**Hon. Imbert:** Not at this time, but I will endeavour to get that information by tomorrow.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Siparia.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Thank you. Under Books and Periodicals, which is 11, I note there is an increase here for Books and Periodicals of \$465,000, would you kindly share with us an account for the greater estimate of \$465,000, and it is not a laughing matter but I really would like to know what because I am interested. Because your previous estimates for 2018 were \$50,000, your revised was \$84,000, and now we have an increase which takes you to 550, so would you have some idea of what it is this extra \$465,000 would be spent on? I know it is Books and Periodicals, but—

**Hon. Imbert:** Being a highly intellectual Ministry, we are always upgrading our skills.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Would you be kind enough to share with us in details of the process—

**Hon. Imbert:** You want to know what books we plan to buy and what periodicals

we plan to subscribe to?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** What do you plan to spend the \$465,000 on?

**Hon. Imbert:** Do you wish to know which books we plan to buy and what periodicals we plan to subscribe to?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Yes, Sir, what you plan to spend on the line Item.

**Hon. Imbert:** That information will be provided tomorrow.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you. A couple of Items, line Item 10, Office Stationery and Supplies, will a decrease by \$150,000 in office stationery and supplies hinder the office of the supervisor—

**Madam Chairman:** Page 82, Item 10, Office—

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** How many persons are employed in this division?

**Hon. Imbert:** Persons?

**Madam Chairman:** If we are under Good and Services.

**Hon. Imbert:** Persons, a book is not a person.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** No, I thought we were on 01.

**Madam Chairman:** We are on Goods and Services. Please, let us go on. Member for Princes Town.

**Mr. Padarath:** Thank you, Madam. Madam, to the hon. Minister, line Item 34 on page 83, under Good and Services, General Administration, the University Graduate Recruitment Programme, Madam, we would recall that since 2015 the hon. Minister gave us a long song and dance about the graduate university training programme—

**Madam Chairman:** Member, just ask a question, please.

**Mr. Padarath:** I see another \$1 million is proposed for this financial year but

nothing has been spent in 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, and again it is being proposed in 2019, could the Minister tell us what are the challenges that had been happening with this particular line Item that they have been able to hire no one in the University Graduate Recruitment Programme in the three years that they have been in office?

**Madam Chairman:** Minister of Finance, that they have not been able to employ anyone.

**Hon. Imbert:** In the last three years there were some issues with respect to the definition of the persons who qualified as graduates for recruitment. We have resolved those issues.

**Mr. Padarath:** And what have you done, Minister, to resolve those issues in three years and four budgets?

**Hon. Imbert:** The issues have been resolved.

**Mr. Padarath:** One, can you give us what the definition is, and, two, the assurance that this programme after four budgets and three years has passed will be brought into effect in this financial year?

**Hon. Imbert:** As I indicated in earlier budgets, this is designed to help persons who graduate at the top of their class.

**Mr. Padarath:** Agreed Minister, but so far it has helped no one.

**Hon. Imbert:** What is the question?

**Mr. Padarath:** The question is, what is the definition now? You have just indicated there was a challenge with the definition—

**Hon. Imbert:** That has been resolved.

**Mr. Padarath:** Right. Can you share with us what is the definition now and give the assurance that it will be instituted in this financial year?

**4.50 p.m.**

**Hon. Imbert:** Persons who graduate at the top of their class, and yes it will be operationalized in this fiscal year.

**Mr. Padarath:** And, hon. Minister, you are telling this Committee that it took you three years, four budgets later to come up with a definition to bring effect to this line Item?

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes.

**Mr. Padarath:** It is much like the Children's Life Fund.

**Mr. Singh:** To the hon. Minister. Line Item 16, Contract Employment. There is an increase of \$12.7 million in the Contract Employment Head. Could the Minister indicate what is the nature of that contract employment?

**Madam Chairman:** We are at page 82, Item 60.

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I answered this already, you know. I answered this question already, Madam Chairman. I really am reluctant to answer it again, you know. This is becoming a habit.

**Madam Chairman:** Just one minute. Minister of Finance, I will allow you one opportunity to bring some clarity so that we can go on.

**Hon. Imbert:** Head 02, Sub-Head 16, Contract Employment. I said already, clearly and unambiguously, this includes a provision for filling of 12 posts in the IT unit. That was a question posed by the Member for Chaguanas East. I said that clearly; 13 posts in the Tax Policy Unit and 41 posts in the Programme and Policy Unit. Madam Chairman, this is ridiculous, and Members are pretending that this question was not asked and answered before.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Under 08, Rent/Lease Office Accommodation and Storage, I note that there is an increase of \$465.5 million.

**Madam Chairman:** This is under 08?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Ma'am, I am sorry, the ruler is giving me a little

trouble; 369—220 increase. Does the Ministry intend to rent/lease any new accommodation or storage spaces under this Head?

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And would you know which ones they are?

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Would you kindly tell us?

**Hon. Imbert:** Trade Zone.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Trade—

**Hon. Imbert:** Zone.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And where is this?

**Hon. Imbert:** The same place you rented from. There is only one Trade Zone in Trinidad and Tobago, as you well know. It is a place that is used for archival purposes; has been used by governments for 20 years, including yours, Trade Zone.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** But you are saying this is a new—

**Hon. Imbert:** Additional storage.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Additional, so I was not renting it.

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes you did. You rented that building.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** No, but you are saying this is something new.

**Hon. Imbert:** We are just renting more space in the same building that you rented.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I am trying to understand.

**Hon. Imbert:** I am explaining. It is the same building you rented. We are renting additional space in there.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Thank you.

**Hon. Imbert:** Welcome.



**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Can you tell us how many properties are leased or rented at this time?

**Hon. Imbert:** We will get that information for you tomorrow.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And the cost of each of these properties.

**Hon. Imbert:** I am told it is two.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Two?

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Under this Item?

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And the cost for each?

**Hon. Imbert:** We will give you the breakdown.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Okay, further, how many storage spaces are rented, leased, which is what you said we did and the monthly cost of each under this Item.

**Hon. Imbert:** What do you mean by that? What do you mean by storage spaces, I said two?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Sure. You are saying you are going to get two new storage spaces.

**Hon. Imbert:** I did not say that. You asked me how many spaces are we renting, I said two. I said two.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** No. Madam, my first question was I noted that there was an increase, and what was the increase going to be applied for?

**Hon. Imbert:** For additional storage.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** That is the point, additional storage.

**Hon. Imbert:** It is not a space.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Okay. So what is the existing storage? You have two

additional, you are bringing what is existing and what is the cost of each, please?

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I will try my best to repeat what I have just said. The Ministry in this particular Item stores its material at two locations. At one of them, we intend to increase the amount of storage space that we occupy. The question should have been—What is the square area that you intend to occupy that would result in this increase? If you had asked me that, I would simply say we will tell you tomorrow.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And the cost of that particular square footage?

**Hon. Imbert:** I already said we will tell you the cost. You have asked me that three times, I have said three times you will get it tomorrow.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I wait with bated breath.

**Mr. Karim:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. May I with your permission return to line Item 34?

**Madam Chairman:** Just one minute, please. Line Item 34, sure. It is still under 02.

**Mr. Karim:** Still under the 02, Goods and Services. If I recall correctly in the budget speech, one of the budget speeches that the Minister presented to us very early, there was an allocation of \$55 million for this Item. I would just like to find out how much of that \$55 million has been utilized, and how many persons—while he was finalizing the definition—how many persons, if any, were employed under that line Item of Graduate Recruitment Programme?

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, that question is out of order. There is no \$55 million allocation here.

**Mr. Karim:** You did not listen.

**Hon. Imbert:** No, you cannot ask questions about a previous budget.

**Mr. Karim:** No, no, no. You are not listening to the preamble I used for the

question.

**Hon. Imbert:** I would not answer any question about a previous budget.

**Mr. Karim:** And I am saying that there was an Item in the budget that made a 55—

**Madam Chairman:** This budget?

**Mr. Karim:** No, but let me just ask the question.

**Hon. Imbert:** That is exactly the point I am making.

**Mr. Karim:** Could the Minister then answer the question: Of this, how many persons does he intend to hire for this allocation under this line Item?

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, so we are dealing with the million dollars this year?

**Mr. Karim:** Yes.

**Hon. Imbert:** That information would be provided tomorrow.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Line Item 21, Repairs and Maintenance of Buildings. Can the hon. Minister indicate the increase of \$500,000, making it 5.5 million, to outline the scope of works that will be required to repairs of what buildings or maintenance?

**Hon. Imbert:** It is ongoing upgrade and maintenance to the Finance Tower, Eric Williams Finance Plaza, Independence Square, Port of Spain, Trinidad.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Okay.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Madam Chair. To the Minister, line Item 58, Medical Expenses. In 2017, 19.195; 19,000 was actually spent. In 2018, you estimated 50,000, nothing was spent; but in 2019 you have an allocation of \$600,000 in medical expenses. What is anticipated in respect to medical expenses for this year?

**Hon. Imbert:** We will get back to you on that.

**Mr. Lee:** When, tomorrow, today, tonight? When he says get back to me?

**Madam Chairman:** I understand that to be a very casual way of saying I will respond tomorrow.

**Hon. Imbert:** Quite, quite correct.

**Dr. Tewarie:** 84; Minister, you indicated that on a merit basis, graduates will be recruited from the top of their class. Could you indicate whether that has been determined, whether it is first class, upper second grade point or whether that has been determined basically?

**Hon. Imbert:** The Member for Caroni Central has a very interesting way of embellishing what I say.

**Dr. Tewarie:** You just said “top of the class”, but I do not know—

**Hon. Imbert:** I did not say on a merit basis. Those are your words, not mine. I said this is for persons who graduate at the top of their class. There is only one top, same way there is only one bottom. Top means top, first.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Does that mean first class then?

**Hon. Imbert:** It means they come first.

**Madam Chairman:** I think the question has been answered.

**Mr. Padarath:** Madam, to the hon. Minister, line Item 62. In the 2017 Actual, 405, 2018 Revised Estimates \$500,000, but the estimates for 2019, \$1 million, an increase of \$500,000. Could the hon. Minister indicate what would have accounted for such a large increase in Promotions, Publicity and Printing?

**Madam Chairman:** Page 83.

**Hon. Imbert:** There is a growing and increasing need to counteract the fake news that emanates from the UNC.

**Mr. Padarath:** So you are going to be putting out fake news as well if that is what you are saying?

**Hon. Imbert:** No, we are counteracting your fake news.

**Mr. Padarath:** You mean your fake news?

**Madam Chairman:** Do you have another question?

**Mr. Padarath:** I think we got that, your fake news.

**Hon. Imbert:** You can say that forever.

**Madam Chairman:** Members, Members. Member for Caroni Central, do you have another question?

**Dr. Tewarie:** Ma'am, I did not feel that the Minister answered my question. I really wanted to understand—[*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Chairman:** Excuse me, Members. It is now 4.59.51, I think it was agreed we will take tea at five o'clock. I think now is a good time to take it, maybe we will all—having got some sustenance—would be able to endure this process. This meeting is now suspended. We will resume at 5.30 p.m.

**5.00 p.m.:** *Standing Finance Committee suspended.*

**5.30 p.m.:** *Standing Finance Committee resumed.*

**Madam Chairman:** So this meeting of the Standing Finance Committee is now resumed. And we are at Sub-Head 02, Goods and Services; Item 002, Budget Division, page 84. So we are not finished with Item 001, General Administration? Okay, I am sorry, Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Item 28.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 28.

**Dr. Rambachan:** I noticed that there is a provision of \$19.487 million for Other Contracted Services. I am very interested in finding out—

**Madam Chairman:** So we are at page 83, Sub-Item 28.

**Dr. Rambachan:** I am very interested in finding out the Item, Consultants to the Ministry of Finance, \$10 million. What kind of consultants are these, and how are these consultants recruited? What is the procurement process for recruiting these

consultants?

**Hon. Imbert:** We hire the best in class, the best in the world. I have answered you.

**Dr. Rambachan:** And specifically, who do you intend to hire with this \$10 million this year?

**Hon. Imbert:** We have legal counsel.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Well I noticed, Minister, you have Legal Counsel and Advisory Services already there for \$2.5 million.

**Hon. Imbert:** I beg your pardon.

**Dr. Rambachan:** You have Legal Counsel and Advisory Services already there for 2.5 million. So I am asking specifically, consultants in the Ministry of Finance you have allocated \$10 million, and you say that also includes other legal counsel?

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes. What happen? We hire the best in the world. “We doh make joke.” We have White & Case for example assisting the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Minister, I sense—I will not make a comment.

**Hon. Imbert:** There is nothing to sense. We hire the best in the world.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Let the public sense that you do not want to say who you are hiring. Electronic Media Monitoring Services, \$263,580, what—

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I “cyar” let that pass. The Ministry of Finance provides technical support to all of the other Ministries when it comes to financial matters. An example is we recruited one of the world’s foremost law firms who are acknowledged experts in oil and gas law, and that would be White & Case. And we have made White & Case available to the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries with respect to the negotiations with bp and Shell. We also have recruited Poten & Partners who worked for your Government. These are world-

class consulting firms. That is what that provision is for. We hire best in class.

**Dr. Rambachan:** And you could have said that, Minister, and I would have been very happy. So I just want to ask you another question.

**Hon. Imbert:** Sure.

**Dr. Rambachan:** \$263,580 for Electronic Media Monitoring Services. Which firm does this for you, or is this on a contracted basis?

**Hon. Imbert:** This is something that, I am surprised you are not aware, because as far as I know, when you were in government, benefited from the provision of this service. It is a service where they listen to radio stations, they watch television and they read newspapers, and they provide a summary of the articles or broadcasts that are relevant to the relevant Ministry. It is not confined only to the Ministry of Finance. It has been in existence for years. I came and I met it there. My predecessor would have engaged the firm.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Minister, I asked the question earlier, and—

**Hon. Imbert:** Line Item please?

**Dr. Tewarie:** Line Item 34—

**Hon. Imbert:** Page?

**Dr. Tewarie:** Page 83. I am not trying to be difficult. I am not trying any tricks or anything. You talked about university graduates, when I said merit, you said it is not on merit. You said top of the class, I said does that mean upper second, grade point or whatever? You said, first. I am just trying to understand, you said you spent three years trying to define the basis on which you would recruit those graduates. I am just trying to understand very clearly what the criteria are.

**Hon. Imbert:** Asked and answered.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Eh?

**Hon. Imbert:** Asked and answered.

**Madam Chairman:** So, can we then go on to Item 002, Budget Division, page 84.

**Dr. Tewarie:** I do not think anybody in the public is any clearer.

**Hon. Imbert:** That is not a question, is it?

**Madam Chairman:** Item 003, Customs and Excise Division, pages 85 to 86.

**Mr. Karim:** Thank you very much. Page 85, line Item 28, can I ask on that?

**Madam Chairman:** Yes, because we are at 003.

**Mr. Karim:** I just wanted to ask the Minister if he would indicate on Item 001, is it \$10 million I am seeing there? I just want to get an idea as to what quantum of overtime payment would you have had for the Customs?

**Hon. Imbert:** Did you not say 28?

**Madam Chairman:** Other Contracted Services.

**Hon. Imbert:** So where is the \$10 million you are talking about?

**Mr. Karim:** Well, I am looking under the details on the right side, Operational cost of container examination stations at Point Lisas and Port of Spain. We have always heard about the extent of overtime payment, can you give us a sense as to what quantum is inside of here for overtime payment?

**Hon. Imbert:** In the \$10 million?

**Mr. Karim:** Well, anywhere in this line Item 28 or any other Item there. I was looking for it actually in the other Items but I did not see it.

**Hon. Imbert:** I am a bit confused at the question.

**Mr. Karim:** I just want to know how much have you catered for overtime payment for Customs.

**Hon. Imbert:** This is why I am confused at the question. That is not this line Item.

**Mr. Karim:** Okay. Could you explain a little bit about the line Item 28(i) there?



Could you give us—

**Hon. Imbert:** I am sorry that I have to tell you this. You were a Minister for five years. We have passed the Personnel Expenditure Item under which overtime is classified. We are on Goods and Services, it is not possible to have an appropriation for overtime under Goods and Services. You should know that. You were a Minister for five years.

**Mr. Karim:** Could you give us a sense as to what the Other Contracted Services increase involves by \$3 million, line Item 28?

**Hon. Imbert:** It has being provided for, 10 million for the container examination stations, 1.48 for IT, two million for x-ray scanners.

**Mr. Karim:** Okay, I am seeing it. I see it there.

**Hon. Imbert:** “So if yuh see it there, wha yuh asking for?”

**Mr. Karim:** I really wanted to get at the overtime payment.

**Hon. Imbert:** “So if it is there and yuh see and yuh could see, wha yuh asking meh for?” [*Laughter*] Please. [*Laughter*]

**Madam Chairman:** Can I have the attention of Members, please?

**Dr. Khan:** Yes, Head 28, Minister, the Maintenance of X-ray Scanners. I see you have \$2 million here? Are these scanners up and running and working?

**Hon. Imbert:** You read papers?

**Dr. Khan:** I do.

**Hon. Imbert:** “Yuh din see a picture ah me” beside the scanner when we launched it?

**Dr. Khan:** I asked you if it working. I saw you beside the scanners, but I want to know if they are working.

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes.

**Dr. Khan:** Second one, Columbus Communication.

**Hon. Imbert:** What is the issue?

**Dr. Khan:** Is Columbus Communication still around?

**Hon. Imbert:** Are you trying to say—

**Dr. Khan:** I am just asking.

**Hon. Imbert:** Are you trying to ask me whether Columbus Communication as an entity exists or does not exist?

**Dr. Khan:** At this point in time.

**Hon. Imbert:** You want to know if it still an operational, active company?

**Dr. Khan:** Yes.

**Hon. Imbert:** I will get that information for you.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Line 23, what do these fees include? Page 85, line 23?

**Hon. Imbert:** Oracle software for the Preventative and Legal Unit of Customs and Excise.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** And line 17, Training?

**Hon. Imbert:** That is training for personnel working on the Container Examination Station.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Minister, this refers to line 16, Contract Employment. Just to get a sense of what sort of personnel would be engaged in contract employment in this division, but more to look at a bit of what I would term “seesawing”, for want of a better term, in terms of actual expenditure in 2017.

**Hon. Imbert:** Is one question or multiple questions you are asking? Ask one question “nuh” man.

**Dr. Bodoë:** All right, Minister. The question is, what could account for the increase of \$1.8 million for 2010, in view of the fact that only 600,000 was spent in 2018?

**Hon. Imbert:** Twelve additional IT posts.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Twelve additional IT posts?

**Hon. Imbert:** I just said that.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you.

**Hon. Imbert:** I did not stammer.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 004, Inland Revenue Division, pages 86 and 87. Item 005 Treasury Division, pages 87 to 89. Item 008 Investment Division, page 89. Item 009 Central Tenders Board, page 90.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Ma'am, I wanted to ask something on 89.

**Hon. Imbert:** We are on 91.

**Madam Chairman:** Member, I have now reached Item 009, Central Tenders Board. I have indicated in setting the table, and I said it twice for emphasis, that we would not be going back. So maybe you would get an opportunity to ask the question further on. Item 009 Central Tenders Board.

**Mr. Paray:** Minister, Item line 01, Travelling and Subsistence. What would account for the increase that you are expecting, of \$488,000 additional, under Travelling and Subsistence? What would account for that increase in your expectations?

**Hon. Imbert:** A number of positions within that department have been recently classified as "travelling positions". They did not have a travelling allowance associated with them before; 16 new positions actually.

**Mr. Paray:** Is there a set policy to determine values and so on for that travelling and subsistence in existence?

**Hon. Imbert:** It is done by the Chief Personnel Officer in consultation with the Director of Personnel Administration and the Public Service Commission.

**Mr. Paray:** Can you give us an idea of the amount of people who are entitled to

that in terms of the current staffing there?

**Hon. Imbert:** Amount of people where?

**Mr. Paray:** At the Central Tenders Board, who would be entitled to that travelling and subsistence?

**Hon. Imbert:** New or existing?

**Mr. Paray:** Well, whatever would account for the additional 488,000.

**Hon. Imbert:** I said it was 16 persons; 1-6, I just said that.

**Mr. Paray:** No, no, you said that was the increase. I wanted to know if that was the total amount.

**Hon. Imbert:** But we are talking about an increase. You asked me about an increase.

**Mr. Paray:** No, but I am asking in general. We were asking about the policy around it.

**Hon. Imbert:** You want to know how many people in the CTB are entitled to a travelling allowance?

**Mr. Paray:** All of them?

**Hon. Imbert:** You will get that tomorrow.

**Mr. Paray:** All right; thank you.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Line 66, Hosting of conferences, seminars and other functions. I am seeing the revised estimates, 30,000, but 2019 estimate is \$500,000. How could—

**Hon. Imbert:** What page are you on, Ma'am?

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Page 91.

**Hon. Imbert:** You are not on the right page.

**Madam Chairman:** No, no, no, we are on page 90. We are still on the Central Tenders Board. Item 010, Valuation Department, page 91.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Line 66 Minister, Hosting of Conferences, Seminars and Other Functions. As I indicated earlier, I am seeing the 2018 revised estimates of \$30,000, and 2019 estimates was \$500,000. So I just need to know how you account for that astronomical figure.

**Hon. Imbert:** Astronomical? You find \$500,000 is astronomical?

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** From 30,000.

**Hon. Imbert:** That is not astronomical.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** What is it?

**Hon. Imbert:** That provision is in anticipation of the operationalization of the collection of property tax in 2019. So it is for training and seminars and publicity, promotion, that sort of thing.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** And you have a number, like how many seminars and training and so?

**Hon. Imbert:** No I do not; not here. If you want, we could try and get a breakdown for you if that is what you want.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Contract Employment, Item No. 16 has gone up by 12.784 million. Is that the amount that is to be spent on the new recruits to do the property tax valuations?

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes.

**Dr. Rambachan:** And how many persons are you going to be recruiting?

**Hon. Imbert:** 165 field assessors, 43 business operation assistants, seven IT officers and three valuation surveyors.

**Dr. Rambachan:** One more question. How long are those contracts going to be for?

**Hon. Imbert:** Three years.

**Dr. Rambachan:** They are going to be three years?

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes, I said three.

**Dr. Rambachan:** And would they have a gratuity at the end?

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes, they would.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Amounting to what per cent?

**Hon. Imbert:** 20 per cent. Next question.

**Ms. Ramdial:** Minister, 01 Travelling and Subsistence. There is a sharp increase by 3.2 million for the 2019 estimate, at \$6 million. Can you give an explanation for this?

**Hon. Imbert:** We are in the field, as we speak, visiting and assessing properties. This would provide for increased travelling and also to accommodate the additional 300-odd persons that we are employing who need to travel, because with the new legislation site visits are required. In other words, they are not sitting down in their office and valuing properties. They are going there. Okay?

**Mr. Charles:** At 08, Rent/Lease, and I am seeing a decrease which I consider—and on every Item we are seeing a large figure for rents. Does the Ministry do a rent/lease purchase option, some analysis to ensure that we are getting value for money in the rental area?

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes.

**Mr. Charles:** Okay. And if we are increasing the number of contract employees, but the rental allocation has been decreased, it means you are putting them in government offices?

**Hon. Imbert:** The rental allocation has been decreased by 79,000 out of 7.3 million, 1 per cent.

**Mr. Charles:** Right. But you are taking on a number of new staff to do the valuations. You are putting them in government offices?

**Hon. Imbert:** Same place. We are already in occupation of the building.

**Mr. Charles:** And the other question about whether you do an analysis.

**Hon. Imbert:** I answered that already.

**Mr. Charles:** Could you tell us the total amount of rents paid by the Ministry of Finance?

**Hon. Imbert:** Which line Item are you on? No, no, no, which line Item are you on?

**Mr. Charles:** I hear you.

**Hon. Imbert:** “Doh try dat.”

**Mr. Charles:** Line Item 8, is this done in the context of an overall plan—an overall plan in terms of rent, lease, purchase option?

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes.

**Ms. Ramdial:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item 37, Janitorial Services. What accounts for the increase by 358,400?

**Hon. Imbert:** The occupation of the new building or new accommodation. It is the same building.

**Ms. Ramdial:** Thank you.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Minister, line Item 05, Telephones. I am seeing an increase in 2018 from \$400,000 to 1.5 million now. Is it that the field assessors are getting telephones?

**5.50 p.m.**

**Hon. Imbert:** We have to make a lot of calls. Under the new approach, persons are called first. There are over 100,000 forms that have been submitted with telephone numbers and other contact details. Before the field assessors visit premises, they make every effort and usually succeed by telephoning the person and telling them when they are coming to visit. So, we have to make a lot of calls.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 011, National Insurance Appeals Board Tribunal.

Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Thank you. Minister, can you give me an idea, given the figures here under Other Contracted Services whether this money that is allocated here is meant in any way to supplement the personnel at the National Insurance Appeals Board Tribunal? And if so, is it because you have a large backlog of appeals from the people who are serviced by the National Insurance Board?

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes and no.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Sorry.

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes and no.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Okay. So it is, yes, there are a lot of appeals.

**Hon. Imbert:** You asked two questions.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Okay. Let us take the first one.

**Hon. Imbert:** This is to supplement—*[Interruption]*

**Dr. Rambachan:** Is there, yeah.

**Hon. Imbert:** The answer is, yes. And then the other part of the question is—*[Interruption]*

**Dr. Rambachan:** Is it to supplement because you have a lot of backlog of appeals?

**Hon. Imbert:** No.

**Dr. Rambachan:** So can you give us any idea of how many appeals are there now?

**Hon. Imbert:** What line Item are you on?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Well, I am dealing with Other Contracted Services because you said that it is a supplement.

**Hon. Imbert:** If you look at the quantum; look at the amount of money we are talking about. We are talking about \$25,000. That is a couple of people. That is



people who would be in the manipulative category.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Well, \$25,000 could be a lot of money, you know.

**Hon. Imbert:** That is the clerical services, manipulative services and so on; \$25,000 for a year, is just one person.

**Dr. Rambachan:** I see. I will find a way to find out how many appeals are lagging. A lot of money.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni Central.

**Hon. Imbert:** Not in this Committee.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Just a quick question, Minister, under 43, Security Services, I noticed that allocated in 2018, 105,700 was not used in 19—

**Madam Chairman:** Page 92, Item 43.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yes. And does it mean that you are going to recruit people—they are going to recruit people now or give a service contract now, and it just was not done?

**Hon. Imbert:** I will get back to you on that.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 014, Financial Intelligence Unit. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you. Hon. Minister, can you advise on line Item number 16, and line Item number 22? How many employees are currently employed and how many persons will be required to fill any vacancies that this increase is targeted to probably accommodate?

**Hon. Imbert:** Can I get clarification? You are on page 93, Member?

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Line Item 16 is on 92, line Item—*[Interruption]*

**Hon. Imbert:** On 92. Okay.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** And line Item 22 is on 93.

**Hon. Imbert:** All right. Fine. Refresh the question, please.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Sure. Line Item 16, Contract Employment. Line Item 22, Short-Term Employment: How many persons are currently employed in both and how many persons will be expected to take up positions in these two line items, please?

**Hon. Imbert:** We do not have the precise numbers, but these are legal officers, analysts, compliance and outreach officers and operation officers. We can get the numbers for you.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Couva North? Can we go on to Item 017, Office of the Supervisor of Insolvency, page 93? Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Minister, line Item 16, Contract Employment. If you could provide the same answer to the question? Thank you.

**Hon. Imbert:** And what was that?

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** How many persons are currently employed under their contract employment and how many persons will be required to fill the positions that would necessitate this increase of \$1 million?

**Hon. Imbert:** Okay.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Couva North.

**Ms. Ramdial:** Thank you, Chair. Minister, line Item 28, Other Contracted Services, an increase by \$1.35 million. What accounts for this?

**Hon. Imbert:** We have an arrangement with the World Bank that is going to kick in in 2019 and will require payments.

**Ms. Ramdial:** Do you care to explain what project exactly with the World Bank, or programme?

**Hon. Imbert:** It is a project designed to assist this office which is now being built out. There was a single person in this office prior, and that person was acting in the position. The Public Service Commission, last year, I believe, appointed a

public servant permanently to head this office, and that person is now building her staff, creating her bureaucracy, creating infrastructure to manage this unit, the Office of the Supervisor of Insolvency. So the World Bank is assisting the Supervisor of Insolvency to create the necessary infrastructure and organizational framework and so on. That is what it is all about.

**Ms. Ramdial:** Thank you.

**Hon. Imbert:** “Bureaucracy” is a word. Go and check the dictionary; it is a word.

**Madam Chairman:** Sub-Head 03, Minor Equipment Purchases, page 94. Item 001, General Administration. Item 002, Budget Division. Item 003, Customs and Excise Division. Member for Couva North.

**Ms. Ramdial:** Thank you. Minister, line Item 02, Office Equipment, can you account for that increase by half a million?

**Hon. Imbert:** Office equipment is standard stuff, photocopying machines and so on. They wear out, you know, and need to be replaced.

**Ms. Ramdial:** Same for 03/04?

**Hon. Imbert:** Yeah. Things do not last forever, you know.

**Ms. Ramdial:** Is that it?

**Hon. Imbert:** Yep.

**Ms. Ramdial:** Any further explanation?

**Hon. Imbert:** Nope.

**Ms. Ramdial:** Okay.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 004, Inland Revenue Division. Item 005, Treasury Division. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, Items 02, 03 and 04. Can you itemize what accounts for such a large increase in the Office Equipment, Furniture and Furnishings, as well as Other Minor Equipment?

**Hon. Imbert:** Certainly. As you may know, the Treasury Division prints payslips and this provides for the replacement of the line printers in the IHRIS system to print the said payslips. The provision under 03 includes a provision for refurbishment of the training room and the public debt management section. And 04 includes a provision for the upgrade of the CCTV system at the Treasury Division which I am sure you will agree is very important to make sure you get bank account numbers right. You do not have fictitious banks from Miami.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 008, Investment Division. Item 009, Central Tenders Board. Item 010, Valuation Division. Member for Couva North.

**Ms. Ramdial:** Thank you, Chair. Minister, line Item 04, Other Minor Equipment, an increase by \$1.45 million. Can you account what is Other Minor Equipment that accounts for so much money?

**Hon. Imbert:** Equipment for the 300 additional staff members who are implementing the property tax system.

**Ms. Ramdial:** What kind of equipment, Minister?

**Hon. Imbert:** Chairs, tables, desks, computers, laptops, GIS positioning equipment, telephones—[*Interruption*]

**Ms. Ramdial:** Thank you.

**Hon. Imbert:**—tablets, pens.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 014, Financial Intelligences Unit, page 96. Item 017, Office of the Supervisor of Insolvency, page 97. Sub-Head 04, Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 001, Regional Bodies. Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Mr. Minister, Item 12, Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility. We spend approximately \$41 million a year in terms of our contribution to that facility. Has Trinidad and Tobago ever benefitted by way of claims on this insurance?

**Hon. Imbert:** I cannot believe you are asking me that. A question was posed in this House under Questions to Ministers, and I reported in your presence that we got a payment of US \$7 million from the Catastrophe Fund. I cannot believe you cannot remember that.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Well, maybe I have a short memory but—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes, you do.

**Dr. Rambachan:** It is not as short as people.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Mayaro.

**Mr. Paray:** Thank you, Chair. Minister, just a follow up to the question. Could you give an idea of how many claims were actually processed by citizens against that US \$7 million in the last fiscal year?

**Hon. Imbert:** It is not for citizens, you know. It is for the Government.

**Mr. Paray:** It is for the Government?

**Hon. Imbert:** What happens is, the Government would make a claim against a flood event or other disaster event, receive money which would compensate the Government for the payments it makes to citizens in terms of disaster relief. So the money comes to the Government, it goes into the Consolidated Fund, and that just replenishes the Consolidated Fund. That will assist the Government to make payments to affected persons.

**Mr. Paray:** Social services and so on?

**Hon. Imbert:** All the Heads.

**Madam Chairman:** One minute, please. You finish, Member for Mayaro?

**Mr. Paray:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni Central.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yes. Caribbean Development Bank. There is a little jump there in the estimates for 2019. Is it because of a reassessment of what is demanded from

us or other explanations?

**Hon. Imbert:** Dr. Tewartie, you were the head of the university. Look to your right on the line. It is there, capital increase. I would have thought a Minister of planning would know about multilateral institutions.

**Dr. Tewartie:** “Doh lecture meh, nah”.

**Hon. Imbert:** I have to. And know that we as a country from time to time—  
[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Tewartie:** “Spare meh a lecture”.

**Hon. Imbert:** —are asked to contribute to a capital increase—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Tewartie:** I asked a simple question.

**Hon. Imbert:**—in institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF, the Caribbean Development Bank, the IFC. I would think you would know that. That is what it is for.

**Dr. Tewartie:** I asked you a simple question. You answered the question. Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Thank you. Minister, I go back to Item 12. So you collected a cheque for US \$7 million, this is approximately TT \$49 million. The disbursement of this—did you disburse all of this \$49 million to affected citizens?

**Hon. Imbert:** I am shocked that you would ask a question like that.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Well please, be shocked. Please, be shocked.

**Hon. Imbert:** Because it was asked by the Member for Mayaro and answered.

**Dr. Rambachan:** No. Because, Mr. Minister, you would agree with me that there are many people who have suffered—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Imbert:** Ask the question, please.

**Dr. Rambachan:**—from flood damages in this country, and from disasters in the

country who have not received compensation, and who continue to knock at the door of the Government for compensation.

**Hon. Imbert:** Ask the question, please. This is not a debate, you know. What is the question?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Have you distributed \$49 million in compensation in the year that you got this \$7 million?

**Hon. Imbert:** I explained clearly unequivocally, unambiguously that this money goes into the Consolidated Fund, and is used to reimburse the Government for the money spent on dealing with natural disasters. The money spent on dealing with natural disasters. You as a former Minister of Works and Transport would know it is not limited to solely payments to affected citizens. It is repair of bridges; it is cleaning of watercourses; it is repairs to roads which could be way in excess of TT \$50 million and, in fact, did exceed \$50 million.

**Dr. Rambachan:** And for which, Mr. Minister, would you not agree that you have budgeted in your regular budget under your expenditures—especially expenditures for the year for those same Items that you are talking about? That is why I am asking, again, Mr. Minister.

**Hon. Imbert:** What is the question?

**Dr. Rambachan:** The question is—*[Interruption]*

**Hon. Imbert:** You asked one just now.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Why is it then that so many citizens have not been compensated?

**Hon. Imbert:** I would like to answer the question. He asked a question. I would like to answer it. You cannot budget for a natural disaster. You cannot predict that a hurricane will come—

**Dr. Rambachan:** But you can engage—*[Interruption]*

**Hon. Imbert:**—or that an earthquake will come.

**Dr. Rambachan:**—but you can engage in preventative kinds of activities—  
[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Imbert:** I could prevent the earthquake.

**Dr. Rambachan:** —like cleaning the rivers which you are supposed to do.

**Hon. Imbert:** I could prevent a hurricane?

**Madam Chairman:** Just one minute.

**Hon. Imbert:** Look.

**Madam Chairman:** The question was whether the \$49 million was paid out to people, and I believe the question was answered—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Imbert:** Twice.

**Madam Chairman:**—that this money goes to the Consolidated Fund as received by the Government. Okay? So, any other question under 04/001? Member for Oropouche West.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Hon. Minister, line 07. Hon. Minister, CARTAC. Can you tell me what is the role and function of it? And what is the current status? Line 07.

**Hon. Imbert:** The Caribbean Regional Technical Assistance Centre is an arm of the IMF that provides technical assistance to member countries of the IMF. There are similar regional assistance centres throughout the world. There is one for Asia. There is one for Europe. And what CARTAC does is it provides assistance to governments. For example, I spoke about the assistance provided by CARTAC to the Central Statistical Office in terms of improving its data collection methodology and the timeliness of publishing statistical data.

CARTAC has been extremely helpful to Trinidad and Tobago over the last year in terms of providing us with advice and assistance with respect to the reform



of our Inland Revenue Division in terms of tax collection, in terms of our data gathering. It is a centre that provides high level technical support by world experts to countries in terms of the management of the fiscal accounts.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** Thank you. Minister, 01, contribution to the Caribbean Development Bank, \$62 million. And I understand that you said it is for a capital increase. Do we do an analysis at the level of the Ministry of Finance about contributions such as this to the general Caricom enterprise so that we could be in a position to say that we assist with by a billion dollars at the Caricom community? Do we have that kind of analysis? That figure?

**Hon. Imbert:** What does that have to with this?

**Mr. Charles:** No. You see, we give \$62 million, and I hear from my friends in Caricom that Trinidad does not contribute and therefore when I know we have given, for example, 62.

**Hon. Imbert:** What are you talking about? This is a Caribbean Development Bank, not Caricom.

**Mr. Charles:** So, this is a contribution we make to the Caribbean Community, is it?

**Hon. Imbert:** No. To the Caribbean Development Bank.

**Mr. Charles:** And we get dividends on it?

**Hon. Imbert:** No. Now, Madam Chairman, let me explain because I am sure the Member for Naparima knows this. Once we agree to be part of a development bank—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Charles:** I agree.

**Hon. Imbert:**—such as the Inter-American Development Bank, the Caribbean Development Bank and so on, the Andean Development Bank, once we as a

country apply to join those institutions, subscribe to their general principles, their rules of procedure, from time to time these institutions will solicit from their members a view as to whether they are in agreement to contribute towards a general capital increase. The capital is used for on-lending to members of the institution. We as a country, once we are members of that organization, we abide by the majority rule.

So if the majority of members of the Caribbean Development Bank agree to a capital increase, we have to pay or we retire from the bank. And since we in Trinidad and Tobago have no intention of resigning or withdrawing from any of these development banks, we are bound by the obligations that we agreed to. The bank asked its members whether they agree to a general capital increase, the majority, yes, and we are due to pay this capital increase. That capital increase will be used to make loans to persons who qualify—countries who qualify for loans from the Caribbean Development Bank.

**Mr. Charles:** And you are saying in this analysis, no consideration is given to a policy towards Caricom? It is just that we are a member, they agree to a capital increase, and we agree, and we pay.

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes.

**Mr. Charles:** That is what you are saying. Well, thanks.

**Hon. Imbert:** But you should know that.

**Mr. Charles:** Let us move on.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, I just wanted to ask a question. Under Finance, will the allocation for insurance for the fleet for the sea bridge—will be under Finance or?

**Hon. Imbert:** What line Item are you on, Ma'am?

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Well, I am looking at the Current Transfers and Subsidies, so you know, I am just asking.

**Hon. Imbert:** Could you kindly direct me to the line Item that you are seeking clarification on?

**Hon. Member:** There are no examples.

**Hon. Imbert:** None. There is no line Item? You are making it up?

**Madam Chairman:** Item 002, Commonwealth Bodies, page 98. Item 003, United Nations Organization. Item 004, International Bodies. Item 005, Non-Profit Institutions, page 99. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** No. No. No. I was just trying to—

**Madam Chairman:** Item 007, Households. Member for Chaguanas East.

**Mr. Karim:** Thank you. Line Item 06, Food Price Support Programme. Could the Minister indicate to us how many persons do you expect will benefit from it now that you have a decrease of \$6.8? And the second question is: What mechanisms do you have for ensuring accountability and transparency?

**Hon. Imbert:** In my Budget Statement, I indicated how many persons would benefit from the increase in the food card.

**Mr. Karim:** Oh the card, the food card. Okay. And the mechanisms for accountability. Did you speak about that?

**Hon. Imbert:** We got rid of 18,000 cheaters that you brought into the system.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 009, Other Transfers. Member for Chaguanas East.

**Mr. Karim:** Minister, could you give us an idea—line Items 41 and 42. But 41 first: How many persons benefited from this stimulus programme? And for 42 as well.

**Hon. Imbert:** We will get that information for you.

**Mr. Karim:** Could you add that, Minister, 40, 41, and 42, so that you could give it

to us in writing?

**Hon. Imbert:** You want to know how many—

**Mr. Karim:** Benefitted.

**Hon. Imbert:** You want know how many entities have benefitted from these programmes?

**Mr. Karim:** Yes. The stimulus programme, like the farmers programme and so on.

**Hon. Imbert:** 40, 41, 42?

**Mr. Karim:** Yeah.

**Hon. Imbert:** That information will be provided.

**Mr. Karim:** Okay.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** No. Well, I was going to ask on 40, but my colleague asked.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni Central.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Minister, I just wanted a little explanation for Item 28?

**Madam Chairman:** First Citizens Bank Limited Indemnity.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yes. I just wanted to have an explanation.

**Hon. Imbert:** On that?

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yes.

**Hon. Imbert:** “Is your Government do that?”. That is Clico.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay. Well, that is the explanation.

**Hon. Imbert:** Okay.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Dr. Khan:** Just one small question. [*Laughter*] Minister, just a small question. Right?

**Hon. Imbert:** Sure.

**Dr. Khan:** Number 40. Line 40, Public/Private Housing Construction Incentive. “How come you giving \$50 million to that?” And if it is a public-private—How come you are giving \$50 million?

**Hon. Imbert:** I am terribly sorry. There is a kinda cacophony from that side.

**Dr. Khan:** Yeah. For the Public/Private Housing Construction Incentive Programme, “how come you putting down \$50 million I think it looks like?”

**Hon. Imbert:** What is wrong with \$50 million?

**Dr. Khan:** No. Why are you putting money into it if it is a public/private incentive programme. I thought the private sector is supposed to put that rather than the Government?

**Hon. Imbert:** You thought.

**Dr. Khan:** That is how it works.

**Hon. Imbert:** I said we give \$100,000.

**Dr. Khan:** That is how it works.

**Hon. Imbert:** I said clearly and unambiguously last year that we give a \$100,000 grant per completed unit. I said that. Every time you complete a unit to the Government’s specifications at a price of \$750,000 or whatever the price is.

**Dr. Khan:** How many units were complete, or will be completed?

**Hon. Imbert:** What is the question?

**Dr. Khan:** How many units will be completed with the \$50 million?

**Hon. Imbert:** Divide it by \$100,000.

**Dr. Khan:** I know you have to divide \$100,000.

**Hon. Imbert:** Well, all right. That is your answer.

**Dr. Khan:** No. No. Are you expecting that to be completed this year?

**Hon. Imbert:** We hope so.

**Dr. Khan:** All right. Okay.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 011, Transfers to State Enterprises. Member for Oropouche West.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

**Hon. Imbert:** And a lot of them will be done by—

**Madam Chairman:** I believe we have moved on. Item 001, Transfers to State Enterprises. Member for Oropouche West.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** 011, 57, line 57. Caribbean Airlines Limited, I am seeing a decrease, hon. Minister, in the amount of almost \$25 million. Can you give a justification for that decrease for the allocation to Caribbean Airlines?

**Hon. Imbert:** Lower debt payments.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Sorry.

**Hon. Imbert:** Lower debt payments.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Chaguanas East. All right. Item 014, Loans to Other Governments, page 101. Member for Oropouche West.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Line 85, Minister, Community Improvement Services.

**Hon. Imbert:** No, no, no. We are on 014.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** We are on 101?

**Hon. Imbert:** I thought I heard Loans to Other Governments.

**Madam Chairman:** Yeah. 014, Loans to Other Governments.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Yeah.

**Madam Chairman:** Page 101.

**Hon. Imbert:** You are on another planet.

**Madam Chairman:** No, no, no. We are at Item 014, Loans to Other Government. Just one minute. So, Member, what Item are you on?

**Hon. Imbert:** “We pass you and gone”.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** So we are on 102? Okay.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Sub-Head 06, Current Transfers to State Boards and Similar Bodies. Item 004, Statutory Bodies. The other book, Current Transfers to Statutory and Similar Bodies. There is the booklet that deals with—you have it? Right. Page 101, Item 004, Statutory Board.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*. 07, National Lotteries Control Board. Sub-Head 01, Personnel Expenditure. Item 001, General Administration, page 145. Are we there? Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Page 145, National Lotteries Board for Goods and Services. Contract Employment, Item 16. Could the Minister state what that dramatic increase—allocation of \$4.4 million? So there is an increase of \$3.8 million under Contract Employment for the National Lotteries Board. Could you explain the reason for that dramatic increase given that in 2018 only \$631,000 was utilized under Contract Employment?

**Hon. Imbert:** Provision is similar to the previous year.

**Mr. Lee:** I did not hear you.

**Hon. Imbert:** The provision is similar to the previous year.

**Mr. Lee:** Why should it be if your actual expenditure in 2018 was \$631,000, why would you want to have that allocation, the same allocation of 2018 estimates?

**Hon. Imbert:** Because the persons that the board is seeking to employ on contract, the positions, the skill sets they are looking for remain the same.

**Mr. Lee:** So you mean that they are still looking—they still have a lot of vacant employment under Contract Employment; vacant positions?

**Hon. Imbert:** Obviously.

**6.20 p.m.**

**Mr. Lee:** And how many positions are vacant under Contract Employment?

**Hon. Imbert:** I will get that information.

**Mr. Lee:** And the numbers and the positions itself?

**Hon. Imbert:** I will get that information.

**Mr. Lee:** Line Item 23, Fees. Madam Chairman, a dramatic increase of \$4.3 estimated for 2019. Actual spent was 1.5 in 2018, so that is 2.7 increase. Could the Minister state what is the reason for this increase of 2.7 in fees, and what would those fees apply to?

**Hon. Imbert:** That is a provision for fees to the foreign provider of services.

**Madam Chairman:** Just now. Have we gone on to something else? I think we are still in Item 001, General Administration.

**Mr. Lee:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes?

**Mr. Lee:** Page 145.

**Hon. Imbert:** We are talking about 23 under 001, on page 145.

**Madam Chairman:** I think the Member—

**Hon. Imbert:** Oh, you are on 01.

**Madam Chairman:** I am under 01, Personnel Expenditure.

**Hon. Imbert:** He reached 02 and he is going through 02. He fly pass 01 already.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, I believe—Member for Chaguanas West, are you on Item 001, General Administration?

**Mr. Singh:** I am taking the queue from my Chief Whip. I am in 02.

**Hon. Imbert:** They are all on 02.

**Madam Chairman:** All right. Okay, so, Sub-Head 02, Goods and Services, Item 001. Yes, Whip; 23.



**Mr. Lee:** Yes, Madam Chair. The Minister was in the process of explaining the 2.7 increase in fees and what it relates to.

**Hon. Imbert:** Asked and answered.

**Mr. Lee:** Refresh my memory?

**Hon. Imbert:** No.

**Mr. Lee:** Why not?

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. To the hon. Minister: Item 27, Official Overseas Travel. I recall an incident in which Members were proceeding in the board in the newspaper without the permission of the Minister to travel. Is travel from this State Statutory Board—requires the permission of the Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes.

**Mr. Singh:** Second Item: Other Contracted Services. There is an increase of \$1.3 million. What is that contracted services about?

**Hon. Imbert:** Other Contracted Services?

**Mr. Singh:** Item 28.

**Hon. Imbert:** We will get clarification on that for you.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** Item 02.

**Madam Chairman:** We are on 02.

**Mr. Charles:** On 02, Item 83, Money For Prizes - Online Games; and there is a significant decrease.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 83?

**Mr. Charles:** That is page 146.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes, yes.

**Mr. Charles:** Item 83, there is a \$634 million decrease on money for prizes on online games. Could you tell us why? This is the largest revenue—

**Hon. Imbert:** We would to seek that clarification from lotteries itself. That is the information they give us. They do their calculations and they give us that information, so I would get clarification.

**Mr. Charles:** Thank you.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Madam Chair. If also for line Items 73, 75, 84 and 86, if the hon. Minister could identify from National Lotteries—

**Hon. Imbert:** We will find out from lotteries—

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you.

**Hon. Imbert:**—why they have indicated to us that they expect to pay out smaller amounts in prize money in the coming year.

**Mr. Lee:** Page 125, still under 02, Items 62 and 66, Promotion, Publicity and Printing, increased to 1.6, and Item 66, 1.3. Could the Minister state, given the issues that have been happening with National Lotteries Control Board, what is the increase for the Promotion, Publication and Printing for 1.6 and what conferences are they hosting for an increase of 1.3 million given the total expenditure in Item 62 is 24 million?

**Hon. Imbert:** If one looks at the 2018 Estimates, the amount allocated originally for hosting of conferences was 4.3 million. This year the allocation is 1.88 million. So it is a reduction.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni East. Sorry. Caroni Central.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Minister, what was the extraordinary expenditure in 2018—that is 36—budgeted for, but never spent? Do you know? And it did not recur.

**Hon. Imbert:** We will find out for you.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Eh?

**Hon. Imbert:** We will find out for you.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, so Sub-Head 03, Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001. Sub-Head 04, Current Transfer and Subsidies; Item 007;

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 01, Contract Gratuities. Could the Minister list who are entitled to get these Contract Gratuities in the coming 2019?

**Hon. Imbert:** That information would be provided tomorrow.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, Item 009. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** No, no.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Hon. Members, we will now return to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, Sub-Head 07, Debt Servicing, page 102. That is the book we were on initially. Item 001, Interest - Local Loans; Item 009, Interest on Overdraft; Item 011, Principal Repayment - Local Loans. Member for Caroni Central.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Am—

**Madam Chairman:** Item 001, Principal Repayment - Local Loans, which is at page 103. That is where we at.

**Dr. Tewarie:** No, I miss my cue, Madam Chair. I missed my cue.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. New book. We are at page 45, Sub-Head 09, Development Programme, Consolidated Fund; Item 005, Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Member for Mayaro.

**Mr. Paray:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. Minister, in terms of line Item No. 059, I know in the legislation, during the budget you indicated that a little over 10,000 evaluations were done. Is that anywhere close to 50 per cent of the

valuations which should activate the actual implementation of the property tax in 2019?

**Hon. Imbert:** No.

**Mr. Paray:** So we are not anywhere close to the 50 per cent?

**Hon. Imbert:** That is what “no” means.

**Mr. Paray:** Okay. Well, just confirming.

**Hon. Imbert:** You want me to say “no” a third time?

**Mr. Paray:** No, no, no, it is okay.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Oropouche East.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Thank you very much, Madam. Could I just clarify before I continue? We are on 005, Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. I can ask a question on Sub 057?

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes, that is what we are on.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Thank you very much. Just for clarity, Minister, in 2017 I noticed an actual for 057—nothing. Budgeted for estimate for '18, 15 million, a revised estimate, which is not actual with revised to 2.5, estimate for 2019, 17.5. Could you just explain for us, please, having estimated that you will need 15 million, you revised—but it is not an expenditure—to 250. What happened there that you discovered that you would not implement or do anything about the Revenue Authority that would explain 2.5 revised as opposed to what you plan to do with \$15 million?

**Hon. Imbert:** I think the operative word is “established”.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Meaning nothing was established?

**Hon. Imbert:** Did you approve the Revenue Authority Bill? I cannot recall.

**Dr. Moonilal:** I cannot recall you bringing it either, so—

**Hon. Imbert:** We are in joint select committee on that.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Because I have no idea of it.

**Hon. Imbert:** Do not be silly.

**Dr. Moonilal:** So, having the 15 million, you had the 2.5. Now you estimate a 2019, 7.5 million. What is that 7.5 million to be used for? Passing the Bill?

**Hon. Imbert:** The operative word is “established”.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Okay. So, we may be back at zero? Thank you very much.

**Hon. Imbert:** No, we will not be.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Oropouche West.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Thank you, Madam Chair, 059, Minister. Once there is an objection for valuation the resident or the home owner could take it before a land tribunal. I am not seeing any allocation for the establishment of a land tribunal.

**Hon. Imbert:** That is not this line Item.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** 059, where you have implementation property—

**Hon. Imbert:** That is not this line Item. That is not this line Item, and therefore that question does not apply to this line Item.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** So you have no intention to make any clarification?

**Hon. Imbert:** I did not say that. You are asking me about a land tribunal.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Yes, because this—

**Hon. Imbert:** The word “land” and the word “tribunal” does not appear in this line.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** But this deals with property tax regime.

**Hon. Imbert:** It has nothing to do with the land tribunal. Absolutely nothing. Zero. *Zilch. Nada. Nein. Nunca. Nil.*

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Property tax, valuation and land, nothing?

**Hon. Imbert:** Zero. Nothing to do with land tribunal. Absolutely nothing.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Okay.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni Central.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yes. Item Sub 017.

**Madam Chairman:** 017?

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes, please.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Is there any likelihood of this particular project being completed during the 2019 fiscal year? And if not, how far advanced are we likely to finish?

**Hon. Imbert:** Three more years.

**Dr. Tewarie:** About three years?

**Hon. Imbert:** I did not say “about”. I said three more years.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Three more years?

**Hon. Imbert:** Correct.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay. And this Item 45—045. I saw whistle-blowing technologies. Can you explain a “little bit” what that involves?

**Hon. Imbert:** This is in anticipation that you might support the whistle-blower Bill.

**Dr. Tewarie:** No, but I meant the technologies.

**Hon. Imbert:** This provision is in anticipation—

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yes, of the Bill. I understand.

**Hon. Imbert:**—that the Opposition would support the whistle-blower Bill, and therefore it is a nominal provision for a start-up cost.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Start-up. Okay.

**Hon. Imbert:** Obviously.

**Dr. Tewarie:** All right, and then 58—058, could I ask a similar question as I did

with the financial management. Is this likely to be completed during the fiscal year, and if not, how long is it likely to take?

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes. Not applicable. You asked two questions.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yes.

**Hon. Imbert:** The answer to the first question, yes. Answer to the second question, not applicable.

**Dr. Tewarie:** It would be completed?

**Hon. Imbert:** Well, obviously.

**Dr. Tewarie:** All right. Okay.

**Hon. Imbert:** That is what “yes” means.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Oropouche East.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Thank you so much.

**Dr. Tewarie:** “Eh mm.”

**Hon. Imbert:** That is what “yes” means.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Oropouche East.

**Dr. Tewarie:** I have to clarify with you.

**Hon. Imbert:** What “yes” means?

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Could Members please continue.

**Dr. Moonilal:** The Minister can go on the corridor if he wants to continue that. Madam, thank you. At 063, and given the statement of the Minister earlier on the necessity to support legislation to spend money, I am wondering on whether at 063 the \$5 million estimate, coming from a \$1 million, is in anticipation that this legislation would also be passed?

**Hon. Imbert:** I do expect so despite whatever you might try to stop it.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Then Minister, may I suggest you redo your budget in anticipation

that nothing may pass.

**Hon. Imbert:** You do not speak for the Opposition.

**Dr. Moonilal:** You will have more money available for projects.

**Hon. Imbert:** You are not a member of the committee and you do not speak for the Opposition.

**Madam Chairman:** All right. Member for Chaguanas West.

**Hon. Imbert:** Thank God you do not—

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Chaguanas West.

**Hon. Imbert:** I am getting very good cooperation; very good cooperation from the Opposition. Thank God he is not on the JSC.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Diego Martin North/East, please do not be distracted. Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Singh:** All questions have been asked that I want.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, thank you. Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Line Item 057, Madam Chair. Would this be the funding necessary to conclude the establishment of the Revenue Authority, or would this be going on for another year and you would need more funds?

**Madam Chairman:** Member, I would not allow that question based on the answer that was given.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** All right. Well, could you give us an indication of what this covers, the \$7,500,000 on the line Item called Revenue Authority Establishment?

**Hon. Imbert:** The Member for Oropouche East asked that question.

**Dr. Moonilal:** I did not.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No.

**Hon. Imbert:** You were not here.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** [*Inaudible*] Well, answer it.



**Hon. Imbert:** The question was asked and answered.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Answer it.

**Hon. Imbert:** And you were not here, as usual.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Madam Chair. To the Minister, line Item 062, Establishment of the Office of the Procurement Regulation, \$10 million was spent in 2018. Could the Minister describe what was the \$10 million used in the establishment, specific wise? And I see only a million dollars is estimated to assist in the establishment again, or to continue.

**Madam Chairman:** We are under what, again, 062?

**Mr. Lee:** 062 on page 46.

**Madam Chairman:** Member, just for my edification, you are telling me 10 million was spent in—

**Mr. Lee:** In 2018.

**Madam Chairman:** Member, 2018 is the estimate?

**Mr. Lee:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Do you see a revised estimate?

**Mr. Lee:** Of a million dollars.

**Madam Chairman:** Let us get serious.

**Mr. Lee:** No, no, no, come on, what do you mean?

**Hon. Member:** “Ooooooh.”

**Madam Chairman:** But wait. Wait! [*Crosstalk*] Wait!

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** You cannot be talking to the Chairman—

**Hon. Imbert:** Disgusting. [*Crosstalk*] Typical UNC.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. I mean—[*Crosstalk*] Members! [*Crosstalk*]  
Members, I do not need anybody to help me.

**Mr. Lee:** I am talking to the UNC.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay? Now, let us get real and let us—we understand, I think, us having sat here all this time how to read this. Okay?

**Hon. Member:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** You have put that 2018, \$10 million—

**Mr. Lee:** The revised estimate is— \$10 million was spent in establishment of the procurement office regulator. Right, \$10 million? On line Item 062 you are seeing \$10 million there?

**Madam Chairman:** Correct. Sure.

**Mr. Lee:** I am asking—a million dollars is estimated to continue the establishment, yeah? So, I am asking the Minister, could he describe what was the 10 million used for in establishing the office, and what is additionally required to further establish the procurement regulator office?

**Hon. Imbert:** That information would be provided.

**Mr. Lee:** What? Information would be provided, thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Oropouche East.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Thank you very much, Ma'am. And Minister, thank you for your patience. At 059, the implementation of a property tax regime, as you said in your comprehensive budget statement, fiscal 2019 is earmarked as the year of attack for this tax. What would be the use of the 7 million? What continuing or new service or goods would be for that \$7 million for 2019 estimate?

**Hon. Imbert:** To implement the property tax regime.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Minister, having an estimate of \$15 million; 15.227 million in 2017, which is actual, to implement the property tax regime, a 15 million estimate to implement the property tax regime; a 2018 revised estimate to implement the property tax regime; you are saying in 2019 you would need a 7 million to

implement the property tax regime, but at this stage you really have no elements, or no details, or nothing you can share with the House? Thank you very much.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** He did not answer my question, so I am just holding back a little bit.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I am patient with that.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, the question is that—[*Inaudible*] Who is that? Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Just the last Item, Customs and Excise, Sub-Head 004, Acquisition of Trained Drug Detector Dogs for Drug Interdiction. Minister, can you indicate the number of these animals that you will acquire with that sum?

**Mr. Karim:** How many dogs they have? [*Crosstalk*] How much?

**Hon. Imbert:** Approximately 25.

**Mr. Karim:** Local or foreign?

**Hon. Imbert:** Here and away.

**Mr. Karim:** Sorry?

**Hon. Imbert:** Here and away. [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Karim:** What kinds of dogs?

**Hon. Imbert:** Canines.

**Mr. Karim:** No, no. It is a serious question.

**Hon. Member:** The breed of dogs?

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Hon. Members, the question is that the sum of \$5,858,096,330 for Head 18, Ministry of Finance stand part of the schedule.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 18 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

*Head 20: Pensions and Gratuities, \$115,000,000.*

**Madam Chairman:** We now go on to Head 20, Pensions and Gratuities. Okay, and just so that Members will be on the same page, we are on the Draft Estimates. Head 20, Pensions and Gratuities, \$115 million. I will now invite the Minister of Finance to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes. You are at page 118. Minister of Finance

**Hon. Imbert:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. This Item is the provision for the payment of pensions and gratuities to public servants, judges, contract officers, heads of missions, persons in the other protective services, fire services, defence force, et cetera. It is all listed on page 118. Well, I said Heads of Mission, that is what that is, 118, 119, it is all there.

*Question proposed:* That Head 20 stand part of the Schedule.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$115 million for Head 20, Pensions and Gratuities is comprised of moneys proposed to expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 04, Current Transfers and Subsidies, Item 007, Household, pages 118 and 119. Member for Chaguanas West

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. To the hon. Minister: Items 04 and 05, together with 01, 02, 04 and 05, it is my understanding that there is a large line up of public officers for their pension and gratuities together with secondary school teachers and principals, and whilst all their matters have been processed there is still a lack of moneys allocated, and whether or not the current allocation is sufficient to meet the backlog?

**Hon. Imbert:** I spoke about this in the budget. I indicated that in activating the new provision to pay public officers the minimum provision, we would be dealing with a backlog of somewhere between five and 600 persons, and then you have

about 900 people per year who retire. So, the current backlog is about 500 persons. It is not as large as some people think it is when you are dealing with a public service of 80,000. Okay? And the pensions department, I want to make a plug for them, they really work hard and they have been trying their best to reduce the backlog, and they have been improving consistently over the three years I have been in the Ministry of Finance. They are doing better and better each year.

**Mr. Charles:** Yes.

**Hon. Imbert:** Okay?

**Mr. Charles:** Thank you. Item 19, Head of Missions, Pensions and Gratuities. I understand that a number of ambassadors and High Commissioners who resigned or left the service in 2015, they have taken the Government to court, and others are contemplating such. Could the Minister give us an idea of when disbursements start in respect of those ambassadors and High Commissioners?

**Hon. Imbert:** I am not associated with the matters of which you speak. I have no knowledge of the matters of which you speak. However, I do have some general knowledge of the predicament that Foreign Service Officers find themselves in. Because, this is one of the few categories that is stationed in Trinidad and Tobago and then posted abroad. So you may have a Foreign Service Officer who has throughout their career being posted in five or six countries. One of the problems with processing pension applications is getting complete and accurate pension and leave records.

It is hard enough when you have persons who have moved from Ministry to Ministry in Trinidad and never left the jurisdiction. But it becomes even far more difficult when you have persons who may have moved within Ministries in Trinidad and then also gone to several missions. So, this is a particular area where we have quite a lot of trouble, because quite often the foreign Missions do not keep

proper records and people's files are not up-to-date, and we in Finance have to keep pushing, because the persons come to Finance and then when you check, it is not even in a condition where you can audit it. Because there are several stages, but you to get to the stage of audit you have to have the records.

**Mr. Charles:** And I understand that in respect of Foreign Service Officers and contract IROs, but this is—Item 19 is Heads of Mission—

**Hon. Imbert:** “Hm mm.”

**Mr. Charles:**—and therefore the question is—

**Hon. Imbert:** A Head of Mission do not have to be a political appointee. It could be a public servant.

**Mr. Charles:** I agree.

**Hon. Imbert:** In fact, we have many Heads of Mission now who are public servants, and that has been the practice in the past as well.

**Mr. Charles:** But I am asking specifically about those who—

**Hon. Imbert:** Who were not public servants?

**Mr. Charles:**—were not public servants, and they worked in—most of them worked in one place.

**Hon. Imbert:** One place for three years.

**Mr. Charles:** One place for three or four years.

**Hon. Imbert:** Well then, I cannot answer specifically. I would try and gather the information from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from our jurisdiction. But I will see what we can do with a view of getting a better understanding of the nature of the problem.

**Mr. Charles:** Would you commit to giving us this in writing, the nature of the problem and the expected date of—[*Inaudible*]

**Hon. Imbert:** I think that question is better posed to the Minister of Foreign

Affairs. But, we at Finance would endeavour to provide whatever information we can. But in terms of the details of a person's appointment to a mission and so on, we would not have that information. So, we would try and see what information we can provide to the best of our ability.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Minister, in the same context, there has been—Minister? In the same context there has been appeals from the judges for an increase in the Pensions and Gratuities, Line Items 13 and 14. Could you give us some elucidation on their requests, whether it is incorporated here, or whether you are going to bring legislation to increase that?

**Hon. Imbert:** I bringing legislation?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Well, consideration. You are the Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Imbert:** No, no, no, no. We simply pay. We pay what we are asked to pay.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** All right. Okay.

**Hon. Imbert:** That is a matter that you should find the relevant Line Item and refer that matter to the relevant Minister.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** At the relevant time.

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** All right. I see you have an increase of 2 million. What does that represent?

**Hon. Imbert:** On what Item?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Six—ah, 13 and 14. Put on your glasses there.

**Hon. Imbert:** Well, I assume there is some calculation based on the persons whose posts. There have been increases in the numbers of judges and so on, judicial officers over time, and these estimates are done based on a calculation, assuming the person will stay there until retirement and so on.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yeah.

**Hon. Imbert:** So, there may be an increase in the number of persons approaching retirement.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** But being a senior member of Government, and act as Prime Minister, would you give some active considerations to the judges' request for so many years that they really deserve an increase?

**Hon. Imbert:** You get this from this Line Item here?

**Madam Chairman:** Honourable—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yes. [*Laughs*] Member Chair, I would like—[*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Chairman:** Member, I take it in good stead.

Hon. Members, the question is that the sum of \$115 million for Head 20, Pensions and Gratuities stand part of the Schedule.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 20 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**6.50 p.m.**

[MR. FORDE *in the Chair*]

*Head 40:* Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, \$526,406,000.

**Mr. Chairman:** I will now invite the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries to make a brief opening statement, not exceeding five minutes.

**Hon. Khan:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, as it is well known, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries has a supervisory role and it is the regulator of the energy sector. It is also well known that the energy sector has been the driver of the national economy for many decades, and very likely would continue to be, in at least the medium term.

However, as the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries per se, we operate very small budgets compared to the national average. On the recurrent side, it is 526,000,000; 410,000,000 of this is really for subsidies. So the operating cost of



the Ministry is just approximately, TT \$120,000,000 which makes it one of the, if not the smallest Ministry in Government. And just to note that the entire operating cost of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries is paid for by the Petroleum impost, which is a taxation on the oil companies.

On the development side, it is a mere \$19 million. Again, to do some in-house projects because the energy sector is largely driven by the private sector; multi-nationals and the state oil companies.

So with those few words, I just put everything in context, and I invite comments and questions as the case may be. Thank you very much.

**Mr. Chairman:** I must say welcome to the Permanent Secretary and the technocrats from the Energy Ministry.

*Question proposed:* That Head 40 stand part of the Schedule.

**Mr. Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$526,406,000 for Head 40: Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimate of the Development Programme*. We now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 255 of the *Draft Estimates Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* booklet. And we are on page 255. I recognize the Member for Pointe-à-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you. Minister, line Item 14, page 255, Remuneration to Members of Cabinet-Appointed Committees. In 2017, you utilized \$823,000; 2018, you budgeted nothing, but you incurred an expense of \$718,000. And now in 2019, you are now budgeting \$1.2 million.

Question: Why was no budget estimated for 2018, yet you expended \$718,000?

And who was that related to, those expenses? And now in 2019, an increase of

\$528,000 on the Remuneration of Members of Cabinet-Appointed Committees, what were those committees in 2018?

**Hon. Khan:** As you are aware, there are several Cabinet-Appointed Committees on the energy sector. In particular, there is the Energy Task Force; there is the Joint Select Committee on the Unitization of Cross-Border Matters with the Venezuelans, especially on Loran-Manatee; and there is also a Permanent Local Content Committee; an Extractive Industry Transparency International which has moved out now from the development side to the recurrent side; and then there is also the Mineral Advisory Committee. And on a very ad hoc basis during the year, we set up these committees that self-destruct after they complete their work. And this is a small sum to pay for the quality of work that has been coming out of the Ministry.

**Mr. Lee:** Yeah, but the question I would like to ask is why no allocation was budgeted for in 2018? And you expended \$718,000, yet these committees were already in place and so forth.

**Hon. Khan:** I am advised we did apply but we did not get any allocation initially, but it was handled later in the fiscal year.

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** Thank you. Minister, Item 01, Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance—24 million allocated, estimate allocation in 2019, an increase of 2.4. One of the concerns that traditionally, when I used to work NP and interact with—that the salaries of the public servants in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, tended to be low compared to what is available given their skills and their competencies. Do you think that \$24 million is adequate enough to attract the kind of talent that we need in a Ministry, to negotiate with multi-nationals, so that the talent is not external to us but resides in Trinidad and Tobago?

**Hon. Khan:** You are speaking to the converted. That is a real challenge that we face. But the fact of the matter is that you are public servants and there is no other way to remunerate you outside of the Public Service Regulations. So what we try, we have contract officers, we get external help but it is a really unfair position where the core technocrats at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries are so very much underpaid and under remunerated. It is a challenge we face and we are trying to see if we can find innovative ways to further compensate them for the tremendous job that they do.

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Mayaro.

**Mr. Paray:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Minister, in terms of, under line Item 01, is the Ministry adequately staffed in terms of delivering the quality and regularity of services that is required? And if no, in terms of percentage, what would you say is either the shortage or the overage of staffing?

**Hon. Khan:** We are understaffed largely because, again, I do not want to bash the public service too much, but public service constraint. Recruitment in the public service is a function as was explained by the Minister of Finance, the Public Service Commission. There are a lot of vacancies. Cabinet, this fiscal year gone, 2018, did in fact approve a new structure for the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries. There were a number of contract positions that were created, I think 40—there were 56 new contract positions. We have filled this year, 42 of those contract positions, because the Ministry and the Minister through the PS, have the authority to recruit contract officers. But when you come onto the permanent establishment, it has to come through the Public Service Commission.

We are in the process of recruiting through the public service because there are a tremendous amount of vacancies, especially at the junior technocrat level, because you have to keep bringing in new young people. There are geologists,

geophysicists, petroleum engineers, chemical engineers. These are the core skill sets that the Ministry needs. The Service Commission had granted us, the PS, the authority to recruit directly. That matter was brought to the court by the head of the Public Services Association. The Public Services Association eventually lost the case and we have restarted that process for the PS to directly recruit the entry level positions within conjunction with the Service Commission.

But I just want to go—to show you how the market is in Trinidad right now. We had applications for chemical engineers, geophysicists, geologists, petroleum engineers, petroleum chemists, petroleum inspectors, geological assistants and petroleum engineering assistants. The Ministry is the lowest paying market in the energy sector. There were—of these entry level positions there were 42 vacancies. You know how many applicants we got? One thousand, four hundred applicants. All of them eminently qualified to hold the position. Graduates, a significant amount of them have first-class honours; a significant amount of them are island scholars. And that is the state of play in the energy sector.

We have invested heavily in tertiary education. We are producing the type of national scholars that we need, but the absorptive capacity of the economy is still short. And this is why we are going into a programme in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries now, where we want to take a cadre of young scholars, 25 or 30 of them and put them on a specialist training programme to build their skills to hold more senior levels in the energy industry in consultation with the energy companies.

**Mr. Paray:** Minister, let me just follow up with one additional question before I move on. In terms of the shortage that you have and taking note of the fact of the auditing requirements of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries in terms of our multi-national companies, when you have to do gas balancing and so on, to

make sure that we are collecting the amount of revenue in term of royalties and so on, based on volumes and so on. The fact that—and I suspect you would have shortages among those people as well. How does the Ministry plan to deal with that going forward now?—because now more than ever we need as much revenue as we can.

**Hon. Khan:** There are shortages on the official establishment but a lot of those positions are actually filled with short-term contracts. Very good people, but there are short-term contracts being rolled over every six months and there are people in the Ministry who have been there now for years but on this extended short-term contract. There is a major human resource management issue in the public service and within the constraints of that, we are trying to manage the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries in a very efficient way. And I really want to compliment the young technocrats in the Ministry in particular who are doing yeoman service to this country.

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Oropouche East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, Caroni East.

**Mr. Chairman:** The Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, sorry.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Okay. Thank you Mr. Chair. Just wanted to ask the Minister in accordance with line Item 08, I know you had spoken about geophysicists and so many other persons, but could you provide in writing the classifications of the vacant positions, please, for this line Item?

**Hon. Khan:** Yeah, we have it here already, it will be circulated tomorrow.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** The Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Minister, bearing in mind your statement a while ago, as Minister, could you not consider setting a policy, knowing that there is the

necessity for the development of so many of your brilliant talent around in Trinidad? Can you consider going through PMCD with a position paper on that? Or could you consider going through the contract services area and seek a little more funding for your area or get some of the oil companies to give you some support for the training of these so you could absorb them and help to fill the oil companies with the same people that you were training. That needs some deep intuition and policy direction and planning for it.

**Hon. Khan:** That is the programme I just outlined to you there with these national scholars and some of the brighter young people, to build this base of young talent and train them in a very effective manner. We will have a proper training programme. The oil companies will support it. The issue is, how do you remunerate them at the level in which they deserve and you have constraint by the Public Service Regulations. And even though you have contract employees, the contract package still has to be approved by the CPO. So—and the CPO has benchmarks and what have you. And bearing in mind there are unique challenges that you want to face in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, but it is an entire public service you run. You do not want to set precedent that will have its impact on other Ministries. Because if you say, we need geologists and we need geophysicists and let us give them a 200 per cent increase, the Office of the Attorney General may say, we need lawyers and we need good lawyers because all the good lawyers are in private practice. So we have to balance it and I think we are on the road of some solutions and I expect some good results this year.

**Mr. Chairman:** The Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, you again?

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Yes, I just wanted to add to line Item 08. If the hon. Minister could in fact advise how many persons are currently employed and how many vacant positions as well?

**Hon. Khan:** Yeah, you will get that.

**Mr. Chairman:** The Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Thank you. Mr. Minister, in regard to a comment that you made a little while ago, you said you had 42 positions vacant and you had either 1,076 or either or one thousand—

**Hon. Khan:** One thousand four hundred.

**Dr. Rambachan:**—four hundred applicants for 42 positions. Is there not therefore, an anomaly somewhere, where we are quoting a 5 per cent unemployment rate in the country and you have a situation where just for one—42 jobs, you have 1,400 applicants. Are you telling me that, of that 1,400—

**Hon. Khan:** What I am saying there is not in contradiction with the national statistics. That comes through the CSO, where have you. What I am saying is that the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries has a career opportunity and there are a lot of professionals who now work, for example, in temporary jobs in the service companies, in the service sector. Remember when you are in the service sector, your job is always on the line, you know, because the day that service company loses its contract for whatever reason or you would be replaced by another contractor, you are home, okay?

So there is a career in the Government for energy technocrats, because just as the Member for Barataria/San Juan will tell you, and the Member for Caroni Central, the best place to learn medicine is in the public health care system as a young intern. It is not in private practice. When you build your skill sets through the public health system then you will feel confident enough to come like my good friend, the Member for Barataria/San Juan, and do what he does quite well. So that is the whole scenario. So it is good to enter the industry at the level of Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries where you get a wide range of skills in handling all

the big ticket items.

**Mr. Chairman:** The Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, you still have a question?

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** Proceed.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thanks. Line Item 23, hon. Minister. If you can please identify what category of workers are paid from this Sub-Item? As well as, how many more workers will be paid as the result of the increase of 1,912,000?

**Mr. Chairman:** Mr. Minister—

**Hon. Khan:** What was it?

**Mr. Chairman:** Line Item 23.

**Hon. Khan:** That is basically the legal staff in the Ministry. The legal department is paid out of that.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** I notice there is an increase. Is there a need for more attorneys?

**Hon. Khan:** Yeah, because there are seven new positions under the new structure, and, again, the legal department at the Ministry has, if I could say so myself, been doing an excellent job. Because at the end of the day your success depends on the nature of the contracts you sign. Whether it is an exploration/production licence, whether it is a production sharing contract, whether there is a gas sales agreement, whether it is a sales and purchase agreement. So basically their role in this thing is very, very, fundamental.

**Mr. Chairman:** Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, Item 001, General Administration, pages 256 and 257. I recognize the Member for Oropouche East.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Thank you very much. To the Minister, I am on 66. Minister, you notice there you have 2017 Actual, 253; 450, Estimate '18; 415, Revised '18, but you now have there, unless I am seeing wrong, you have \$3.4 million there which



is a \$3 million increase. Could you just explain that? Is there some new conference, seminar, some big function you are undertaking in the next few months? Could you give us a little detail?—not too much detail.

**Mr. Chairman:** The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

**Hon. Khan:** There is a group called the Gas Exporting Countries Forum, of which Trinidad is proud to chair this year. So I am actually the chairman of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum. The Gas Exporting Countries Forum is the gas equivalent of OPEC. It is a select group of countries. Only 12 members and five associate members. The 12 members are—I cannot recall them off the cuff, but it includes, Qatar, which is big; Russia, Libya, Iraq, Iran, Venezuela, Bolivia, Gabon, Nigeria, and Equatorial Guinea. We will be hosting the ministerial meeting on the 14<sup>th</sup> of November which is just a month away, a month and a half away from now and then we will be having an international gas symposium the day before the conference. So there will be a lot of “heavyweights” so to speak, in Trinidad next month.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Could I have a follow-up question?

**Mr. Chairman:** Same line Item?

**Dr. Moonilal:** On the same matter.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Minister, did I hear you correct here? Did you include Ghana in the list of countries?

**Hon. Khan:** No, Ghana is not a member.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Okay, thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** The Member for Caroni Central.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Item 16, Contract Employment. I just wanted to have an idea of what kind of contract employment is involved there? Is it individual, is it projects

or is it a combination?—because I see a 2.1 increase.

**Hon. Khan:** Mostly individual contracts. In fact, largely individual contracts.

**Dr. Tewarie:** So these would be technically competent people?

**Hon. Khan:** Yes, very much so and they are paid slightly more than the public servants.

**Mr. Chairman:** The Member for Naparima.

**Dr. Tewarie:** No, no. Can I have a follow-up?

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, go ahead, go ahead.

**Dr. Tewarie:** The Short-term Employment—

**Mr. Chairman:** Number?

**Dr. Tewarie:** Number 22. What would the Short-term Employment involve? I do not mean the people. When you say short-term, what is that? Is that months, or years or—?

**Mr. Chairman:** Mr. Minister.

**Hon. Khan:** I am being told it is a small amount. That is for summer students.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay, so it is a few months?

**Hon. Khan:** Yeah.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay, I understand.

**Mr. Chairman:** The Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** Thank you. Minister, Item 17, Training. If I were a head of a Ministry with highly qualified, highly performing, lowly paid staff, one of the incentives I would have to keep them would be to train and ensure that they would be at the cutting edge, when they interact with their colleagues in the external energy sector, like Shell and bp and what not. And I see in the 2018 Estimates, 1.2 million was allocated, but only 150,000 spent. I see, and you must be commended, it has increased this year by 781,000. Still I think inadequate, but, just the

explanation on 1.2 million allocated and only 150,000.

**Hon. Khan:** What happened here is that, this is the budget from the Consolidated Fund. Now, a lot of the Petroleum contracts are governed by what we call PSCs, Production Sharing Contracts. There are two types of contracts: exploration/production licences and production sharing contracts. Production sharing contracts are now taking over from the NP licence. Under the terms of the production sharing contract the oil companies are mandated to allocate money for scholarships, training, research and development and local content. So there are deposit accounts in the Central Bank that have millions of dollars for training which the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries uses very regularly during the course of the year. So this alone does not reflect the training budget.

**Mr. Charles:** Reflect the real position. Okay, thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** The Member for Chaguanas East.

**Mr. Karim:** Minister, in the event that I may have missed the—anything with respect to line Item 34, you could let me know. I just want to know, I see no money was utilized at all than the 1 million in 2018. What do you plan to do with this programme in 2019?

**Mr. Chairman:** Line Item 34.

**Hon. Khan:** What Item is it?

**Mr. Karim:** Line Item 34. University Graduate Recruitment Programme.

**Hon. Khan:** That was a programme that was announced by the Minister of Finance last year, I think it was year before, 2015. There were a lot of hitches in putting that programme in place. So it never kicked off and that is the reason you see that Item there—

**Mr. Karim:** Will it kick off in 2019?

**Hon. Khan:** We have made up for it. And as a matter of fact I think it should be

moved out of the next budget as a line Item, because we have had other programmes that replace it.

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Minister, I am a bit saddened to hear you say that you are moving that out, because just a while ago you were indicating that there are a number of graduates, over 1,000 that are waiting for jobs. But you have a line Item here, University Graduate Recruitment Programme which fits in directly to what you are saying. So are you moving in opposite directions, where your heart is good, you really want to bring these people in, why not reconsider that and increase the funding for that rather than moving it out.

**Hon. Khan:** We are putting alternative programmes, because this programme had some administrative hitches as it relates to allocation and moneys and what have you. I am not seized of all the details of it, but I know there have been hitches in implementing this programme, so we are not waiting on this programme and we are moving ahead with our own model to bring in new graduates, to bring in scholars, in particular, and train them.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** May I humbly suggest that you have a very great line Item here—

**Hon. Khan:**—that we can use.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yeah, exactly in keeping with your thinking for development.

**Hon. Khan:** All right. Okay. I stand guided.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So probably weed out the difficulties you have and expand the programme to get more people. I am sure your PS and so on may help you with that. I want to commend this part.

**Hon. Khan:** I will be so guided. I will take it on seriously.

**Mr. Chairman:** The Member for Oropouche West.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Thank you, Chair. Minister, line Item 05, Telephones. Am seeing the 2018 Revised Estimates as 1.5 million; 2019 Estimates, close to 3 million and then—which shows like an increase of \$1.5 million. [*Crosstalk*] My question is, does the Ministry have guidelines for the use of telephones and mobile devices?

**Mr. Chairman:** Members, Members, please. I am trying to hear the Member for Oropouche West. Go ahead.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Yes. Does the Ministry have guidelines for the use of telephones and mobile devices?—one. And two, whether—what is the Ministry's policy for the use of mobile devices for overseas travel. Is it on roaming or so?

**Hon. Khan:** We are guided by, there is a national policy in the public service on the use of cell phones and who will be allocated cell phones, et cetera, et cetera. And we have a new phone system at the Ministry now which we think is much more modern and more applicable to the state-of-the-art technology.

A phone is not a phone now. It is data. Okay? And you see communication, communication is the secret to any business. And any expenditure in communication, once it is properly managed, is money well spent. Because in today's world, you will be drilling a well off the east coast in Galeota and that well is being monitored from Houston, Texas. You can open a valve by clicking on a button in Houston and shut off the valve in Galeota. That is the way the technology is now.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** And may I just follow-up?

**Hon. Khan:** And there is a grey area between data, technology, information, voice messaging and text messaging. So that whole issue lumps as one, as communication. So the nomenclature evolves with time.

**Mr. Chairman:** Follow-up you said, Member for Oropouche West?

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Yes. Thank you. I am not sure if you might have it hon. Minister, but, what might be the total monthly bill for landlines and cellular phones?

**Mr. Chairman:** You have that information, Mr. Minister?

**Hon. Khan:** No, we have not. We can provide that.

**Mr. Chairman:** You will provide it?

**Hon. Khan:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Mr. Chairman:** All right, the Minister will provide it. The Member for Couva North.

**Ms. Ramdial:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, line Item 28, Other Contracted Services. In 2018, your Revised Estimate was 23 million. In 2019, it is 26.1 with an increase by 3.1 million. Can you give an explanation for this, please?

**Mr. Chairman:** Mr. Minister. [*Pause*]

He is gathering the information.

**7.20 p.m.**

**Hon. Khan:** Okay. Most of that increase is for technical studies and, as we speak, we are conducting a regional deep-water evaluation of the Trinidad assets going into the Caribbean basin as far north as Grenada and Barbados, and east into Guyana and Venezuela. These are the long-term strategic items that the country has to keep focused on to increase our reserves in the future. Couva North will be happy to hear that part of that money is also allocated to the offshore well that blew. That was controlled and—

**Ms. Ramdial:** I was about to ask you about that.

**Hon. Khan:**—consideration is being given to facilitating your fishermen.

**Ms. Ramdial:** Thank you very much.

**Mr. Chairman:** Princes Town, you still have—proceed.

**Mr. Padarath:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, just to clarify a point that you made under line Item 34, I just wanted to find out from you whether or not the alternative programmes that you speak of with respect to this particular line Item being moved out, whether there are new plans for a parallel programme, or whether or not prior to the Minister of Finance's announcement in 2015, did these parallel programmes already exist in the Ministry?

**Hon. Khan:** There was a programme for, what they call, associate professionals where the Ministry of Education will assign scholarship winners who have come back to serve their two years to the various Ministries, and that is the programme we were implementing as per normal, but we want to expand that programme to include more scholars and also top-of-the-class students, in giving them the required training, because the exposure will be great. Because you are not only working in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, you will be assigned assignments with the oil companies to be exposed to their level of technology.

**Mr. Padarath:** Thank you, Minister. Minister, could you say whether or not this alternative, then, will be designed in terms of the requirements—will be designed by the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries?

**Hon. Khan:** By and large, but with normal consultation. Because it is training, we will still speak to the Ministry of Education through some inputs from UTT and UWI as the case may be.

**Mr. Chairman:** Sub-Head 03; Minor Equipment Purchases, page 257; Item 001, General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 27; Item 001; Regional Bodies, 257. Item 004, International Bodies, page 258; Item 007, Households, page 258.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Minister, under line Item 01: Shortfall in Subsidies re Sale of

Petroleum Products, what we gather here is—

**Mr. Chairman:** Member, give me the number, please?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** 007, 01.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, proceed.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** The shortfall in subsidy in 2017 was \$379 million, roughly. What we are seeing here, there seems to be no shortfall in subsidy in '18. Am I right, from what the book shows here? Because there was no estimate, no revised estimate. Could you just give us a little clarification? And as I am on that, 2019, you estimate—

**Mr. Chairman:** One second, Member.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So you could probably answer all, because they are linked. In 2019 you have a shortfall in the subsidy of \$400 million. Could you give us and the country, if possible, an appreciation of the total subsidies that we had for '18, if there was any; what you feel they may have in 2019? And I see you have allocated \$400 million. So could you give us a clarification on the issue?

**Hon. Khan:** Okay. Let me start from the beginning. During the 2018 budget, which was pegged at US \$52 per barrel for oil, and the price of diesel and super went up in that budget, at that point in time there would have been no subsidy because we have come to a free market position where there was a small subsidy, but that was being paid by the petroleum levy, and that was covered entirely by the petroleum levy. Where the subsidy came into effect is when—in the latter part of the fiscal year when the oil prices increased, a subsidy became due because of the higher oil prices, and we did get an allocation of 100-plus million dollars in the mid-year review.

The forecast—because oil prices are still above \$70—is about \$400 million even with the dollar increase in the price of super, and we estimate around \$375



million coming out of the petroleum subsidy and petroleum levy. So, all in all, it may be about \$700 million/\$800 million in all, at current oil prices. If oil prices fall, it will be less. If oil prices increase, there is a sting in the tail. You will get more revenue on one side but the subsidy increases on the other side.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So you estimate probably the subsidies that the country will have to bear is approximately \$700 million to \$800 million?

**Hon. Khan:** May be around that figure. But you know the subsidy changes every day because the oil prices change.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I hope the Minister does not come with a midterm review and carry up the price of diesel to offset that.

**Mr. Chairman:** Well, that is not my jurisdiction.

**Ms. Ramdial:** It is quite possible.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** It is possible, eh, to offset that. But thanks for the explanation.

**Mr. Chairman:** I am recognizing Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Deputy Chair. Minister, just for my own clarification, the premium gas right now, as it stands at the pump, is that subsidized presently?

**Hon. Khan:** No, no. That is—

**Mr. Chairman:** Members, wait. Hold on one second, one second. Remember we are going according to line Item.

**Mr. Lee:** Okay. Well it is in relationship to line Item 01—

**Mr. Chairman:** Right, well, please identify—

**Mr. Lee:** It is an additional follow-up question in respect to what the Member of Caroni East was asking.

**Hon. Khan:** There is no subsidy on premium.

**Mr. Lee:** When would that attract a subsidy?

**Hon. Khan:** Probably at—

**Mr. Lee:** At what price?

**Hon. Khan:**—around \$80. And we are well below that, as we speak.

**Mr. Charles:** On the subsidy—and Minister, this is just for clarification—is any part of the subsidy—and you probably said it before—borne by the oil-producing companies, and not by the State?

**Hon. Khan:** Yes, a part of the subsidy, it comes under what we call, the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Act of 1974, where they cap at 4 per cent of their gross revenue for oil production only. While that subsidy which used to cover the entire subsidy in the past because oil production was very high in those days—in the '70s and '80s—was over 200,000 barrels; we are down to 62,000 barrels now. So the cap of 4 per cent on oil production does not cover the entire subsidy.

**Mr. Charles:** So when we reach to a state where we remove all the subsidies, the petroleum levy would still exist with the oil companies?

**Hon. Khan:** Well, we will be shooting ourselves in the foot if we do not adjust the price that at least the residual subsidy should be covered by the petroleum levy.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 009: Other Transfers, page 258. Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprise, page 259. I recognize Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, line Item 01, Establishment of Quarries Authority, you had estimated \$900,000 in 2018. You utilized nothing and no estimate for 2019. Are you saying to us that you are not worrying about establishing a Quarries Authority anymore?

**Hon. Khan:** As we speak, we are seriously considering that position, the issue of Quarries Authority. I think right now there is too much conversion into authorities, authorities, authorities. Authorities come with their own cost structure and their own, what have you. But as we speak, I do not forecast that that will be

operationalized this year at all.

**Mr. Lee:** Just a follow-up, Minister. Given the—and if my memory serves me right—within the Auditor General in respect to extractive, in respect to the quarries, they had some issues about really getting the correct funding for the Government, or the country. Was not the establishment of this Quarries Authority to assist in that?

**Hon. Khan:** Yes and no. It is a new administrative structure to operate quarries. The fact of the matter is that the level of oversight and the demand to stick within the regulation and to pay your dues, the Auditor General's Report was very clear that the quarry operators, in particular all, from the largest to the smallest, owe the State significant amounts of royalty payments. Okay? And what we have to do, and what I intend to do, is to become very draconian in collecting the money that is owed to the State. Because these quarry operators make money. Okay? And it is untenable to be in a position where they can think that they can get away, because nobody enforces the laws and the regulations for the non-payment of royalties.

**Dr. Tewarie:** A couple of questions. The first thing is Item 04: Equity Injection, Alutech. This is the same Alutech in East Trinidad. Right? Wallerfield?

**Hon. Khan:** Yes, it is. That is the one we commissioned—well, not commissioned, but recently, down at Tamana InTech Park.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Now, for this equity injection, do we have a percentage of ownership? Is the State an owner in that?

**Hon. Khan:** I will have to get that information for you, but I think our equity position is quite small.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Small? Okay. And the second one, 05: Trinidad and Tobago Upstream/Downstream Energy Operations Company. This is the company that will now be doing specialized functions upstream and downstream and extracting

that responsibility from NGC. Is that correct?

**Hon. Khan:** The conceptualization of this company—and it is still in its formative stage because the dynamics of the state sector in oil and gas is changing rapidly as you all are aware. The NGC had a conflict of interest, so to speak, being the aggregator of gas and being an investor in the upstream. So when you are doing a gas sales agreement, as an upstream investor you want the highest price for upstream. The NGC, as the aggregator, wants the lowest price for NGC to onward sell to the down-streamers. So the intent of this company was to take the upstream assets of NGC, vest it into a new state company that can joint-venture with other operators in a more serious way, and not only as an investor in the silent sense of the word, but to be an aggressive exploration and production arm of the State. So that is still in the making, and we are—

**Dr. Tewarie:** But would they not have the same conflict of interests if they are also serving downstream, though?

**Hon. Khan:** No, no, no. They will be independent and they will be selling to the NGC as a hands-off arrangement. And more often than not—

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay. I understand. So NGC will supply downstream.

**Hon. Khan:** Yes, NGC, as the aggregator, the midstream aggregator.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay. I am fine.

**Dr. Rambachan:** I just want to go back to the establishment of Quarries Authority. You said you are going to become draconian and get your money from the quarry operators, and I agree. I mean, fellas are charging a pound and a crown for a load of gravel. But what about the people who are operating illegally in the country? What is the Ministry doing about that? Because I feel equal amounts of quarry material are being stolen, and so on.

**Hon. Khan:** I have a security advisor in the Ministry. He is working closely with

the police. We are working with the mining inspectors and we have a plan in place—obviously, we cannot disclose it too much to the public—to come down on illegal quarrying. Illegal quarrying is big business and it has a lot of criminal elements in it, if I should say so myself. But we have a plan in place to try to bring it under control. It is almost endemic in north-east Trinidad, as everybody is aware of.

**Dr. Rambachan:** And the sand quarries too.

**Hon. Khan:** No, the sand quarries are different.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the hon. Minister, Item 03: Environmental Indemnity to the PowerGen Company. Minister, could you inform this Committee as to what is the status of the remediation works at the PowerGen plant?

**Hon. Khan:** I am glad you bring up the environmental indemnification, and that is one thing that the UNC administration did that was not in the national interest.

**Mr. Singh:** Well, I think the national interest was poorly served by giving the power generation to PowerGen in 1994.

**Hon. Khan:** That is beside the point, but you went ahead and signed an agreement—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Hold on, Members. The Minister is answering.

**Hon. Khan:**—giving them total indemnity for any environmental issue on that, and today the State has to pay. As we speak, the decommissioning of the Wrightson Road power plant—

**Mr. Singh:** Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse.

**Hon. Khan:**—they have applied for the CEC. They expect to get it by the first quarter of 2019, and once the CEC is granted by the Environmental Management Authority, decommission will start. Luckily, the way I have brokered this deal

with them now, that the dismantling of the plant will be to the cost of PowerGen, which is dismantling it and putting it—and the soil remediation work alone will come under the indemnity that you all gave them.

**Mr. Singh:** Yes, but that could only have been done if the contract allows you to do so.

**Mr. Young:** Mr. Chair, if I may come in here, just to add. One of the things we found and it was quite distressing, whereas the previous contract, it was vague as to who had to cover the cost for the dismantling of the plan, the environmental effects, et cetera, the Cabinet took a decision in 2014 and made the language very clear against the State, that the State had to pick up the bill. So wherever there was any vagueness before, the Cabinet made it clear that the State would pick up the full bill for the dismantling and the economic cost of—the environmental cost of the dismantling of it, et cetera. So what has been achieved, as Minister Khan just described, actually is outside of the contract and came up on negotiation.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I just want to engage the hon. Minister for a little further clarification of the line Item 05 on page 259, the upstream and downstream energy operations. Minister, is this the same company that has just been recently formed to supply 20 years of natural gas to the NiQuan company?

**Mr. Young:** Yes, it is.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So why has that been taken away from NGC when NGC is supplying the downstream industry, and this will be doing the same job of supplying the downstream industries? What is the rationale for that? I can understand the upstream aspect of it, but in addition to give a company a 20-year contract for supplying gas to them, I think it is not in the best interest of our country as a whole. So could you just comment a little on the—

**Hon. Khan:** Just very briefly, the NGC is in a lot of sensitive legal matters with

some of the down-streamers, especially as it relates to claims against them for non-supply of gas. So if the NGC had gone into a new contract with the supply without satisfying that liability, they would have been exposed to serious litigation.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** All right. I hear that, but are you comfortable with supplying gas to a company for 20 years, Minister?

**Hon. Khan:** I think it is because these plans, to become operational, need long-term gas supply agreement. The economy just cannot fly with a—a bank would not lend you money with a five-year guarantee supply when the life cycle of the plant is 15 and 20 years, and when your whole economic model calls for that.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Is the value of the gas subject to variation based on the sale price? Or is it a fixed—

**Hon. Khan:** No, no. It is linked to product prices and also upstream prices.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Well, I, personally, from my years in Parliament, I always have found difficulty when companies say, you know, you are negotiating and you cannot give the price of gas. I mean, this is one of the reasons why the Trinidad and Tobago Extractive Industries Company was formed, so that it would make things a little more transparent. But that is a situation—

**Hon. Khan:** But that is a different topic.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** All right. Thanks for the elucidation.

**Mr. Singh:** I would just like to clarify. You indicated that this new company was formed, JV, with upstream companies, so that therefore—and pursue that aggressively. So how do you reconcile that with the fact that now you are supplying NiQuan downstream?

**Mr. Chairman:** Hold on. That was answered already.

**Hon. Khan:** That was answered already. I just answered the Member for Caroni Central—because of obligation matters.

**Mr. Chairman:** Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme* and we will now go to the Developmental Programme, Sub-Head, 09: Consolidated Fund, page 96. And I will recognize Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Minister, line Item 003: Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Initiatives. You have estimated \$9 million in 2019, but throughout the last three years, really and truly, nothing—you have estimated areas in renewable energy and nothing really, of substance, has been done within the Ministry for renewable energy. Could you elaborate why? And what is this new initiative of \$9 million for 2019?

**Hon. Khan:** The new initiative, which was really in last year's budget but it was not implemented in its entirety, is for the insulation of solar LED lights at a number of play parks throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Okay? We plan to expand this programme to light play parks, in particular, with LED lights. That, basically, will cover the \$9 million cost. The key aspect of the renewables is really to generate renewable power. And as we speak, there will be requests for proposals, because we already had EOI that was concluded both for the waste-to-energy and for the renewables.

As you know, we signed the Paris accord—Paris Agreement, as it is called—where we committed to 10 per cent renewable by 2021. It is approximately 150 megawatts of power. We hope to generate that from the renewable energy project. We will be going out for tender within about a month's time for solar and/or wind, in various sizes. We do not know. We have asked people to bid from as low as three megawatts to as high as 50 megawatts. And then we will have, what you call feeding tariffs to integrate it into the T&TEC grid.

The proof in this matter is at what price will the renewables—because



“everybody talking renewables, eh.” What price they would be willing to sell it into the grid. And I “doh” want to prejudge a tender, but the chances are, based on international pricing structure, that the power made available from renewables would be much more expensive than the cost of the power that we produce now from gas.

And just to put a plug on renewables also, we must understand, in Trinidad and Tobago here, people miss the point. I have always said, “everybody talking” about electric cars, but what is the point in having an electric car and you are producing electricity from coal? So you could have electric cars in China, but China’s power is generated from coal. The better thing to do is convert your power plants to natural gas in the first instance, and then you move along the renewables chain. We are one of only three countries in the world that generate 100 per cent of its power from natural gas. The other two are Qatar and Oman in the Middle East.

So I think that is a plus for Trinidad, and as we now move into the renewables sphere—because that is what the world is coming to and that is where we have to go. But we are not in such a bad place as it will be made out to be because we do not have a classic renewable market at yet. But we will have that in the coming year or two.

**Mr. Lee:** Under Renewables, Minister, in the budget there was mention about the government vehicles and the targets for this coming year. What is the target figure, and how do you plan to push that within your Government Ministries?

**Hon. Khan:** Thirty per cent of government vehicles should be either hybrids or CNG and there is a Cabinet decision that mandates all Ministries, starting from fiscal 2019, that any new vehicle bought from this year has to be either hybrid or CNG, or if it is a specialized vehicle, well then you may have the opportunity to go

with liquid fuels.

**Mr. Lee:** Buses?

**Hon. Khan:** Yes, buses too.

**Mr. Paray:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, in terms of the issue of renewable energy, any consideration to new housing developments, as it goes on? Because in the United States you find a lot of the new housing developments, they are retrofitting them with their own power plants, solar plants. Any plans of your Government to go in that direction?

**Hon. Khan:** Well, I am not sure what the HDC has planned. You could ask that to the Housing Minister when he takes the seat. Private developers are free to do that. Okay? But, again, the issue is the cost structure, and people will not use a particular source of power if it is not economic to them. Okay? And that is the long and short of the economics of power in Trinidad and Tobago. However, according to Paris, we are committed to 10 per cent renewables by 2021 and we will try as far as possible, as a Government, to meet that target. That is all I would say.

**Mr. Karim:** Minister, just a quick question. Are you working with any of the universities in terms of these initiatives? And if so, which one and what initiatives, in terms of the priority for renewables?

**Hon. Khan:** We are party, and we are a member of a lot of international agencies that deal with renewables, but the point of a direct link with the University of Trinidad and Tobago or UWI, the answer is no, and it is an area we can possibly look at.

**Mr. Karim:** I want to suggest strongly because UTT, particularly, had an energy institute and UWI would have had a lot of research being done which could be application research now for what you want to do.

**Hon. Khan:** Okay, I am guided.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Thank you very kindly. Could I indicate that the University of the West Indies has shown an interest in partnering with the Government, but through the EMA and the Ministry of Planning and Development. But what we are trying to do is to make sure that we do not do things in silos, so we will be working with the—when I say, we, the Ministry of Planning and Development, which has the environment portfolio—will be working with the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries and UWI to try and see if we can get one programme going. I mean, we live in a small island and one programme will be effective. Thank you.

**Mr. Lee:** Minister, line Item G001: Acquisition of a Radar for Detection of Oil Spill, \$1 million. Could you elaborate? Who will be responsible for this piece of equipment, or this radar? Will it be within the Ministry? Would it be—

**Hon. Khan:** The plan is that the Ministry will have responsibility for it. It will be sited on Point Gourde, one of the communication towers there, and it is a system that deals with anomalies on the sea surface. And if it detects a totally calm surface where it does not have any ripples, the assumption is that it could possibly be an oil spill, because there are always ripples on the surface of the sea because of wind and waves. But what a spill does, it suppresses that. So that will be the—it is a first respondent kind of thing. So if it is an anomaly, we will check it. The chances are it may not be a spill, but at least it is something you keep monitoring and you check it and it is an early warning signal.

**Mr. Lee:** Do you have the personnel in-house presently when you do acquire this piece of equipment?

**Hon. Khan:** Well, we will train a couple people, but, I mean, it does not call for a massive staff. It is just a remote sensing device on a tower linked up to some

computer system and you must have the surveillance system to—if you have an anomaly, you could probably get the coastguard to check it in the first instance, and we will work out those operational details.

**Mr. Charles:** Minister, again on 003: Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Initiatives, you said earlier that we are one of a few countries where all our electricity is generated from gas.

**Hon. Khan:** Yes.

**Mr. Charles:** And you said, most of our Point Lisas industries are fuelled by natural gas. If that is correct, why it is we have the reputation of having the second highest per capita carbon footprint, if a large part of our industries are fuelled by natural gas?

**7.50 p.m.**

**Hon. Khan:** The fuel for natural gas in power generations is a clean fuel. The Point Lisas estate do not power their plants by natural gas per se. Natural gas is a raw material to make methanol, urea and ammonia. We have a challenge. Just forget the per capita issue because we are a fairly industrialized island when you work it on a per capita basis. Look how much pollution China has, but if China works out on a per capita basis they have to divide by 1.8 billion people. So the absolute amount of CO<sub>2</sub> is minimal in terms of effecting any significant climate change in the world. But having said that, carbon capture is a commitment we also under Paris because we have to reduce our carbon emissions both from industry and from vehicular traffic. And the best way for carbon capture is to capture the CO<sub>2</sub> at Point Lisas, pipe it down to Forest Reserve, and to Palo Seco, and to Point Fortin, and reinject it back into wells for secondary recoveries. It is called CO<sub>2</sub> flooding and the new Petrotrin will be focusing on that a lot.

**Mr. Paray:** Minister, my understanding of these SARs, they are ideally suited for

aircrafts and so on, that are retrofitted to do scans, to do sweep overs, and so on, to be able to get the best, how you put it, in terms of the mobility of checking areas, and I am assuming that is when you have very large areas to be scanning. When you mount this on a fixed and I assume this is going to be on a tower on one side of the island, or on a platform as the case may be, how would you really look at now that we have exploration and so on happening on the north coast, you have on the east coast?

**Hon. Khan:** It is not intended to be a national programme. It is starting off here because our most vulnerable asset for pollution—

**Mr. Paray:** Is the east coast.

**Hon. Khan:** No, it is the Gulf of Paria because of the ageing asset infrastructure of Petrotrin. The east coast is fairly well handled because we have first in class operators on the east coast, BHP, bp, Shell, and they have proper monitoring system and their asset integrity is significantly better, if not almost world class in the east north coast and the north-east coast. So the risk of major things happening there, while it still exists in the energy sector it is small compared to what is the potential for it happening on the Gulf of Paria.

**Mr. Paray:** Is this allocation adequate to acquire that piece of equipment looking at this it is about US \$150,000 when you do the conversion, or are you putting it towards it with acquisition over a period of time?

**Hon. Khan:** I have been advised, yes, but probably it is a small system to start with. But if it works and if we see value in it, I am almost certain we will be coming back next year to talk about an expansion.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Just a quick question, Minister. Besides a \$400 million allocated for subsidies for Petrotrin—

**Hon. Khan:** Chairman, we are past that you know. We are under the

Development Programme.

**Dr. Tewarie:** No, no, I was going to ask a general question. I could use 005, Extractive Industries, to ask my question.

**Mr. Chairman:** Member. 005, okay. Let me hear it.

**Hon. Khan:** Go ahead.

**Mr. Chairman:** Let me hear the question. 005, Extractive Industries.

**Dr. Tewarie:** I was going to ask that I see no other Item related to Petrotrin on the Government accounts in either recurrent or development.

**Hon. Khan:** That has never been the case with the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries. We have never had any line Item in any form or fashion that deals with Petrotrin.

**Dr. Tewarie:** But given the pending situation, is it not likely that the Government, or is Petrotrin going to handle all of that? I do not see how that is possible.

**Hon. Khan:** If Petrotrin has to handle it, it has to handle it. If Petrotrin cannot handle it in some form or fashion, the obvious Ministry to handle it would be the Ministry of Finance. The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries as the regulator, it has nothing to do with that.

**Dr. Tewarie:** All right. Okay. I understand.

**Mr. Chairman:** Members, please, please. Let us go according to the procedure. So Infrastructure Development Fund, page 202.

**Mr. Singh:** Mr. Chairman, I had my hand up.

**Mr. Chairman:** I missed it and also the Clerk missed it. I will give way.

**Mr. Singh:** Well maybe I am too far down on this side. I just want to go back. To deal with Item 003, the hon. Minister indicated that they are going to do a series of grounds, could you provide a listing of those grounds, and I hope that there is an appropriate distribution so that we can claim, also that we are environmentally, and

we are green, and we are part of renewable energy.

**Hon. Khan:** Well, I cannot provide the listing because I do not have the listing as yet, but in due course.

**Mr. Singh:** Okay.

**Mr. Chairman:** Infrastructure Development Fund, page 202; Item 003, Economic Infrastructure, page 202.

**Mr. Lee:** Minister, I noticed on line Item 001, Development of Industrial Sites, you had 21 million budgeted in 2018, nothing spent in 2018, and nothing allocated in 2019, you must have had plans for these industrial sites back in 2018, what happened now that—

**Hon. Khan:** You see Port Development and Industrial Sites. Port Development and Industrial Sites largely falls under the remit of a subsidiary of the NGC, which is called National Energy Corporation, because they handle the Labidco site and, et cetera, et cetera. It is the very said NGC that has been making profits, so much profits so that you all could have taken out \$13 million from it, but let me just make the point. I did not see the need where we are struggling to get money to build schools and hospitals for the PSIP to continue to fund the work of the National Energy Corporation. So we have taken it out of Development Programme. There is enough cash flow within national energy itself, and within the NGC as the parent company, to fund all their development programmes because they make income from port development and from industrial estates.

**Mr. Lee:** Fair enough.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, Item 011, Dredging of Sea Lots Main Channel and Turning Basin, could you give us an appreciation of the status of this project?

**Hon. Khan:** Well, that was a legacy project of the United National Congress. It

was a poorly constructed contract. There were major issues and flaws in the contract. The contract was poorly worded and they had no proper oversight of that contract. As we speak, we have been struggling for the last year and a half to put some order to this contract. Hopefully, we are coming there and once we have sorted out these issues, we plan to spend approximately \$9 million this year to complete the works, but that contract was awarded in 2015.

**Mr. Paray:** Minister, is there any intention of your Government to pursue the phase two of the Galeota port development project?

**Mr. Chairman:** Member, one second. One second. Line Item?

**Mr. Paray:** Line Item 05, sorry. My apologies, Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** New Port Facilities.

**Mr. Paray:** 005, yes.

**Hon. Khan:** We will be going out for request for proposal on phase two Galeota in the coming months, most definitely.

**Mr. Chairman:** Hon. Members, the question is that the sum of \$526,406,000 for Head 40, Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries stand part of the Schedule.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 40 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you, Mr. Minister, thank you, Madam PS and to the technocrats. Do reach home safely.

*Head 37: Integrity Commission, \$11,126,900,000.*

**Mr. Chairman:** I now invite the Minister of Finance to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

**Hon. Imbert:** The Integrity Commission of Trinidad and Tobago, as we are aware, was established by an Act of Parliament for three primary purposes: to make provisions for the prevention of corruption by persons in public life, to



regulate the conduct of persons exercising public functions, and to preserve and promote the integrity of public officials and institutions among other things.

*Question proposed:* That Head 37 stand part of the Schedule.

**Mr. Chairman:** I would like to welcome the Registrar and also the technocrats from the Integrity Commission. Welcome. Page 257, Sub-Head, 01, Personnel Expenditure; Item 001, General Administration, page 237; Sub-Head 02, Goods and Services, page 237; Item 001, General Administration, pages 237 and 238; Sub-Head 03, Minor Equipment Purchases, page 239; Item 001, General Administration, page 239.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*. Sub-Head 09, Development Programme – Consolidated Fund, page 86; Item 005, Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, page 86.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 37 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you, Madam Registrar. Thank you.

*Head 28:* Ministry of Health, \$4,960,215,850.

**Mr. Chairman:** I will now invite the Minister of Health to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Thank you very much, Chairman. In the interest of time, I will forego my opening statement.

**Mr. Chairman:** Welcome to Madam PS and also to the technocrats this evening.

*Question proposed:* That Head 28 stand part of the Schedule.

**Mr. Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum \$4,960,215,850 for Head 28, Ministry of Health, is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads on Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies*

*of the Tobago House of Assembly and the Draft Estimates of the Development Programme.* We now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure.* Sub-Head, 01, Personnel Expenditure, page 187; Item 001, General Administration, page 187; Item 004, Vertical Services, page 188; Item 005, North West Regional Health Authority, page 188. Caroni Central.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** East.

**Mr. Chairman:** East, sorry.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Minister, could you just give us a little idea of what various divisions constitute the Vertical Services?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** So Vertical Services are services that would not devolve under the RHA Act and remain under the remit of the Ministry of Health. There are a total of 20 Vertical Services comprising Trinidad Public Health Laboratory.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Okay, the main ones.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Oh. Chemistry Food and Drugs, Queen's Park Counselling Centre, National HIV/AIDS Programme and so on.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Okay. And the ones that do the spraying?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Insect Vector, yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** That is one of the latter ones.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes, it is.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 005, North West Regional Health Authority, page 188. Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** With regard to Salaries and Cost of Living Allowances, Item 01, that expenditure of 23 million. Now, I know that these are employees that work at the RHAs and are paid by the Ministry, can you indicate what category of employees remain in this and how many? I am asking this in view of the devolution of the North West Regional Authority.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** So for North West there are 87 such employees left on the payroll from the Ministry of Health.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Is there any effort being made to have these completely under the control of the RHAs?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** We are trying.

**Dr. Bodoë:** I am asking simply because they have a dual reporting relationship.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Correct. So we are trying.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** You are making attempts for them to transfer across—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** We are trying, yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:**—and they are still resistant to it?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Well, I would not they are resistant, but we are trying.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 006, North Central Regional Health Authority, page 189; Item 007, Eastern Regional Health Authority, page 189; Item 008, South West Regional Health Authority, page 190; Item 009, National Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention, page 190. Sub-Head 02, Goods and Services, page 191. Mayaro. Sorry, Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Item 16, Minister, Contract Employment, I note a decrease here of 23,000,413, can you perhaps give an explanation as to that decrease?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** For the—?

**Dr. Bodoë:** For the Contract Employment, Item 16.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Well, we are trying to fill vacancies. However, we have received a decreased allocation, and if there is anything that we require further we will tap it in the mid-year review.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** These are vacancies within the Ministry of Health itself, is it?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** These are vacancies—yes, within the Ministry of Health.

Correct. Example, occupational and health and safety, and so on.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Well try and fill them because—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** We are trying.

**Dr. Khan:** Minister, there is line 08, there is a decrease of \$2 million for the Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation, et cetera, any special reason why?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes. Currently, we pay about \$1 million per month VAT inclusive for all our rentals. We are starting to shift some of those rentals to some in-house. It should be enough. If we require more we will go to mid-year review. So it ought not to be a problem.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Line Item 23, Minister, Fees, could you elucidate the Fees for what?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** These fees include legal cost, licences, technology support, antivirus agents and so on.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Okay, and the Training aspect, line Item 17, just above that.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** So key training in areas include Public Health Inspectors for food safety, insect vector, general nursing, customer care, pay sheet, finance.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Minister with regard to the Fees, there is a big decrease of \$22 million, is it this year you do not have to pay those fees or have up opted out of certain arrangements requiring fees?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** No. One of the reasons for that big decrease was the legacy fees for the Scarborough General Hospital. That has been handled so we do not have to pay that again.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you. Goods and Services, 001, General Administration, 01, Travelling and Subsistence, I see there is a decrease. With the proposal to allow for the health centres in Grand Riviere, Blanchisseuse and Cedros to be opened 24 hours, would the decrease in the travelling subsistence

impact negatively upon these health centre functioning on a 24 hour?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** It ought not. It is just three health centres in the first instance. So it ought not to.

**Dr. Khan:** On 66.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sorry?

**Dr. Khan:** 66. Let us go—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes, Hosting of Conferences?

**Dr. Khan:** The estimate has gone up by \$500,000, any special reason for that?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes. If you remember the contribution of Caroni East about NCDs and so on, we want to do a lot more outreach programmes, and one of the pillars is going to be NCD drive. So we want to have that for diabetes, hypotension, cancers, heart diseases, and other critical areas to continue the drive on infant and mortality health and bringing down those numbers.

**Dr. Khan:** And one last one, on 27, I noticed that you are not travelling much, any special reason why, to different various conferences?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** A lot of the travel that we do the technocrats go more and those travels as you know, as a former Minister, are co-sponsored by CARPHA and PAHO. So at the technical level the travelling and learning takes place, but at the ministerial level I hardly travel.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Forgive me. Minister, as you spoke about the NCDs, the same line Item my colleague asked about, am I to understand that there is an IDB loan that is giving you some support in that?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** And could just elucidate on that a little bit?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** What line Item is this?

**Dr. Khan:** That is coming up.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** That is coming up yes. So we will deal with it then.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 004, Vertical Services, page 192; Item 00—Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Minister, with regard to line Item 39, Drugs and other Related Materials and Supplies, could you just for our edification indicate what items that covered in that.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** So this has to do with drugs that we buy through NIPDEC and through the PAHO Strategic Fund, and for the EPI, for vaccinations and so on, and also for non-pharmaceuticals. So it covers pharmaceuticals and non-pharm.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Well, I am happy to see that there is an increase in the subvention from 500,000 last year—well 2018, the estimate was 630, Minister could explain what happened? I mean, you utilized 500 million, what happened when there were shortages of drugs and so on.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Member, I know the issue of drug shortages is a very emotional one and it makes for good political talk, but if you Google drug shortages there is an absolute shortage of drugs globally for a variety of factors in many special classes: epilepsy, anaesthetics, oncology, antibiotics. There is an absolute global shortage of drugs. Even with that absolute global shortage, countries like Canada are now thinking about making drugs themselves and stop relying on imports. In Canada, they are even postponing elective surgery because Canada cannot get drugs. Australia, which has 2 per cent of the world population, a big country, has a massive drug shortage because the Australian market is considered too small by international standards for the global companies to supply.

Our market in the Caribbean is last in line for all the drug manufacturers. It is a horrendous situation globally. The global rates of syphilis are going up. Do you know why? Because there is an absolute shortage of benzyl penicillin on the

global stage. So there are lots of factors driving drugs shortages. Market size, we are too small, plus consolidation of drug manufacturers. As you know, when drug manufacturer A buys out drug manufacturer B to get one blockbuster drug, and then they just kill off the rest of the line. So, I know it is an emotional thing. It is good to beat the Minister of Health—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, no, no.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:**—over drug shortages, but a lot of it, as Barataria/San Juan knows, totally out of our hands. But, we are using the PAHO Strategic Fund much more, and without the political back and forth, the last year has been one of our better recent years for drug shortages for critical areas.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So the non-expenditure of the allocation of 130 million, more was as a result of inability to source the pharmaceutical?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** No. A lot of that had to do because we switch to the PAHO Strategic Fund especially for HIV/AIDS drugs and we save 87 million on that one category of drugs alone.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Okay. Minister, while you are on that—I am sure my colleague, previous Minister of Health—could you give us a little idea of the monopoly in the supply of pharmaceuticals because the understanding of a few of us that one or two companies hold the market to ransom..

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** I would not say so. I would say a lot of the legacy drug importers are by and large the better ones to deal with. They fulfil their contractual obligations. One of the reasons we have drug shortages in Trinidad and Tobago are the smaller importers, the smaller suppliers, who bid for drugs and then blatantly refuse to fulfil their orders, and Barataria/San Juan knows that. And you know what they do? They then go to the RHAs and hold them to ransom and say buy your products from me, X stock at a higher price, and we are trying to break

that monopoly with the—it is not the bigger ones you know. It is not the Smith Robertsons and so on. It is the smaller importers who bid for one or two drugs, important drugs, get it, and then blatantly refuse to fulfil their contractual obligations, and I have asked NIPDEC to read the riot act for them and they must not get anymore awards.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Would it be too much for you—

**Mr. Chairman:** Members, one second. It is Standing Finance. We just came out of a debate and—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, it is not a debate here, Minister. We are supporting him on this, but we are just seeking some clarification on these issues. Minister, would it be too difficult for you to give us a gentle breakdown of the expenditure on pharmaceuticals from the larger—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure, I can provide that for you in writing, Sir.

**Mr. Chairman:** That will be provided. Mayaro. One second, I recognized Mayaro first.

**Mr. Paray:** Thank you. Minister, just on line 39 again and just a little follow-up. You made reference to the fact that Canada was looking at manufacturing its own drugs, taking note that a lot of drugs are highly, would you would call carbon-based polymers, the fact that we have a petroleum industry here, would it not be prudent to look inviting pharmaceutical companies to perhaps set up shop here in Trinidad, and perhaps the fact that we are graduating so many students out of UTT in biotechnology, biochemistry, and so on, to be able to get the employment in those areas, is that something that is in conversation—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** I am having that discussion with one country as we speak.

**Dr. Khan:** Just one question, Minister. It jumped by 160 million, the increase. What is reason for that because you have not really used that value prior to this?



**Hon. Deyalsingh:** People are making more and more use of the public health sector as you know, and then we are going to have the Arima hospital coming on, the Point Fortin hospital coming on, and with increased bed space you are going to need more drugs.

**Dr. Khan:** That is your anticipation?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes.

**Mr. Karim:** Minister, just a quick question related to line Item 39. Last year in the budget debate you brought some samples of some clips I believed and some screws and so on, could you give us an update as to that because I noticed the allocation has been increased? What is the position with that kind to monopoly—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** That had to do with orthopaedic supplies, and what we have done we have now ask all doctors, especially at the North West Regional Health Authority, that they must disclose their interest in any company supplying orthopaedic supplies to us. We have also developed our own terms of reference on the standards of orthopaedic supplies and we will be sticking to those standards. We will impose the standards, not the specialist imposed standards on us.

**Mr. Karim:** And has there been a reduction?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** There has been a significant reduction already.

**8.20 p.m.**

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Chairman. Minister, I just want to tie this question to line Item 39.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** 39 again, yes?

**Dr. Bodoë:** And the impending closure of Petrotrin and the Augustus Long Hospital, part of your increased allocation, are you expecting that you would have an increased number of patients in the public facilities because of this closure of the Augustus Long Hospital?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** As I said, we are preparing for an increase in outpatient throughput across the board due to a variety of reasons.

**Mr. Chairman:** Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Just one question. Minister, you had mentioned and we had discussed this in a debate on the issue of the pharmaceuticals for the chronic non-communicable diseases of diabetes and hypertension. Just bear that in mind in the question.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** And the second one is the chemotherapeutic drugs for malignancies.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** It has been carried around that we do not get the first line drugs for oncology and the drugs for the CDAP are not as efficacious and effective. Could you give us some ideas where you want to take these areas to help the improvement?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** A lot of that has to do with the type of drugs that we import and when I spoke last year about two particular drugs, we took them off the formulary and replaced them with more efficacious drugs and I think you should be happy about that. Right?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Excellent then. “Uh-hmm.” And no, the oncology one.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yeah, yeah. So we will look at that.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** All right, then.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** But let me just tell you something about oncology. We have to par and trim our national formulary down to WHO standards to give each oncology patient a consistent reliable supply of drugs. WHO recommends 39 drugs for oncology. Our formulary has 59.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So your national formulary committee is meeting?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you, Minister. Item 005 North West Regional Health Authority; Item 006, North Central Regional Health Authority, page 193; Item 007, Eastern Regional Health Authority, page 193; Item 008, South West Regional Health Authority, page 193; Item 009, National Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention, page 194. Sub-Head 03, Minor Equipment Purchases, page 195; Item 001, General Administration, page 195; Item 004, Vertical Services, page 195. Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** If you may permit me, I just want to go non-profit institutions unless there are other questions before that.

**Mr. Chairman:** Hold one second, when I get there. Item 009, National Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention, page 195. Yes, Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Minister, there has been a deficiency in the management of a number of citizens who have fallen way down as a result of drug abuse and there is a national cry for more centres. Is there consideration from the Ministry of Health to set up some centres or could you look at public sector/private sector partnership in these areas?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** I will give you the assurance, we will look at it.

**Mr. Chairman:** Members—one second, Minister of Health. Member, please, identify the line Item so that other Members can follow and then also, as the Chair, I can direct the Minister of Health accordingly.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** 009, National Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention. You see there is a very small amount. So the Minister was answering.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** I will look at it. Thank you.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** It is something that you need to look at carefully.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure.

**Mr. Chairman:** Sub-Head 04, Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 196, Item 001, Regional Bodies, 196. Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you. I am on International Bodies. Right? No, 005.

**Mr. Chairman:** Regional Bodies, page 196.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Okay, so 005. I can?

**Mr. Chairman:** One second. Item 003, United Nations Organizations, page 196. I recognize Barataria/San Juan.

**Dr. Khan:** Minister, just one question. How come the IAEA subvention has dropped to \$500,000 as compared to the 1.1 which is normal standard?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** What I have been advised is that the payment of this quota contribution, the funding will be sufficient based on our previous year expenditure. If there is anything that we need—

**Dr. Khan:** Normally, it was a fixed value.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yeah, so we will look at it.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 004, International Bodies, page 196; Item 005, Non-Profit Institutions, pages 196 and 197. Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, under Item 20, Contribution to Non-Profit Organizations. Two questions which, perhaps, you can supply the answer in writing.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure.

**Dr. Bodoë:** One would be a breakdown of that 17 million expenditure in 2018 in terms of the organizations that received funding.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Could give it to you now.

**Dr. Bodoë:** All right, sure.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** MRFTT was given \$5.9; HEAL, Helping Every Addict Live, they were given substantial funds; Autistic Society, Cotton Tree Foundation, Breastfeeding Society, all of them were given moneys.

**Dr. Bodoë:** All right. One further question. In the explanation, Pharmacy of Medical Sciences Department, Paraclinical Sciences, UWI.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** What line Item?

**Dr. Bodoë:** Same line Item in the explanation.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sorry. Where?

**Dr. Bodoë:** No, same line Item 20 in the explanation column in the list of groups that received funding.

**Mr. Chairman:** Page 196.

**Dr. Bodoë:** I am seeing here Pharmacy of Medical Sciences Department, Paraclinical Sciences, UWI. I am just trying to understand.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Well, maybe, they are not an organization that has applied.

**Hon. Member:** They are there.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** “Dey there?”

**Dr. Bodoë:** “Yeah, they in.” I am trying to find out—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** On the right side?

**Dr. Bodoë:**—as to why they would qualify as a non-profit institution.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** I will have to check and supply that answer for you.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Yeah and supply that.

**Dr. Khan:** Minister, I have noticed that you have a serious decrease of 6 million. What is the reason for that? It has gone from 11 million with the estimates—sorry, 17 to 6. Is that because of the MRFTT?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** No.

**Dr. Khan:** Because it is a serious decline.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** What we are doing now, we are assisting via the RHAs a lot of these non-profit organizations by doing a lot of work in-house. For example, the great Pap Smear Initiative. For example, the Diabetes Wellness Centre where we engage the Diabetes Association and so on.

**Dr. Khan:** But do they get their subvention still?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yeah, they get the subvention still.

**Mr. Chairman:** Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Minister, I have not seen the Cancer Society of Trinidad and Tobago in this but they have been complaining they have not received their subventions for about two years.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Cancer Society did receive some funding but I can give you in writing what exactly they received. But they did receive some funding.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** They do great work and you should support them.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes, agreed.

**Mr. Chairman:** Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Minister, just to finish off on line Item 20, there are many organizations involved there. Can you commit to give us in writing the allocations for 2018 and the proposed allocations for 2019 with that sum.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure, I have them here but I could give it to you in writing.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Sure, just for time. Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** No, no, we will take it in writing. Provide it in writing, Minister.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Writing will be fine.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** No problem. I will just mention a couple: Leprosy, Lupus Society, Society for Inherited and Severe Blood Disorders, South Cancer Support Group, Just Because and so on. But I will give it to you in writing. Sure.

**Dr. Tewarie:** What about autistic?

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 007, Households, page 197. Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Minister, the Medical Treatment of Nationals in Institutions, is that the payment for services done at the private health centres?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Through the EPP programme, yes, Member.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I saw “yuh” stopped flat at \$60 million last year.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Is it because when the money was completed, you stopped the outreach programme?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** No, we have not stopped it but we are doing many more of these things now in the public sector and not farming out to the private sector as before.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** With the closure of the central block at the General Hospital, what would happen to a number of patients who would not be able to get?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Okay. So what we have done with central block is that we are repurposing a lot of existing facilities over the next couple of months, and by, I think, around December of this year, everything should be back to normal. But we had to decant central block, as you know. Right?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** All right, I understand that.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** But we are repurposing the old COSTAATT building. We are re-purposing significant space in St. James and that is ongoing right now as we speak.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yeah, but may I be permitted?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** But when you scatter these services across, there would be no focused health care—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** But Member, we had no choice but we are bringing it back

once we repurpose the buildings. I give you that assurance. All right. Yes? Okay?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Okay.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 009, Other Transfers, page 197 to page 198. I recognize Chaguanas East.

**Mr. Karim:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, with respect to that line Item 01, 009, the explanations on the right side; you have Emergency Ambulance Service, 126 million. I have two questions. If you could give us a sense as to how many units? Secondly—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** How many units of what?

**Mr. Karim:** The ambulance units. If this is allocated to purchase or if you are satisfied with the service provided by the emergency ambulances.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Right, okay, that can be provided to you. Sure.

**Mr. Karim:** And whatever vacancies you might have.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Minister, with the enactment of the ambulance law, there were provisions for improving the level of care within the ambulance service from level one to two to three to four. Are you giving any consideration for improving the level, just not by taking patients and putting them in the ambulance and giving them oxygen but by a number of other things: IV lines and resuscitation and so on? Could you give us some comment? I think this is the way we need to go.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Actually, Member, that has already begun and GMRTT has already stepped up their training and we are already saving people's lives in the ambulances with paddles and so on and IV lines. That has already begun.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I think it would be worthwhile to give the population some idea of where we are.



**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure, agreed.

**Mr. Chairman:** Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, the same line Item 01 Regional Health Authority, the Revised Estimates. Those vacant posts in the RHA that you allocated \$10 million for, can you perhaps indicate in writing what those positions—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** I have it here, it is a very long list and I will give it to you in writing.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Yeah, sure. The other issue is the issue of Legal Settlements and if you can indicate, perhaps, in writing, how much was spent out for 2018?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Okay.

**Dr. Bodoë:** And with regard to Paediatric Cardiac Surgery, in the same explanation column, can you just give us a sense of what happens in terms of paediatric cardiac surgery? How many patients would have benefitted? Because the amount here is \$2 million which appears to be small.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yeah. So actually we did a run of Paediatric Cardiac Surgery just about two weeks ago but I will give you the exact figures.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Sure, thanks.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Minister, Line Item 02, North West Regional Health Authority. There is a significant decrease of \$134 million. Could you just give us some explanation on that?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Okay. What we are doing across the RHAs is a lot of more work internally. We are decreasing our procurement cost and Member, I will just give you one example to show you the wastage that used to go on. We recently had to install a screen door at the Point Fortin Hospital when snakes were deliberately brought into the facility. They went to the procurement department.

Procurement department said, okay, we could give you a screen door, get quote from hardwares, \$12,000. The new CEO said no way. He went himself, he went to a hardware, he brought \$500 in material, wood, meshing and put up a screen door from \$12,000 to \$500. That is the madness that goes on in procurement in the RHAs and we are stamping it out across the board. That is just one example.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** All right, so the decrease there is what you would—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** It is efficiency, efficiency.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** To manage it?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yeah, yeah and “we cut the bush too”. [*Laughter*] “We cut the bush.”

**Mr. Chairman:** Caroni Central and then you, Barataria/San Juan.

**Dr. Tewarie:** 04, 21 and 22.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sorry, which line Item?

**Dr. Tewarie:** 04, Current Transfers and Subsidies, 21, 22.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Under North Central?

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yes.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes, right.

**Dr. Tewarie:** I see that the substance abuse transfer or subsidy has been discontinued and the National Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention has been reduced. Is there a reason?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Member, Member, hold on. You have me lost.

**Mr. Chairman:** Member, just for clarity. Which page you are on?

**Dr. Tewarie:** 197.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** You have gone back.

**Mr. Chairman:** You have gone back, you know, Member.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Orr, I am sorry. So what page are we on then?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** 198. We are on 198.

**Dr. Tewarie:** You know I put up my hand nearly half an hour ago.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, I will give way. Go ahead, proceed, Caroni Central. I will give you the opportunity.

**Dr. Tewarie:** No, it is a simple—I just want to know why it has been reduced. If there is a—you know.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Under what heading?

**Mr. Chairman:** So we are at the top of page 197, Member. Right, 21 and 22. Go ahead and ask. Go ahead.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** All right, yes. So already paid under the non-profit institutions. So this line Item is to facilitate request from any other Substance Abuse Rehabilitation Centres.

**Dr. Tewarie:** So it is covered elsewhere?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes, it is covered. In other words, it is covered. It is already paid.

**Dr. Tewarie:** And the other question I had was on page 198, the Point Fortin Hospital. I just wanted to understand if the—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** What line Item, Member.

**Dr. Tewarie:** 11. I just want to understand if this movement from 279 million to 8 million was because of refinancing, that is to say not First Citizens Bank.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** This was the payment of a loan sum required for the construction of the Point Fortin Hospital as an interim payment until the MoU—which the UNC did not sign which we had to fix—was finalized with the Austrian Government.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yes, so because of the new financing, there is no longer—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** That is right, you have that.

**Dr. Tewarie:** I understand.

**Mr. Chairman:** Hold on, Members. I have Oropouche West then Barataria/San Juan and then Fyzabad.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Thank you, Chair. Hon. Minister, line 09, School Health Programme (Audio test, hearing aid service and eyeglasses). I am seeing there is a decrease of a half of million dollars and I believe this will include school children, so I am trying to figure out the justification for this decrease.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** So we will go back to the mid-year review if we need more. I give you that assurance, because this is very important.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** And might be prophylactic too.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Exactly, so we will go back if we need more.

**Dr. Khan:** Two questions. Minister, I just want to ask one question. The CEO who went and bought the screen door by the hardware, what procurement process he used?

**Mr. Chairman:** Member, hold on.

**Dr. Khan:** No, no, it is a serious question.

**Mr. Chairman:** But we have a format.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Through the procurement department, he gave instructions.

**Dr. Khan:** No, because that could be considered illegal eh.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yeah, he gave instructions for them and the daily-paid workers built the door.

**Dr. Khan:** No, you could expedite stuff but the thing about it, if it is not done the correct way, it could run the risk of—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yeah, it was done the correct way.

**Dr. Khan:** Because how would he choose the hardware. Anyway, second one, 04 04, under the National Cancer Registry.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** “What page yuh on, Sir?”

**Dr. Khan:** That is 198. Are we on that? “Yuh have it?”

**Mr. Chairman:** North Central Regional Health Authority.

**Dr. Khan:** Right, you go across to decrease of \$125 million and you have 04 National Cancer Registry, only 0.7.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Member, hold on. You are saying page 198, North Central Regional Health Authority.

**Dr. Khan:** And you go across.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes, right.

**Mr. Chairman:** There is a decrease of 125.

**Dr. Khan:** There is a decrease of 125, right, but the National Cancer Registry, is it up and running?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** The National Cancer Registry, as you know, is something that we are rebuilding under the IDB loan for NCDs. So it is running but I would not say up and running.

**Dr. Khan:** Up and running, yeah.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Minister, for the Regional Health Authorities, three of them.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Which line Item?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** 03, 04, 05 on page 198.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** There has been a significant cut of close to \$428 million and from my knowledge, there have been cries from the Regional Health Authorities of insufficient funding in the past. So with this further cut, Minister, may I proffer that there might be some significant changes in the level of health care? Could you comment on this with that large cut of these?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** I would not agree with that. What we are doing, as I said, is

driving the efficiencies across the RHAs from consumables to everything and we are seeing the results of that efficiency drive across the board.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** “You sure yuh not stifling the RHAs that the level of care will diminish?”

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** The level of care will not diminish and as we did last year, if we need extra funding, the Minister of Finance will deal with us in the mid-year review.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Okay, all right.

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Chairman. Minister, I just want to explore that point further and to get your assurances that the cuts are not going to relate to staff and just to the procurement of goods and services within the RHAs because it represents cumulatively over \$400 million.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Correct.

**Dr. Bodoë:** And secondly, whether you will give consideration or if you are giving consideration to a central procurement agency or process for all the RHAs to make it even more efficient.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** A lot of these savings too are overtime eh and we are watching our overtime bill. That will not impact on patient care, I give you that assurance. And as for central purchasing, it is something that is engaging the Ministry of Health.

**Mr. Chairman:** Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Chair. Hon. Minister, I just want to also stand on that point with both Members that the cuts would not affect because I know in the eastern regional health, the ambulances sometimes—often break down and I would hope that it will not impact upon.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Members, as you know, we bought four new ambulances for Eastern RHA just recently. That was a fact, it is no longer a fact because in the last fiscal, we bought, I think, four brand new ambulances.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 010, Other Transfers Aboard, page 199; Item 011—you are anticipating me?

**Hon. Member:** Sorry.

**Mr. Chairman:** Right. Item 011, Transfers and State Enterprises, page 199. Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Minister, 01, National Health Service Company Limited, expenditure of \$1.5 million in 2018 and reduced to \$100,000. Can you just give us a sense or an idea of what this company did in 2018 and what you are proposing to do with it in 2019?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** This company was set up by the previous administration to do central purchasing for pharmaceuticals. We have not moved it to them as yet; we still purchase under Nipdec. So the company still maintains its registration. So no significant funds are expended here.

**Dr. Bodoë:** And is it the intention of the Government to move it in that direction?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** We are looking at all possible options to improve the purchase and management of pharmaceuticals.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Minister, line Item 14 under 06, Princess Elizabeth Home. For years they have been continuing to do a great job for our patients in Trinidad, those particularly with scoliosis and so on. So it is always flooded whenever small rain falls. Could you consider giving them some extra help to improve their physical situation and infrastructure?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure. So what we did, we actually had Ministry of Works and Transport go in to assist them in a flood alleviation programme.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** And the improvement of the infrastructure with the operating theatres and so on.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes. So what we did here—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Dr. Toby has been doing a great job there for a long time.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** I fully agree with you. He is a national treasure.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yeah. So I want to make a plea for a little more support for them if you can.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Agreed. Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 011, Transfers to State Enterprises, page 199. Sub-Head 06, Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies, page 199, Item 004, Statutory Boards, page 199.

Hon. Members, we will now move to the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*.

14, Princess Elizabeth Home for Handicapped Children. Sub-Head 01, Personnel Expenditure, page 177; Item 001, General Administration, page 177. Sub-Head 02, Goods and Services, page 177; Item 001, General Administration, page 177. Sub-Head 04, Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 177; Item 007, Households, page 177.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*. Sub-Head 09, Development Programme, Consolidated Fund, page 68; Item 004, Social Infrastructure, page 68 to 70 and I will recognize the Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, line Item 04, Education, 001, the expenditure of 743,500 representing 643,500 extra compared to 2018. Can you indicate what that expenditure was?



**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Okay. So this is the exact same thing that Caroni East was speaking about. All this went to Princess Elizabeth. This was the refurbishment of Princess Elizabeth Home and what we did was expanded the first floor of the south block to facilitate relocation of the surgical suite. The project is 50 per cent completed with actual expenditure of 300,000 with the remaining 443,500 to be spent in fiscal 2019. So that is exactly what Caroni East was just speaking about; increased support for Princess Elizabeth.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 004. Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you. Hon. Minister, line Item 003, the commissioning of Arima and Point Fortin Hospitals. Now, I am looking throughout and I am not seeing anything with Sangre Grande. I know that you spoke about it in your budget debate. Where can I find that? In line Item?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** So the new Sangre Grande hospital is going to be a government to government arrangement with the Government of Austria using the framework agreement that we have with them.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Line Item 001. Of course, I welcome the additional amount to medical equipment upgrade. Just give us a little idea what you are buying to increase that amount by 35 million.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Okay. So what we want to do at Eastern, brand new CT scanner. When I came into office in September 2015, the CT scanner was already down for six months. It makes no sense fixing it. It will cost three quarter of a million dollars. The housing is already about 75 per cent completed. So they should have a brand new CT scanner. So that is a main CapEx there.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** What is the expected cost for that?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** 5.9 million.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yeah, okay and just the others that will account for the \$25

million.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** So procurement of more anaesthesia machines for the operating theatres which you spoke about in your budget debate.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yeah.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Procurement of immunology and medical lab analysers, 1.2 million. For South West, we want to expand the literacy services, which is vital as you know. Replacement of the endoscopic system, 3.8 million; replacement of operating theatre lights at San Fernando and Point Fortin.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Minister, that is fine. I am comfortable with that.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 005. Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, under 002, Special Programme - Treatment of Adult Cardiac Disease, I note the expenditure of \$20 million there. If I could, perhaps, have in writing the number of cases by the types and the waiting time. The time that patients would have had to wait for these procedures to be done.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** I will get that for you.

**Dr. Bodoë:** And with regard to the waiting list for surgery, can you clarify? Is that part of the external patient programme?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Correct, yes.

**Dr. Bodoë:** All right. And can you provide in writing a list of the procedures that are now available? Procedures and investigations that are now available under this programme.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure. All right.

**Dr. Bodoë:** And if I could just ask you on 001, 018, the establishment of renal dialysis centre, can you give us a status update on what is happening with those

centres?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure, I will provide that for you in writing.

**8.50 p.m.**

**Dr. Khan:** Minister, Item 005, Tissue Transplant. How many—have any corneal transplants been done? And what about the corneal tissue bank that was not set up.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Right, so for corneal transplants for 2018, four were done. And what was the second question?

**Dr. Khan:** The tissue bank. The corneal tissue bank, has it reached anywhere?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Tissue banking. I will get that for you.

**Dr. Khan:** Part of that? Okay. Sure.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** On the renal dialysis situation, could you give us some enlightenment about the issue of the setting up of two major renal dialysis centres, one in north Trinidad and one in south Trinidad, which has been on the back burner—

**Mr. Chairman:** Member, that was just asked by the Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, no it was a different question. These are specific centres.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes. But that does not fall under this line Item.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** All right, which Item that will fall?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure and we will deal with it then.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** You will deal with it then. Right okay.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 005. Multi-Sectorial and Other Services, page 70; Infrastructure.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Sir. 250, Health Services Support Programme. Can you give us an idea of what is expected to do and where we are in terms of that?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Okay. So a lot of this has to do with the NCD Programme. So for 2018 we did the BMI study. We did the healthy schools campaign. We

procured ultrasound machines for North West, North South, North Central, and South West. We did patient self-management and educational books. We had some project admin expenses and so on.

Where we are now with some significant projects in the procurement stage is the second risk survey factor for salt, screening for diabetes in pregnancy which I spoke about in the budget debate. We want to have a national programme, clinical guidelines for screening the healthy schools initiative, the gym equipment in schools, electronic health records and development of health registries for stroke, heart and diabetes. So those are some of things that we are doing.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Is this public information already?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Not as yet. We are—the data was collected and we are now crunching the data at CARPHA.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Would there be an intention to—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Of course.

**Dr. Khan:** 001, Review of the National Health Insurance System. Initially in 2018, you got \$500,000 and nothing was used.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** This is 001, Refurbishment and Improvement of Accommodation—?

**Dr. Khan:** No, no, no. Review of the National Health Insurance System.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sorry, yes.

**Dr. Khan:** Anything is happening on that?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes. So we have reached the stage where we are looking at two things. The bundle of goods and services to be provided. And two, how we are going to finance it. So, some work is being done with some international people on that.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I do not know if we have reached page 70 as yet, Minister?

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes, proceed.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Right. The hospital refurbishment programme, which is good, I mean, but just give us a little idea where you are going, which hospitals and what you are doing?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure. So under North West Regional Health Authority: electrical upgrade for St. Ann's; roofing, plumbing and structural refurbishment of wards to St. Ann's. St. Ann's as you know is in a very bad state. I inherited a real problem there. We are spending serious funds there.

Eastern RHA: hospital network refurbishment project; relocation of endoscopy suite; completion and design for a dedicated operating theatre for the maternity unit; replacement of air condition units in Ward 1 and Ward 2.

South West, major works: Installation of a new 180-tonne chilled water air-cooled unit; upgrade of the labour ward.

North Central: replacement of the air-condition chiller, number 1, inclusive of electrical works and cooling tower at Eric Williams, and commencement and upgrade of electrical infrastructure at Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. Just some of the items.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Foreign and Technical Assistance of 70 million. Just above that, same page 70.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Foreign and Technical Assistance, where is that?

**Mr. Chairman:** You said it is the same page?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yes. Page 70, C.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Under Hospital Refurbishment? I will get that for you, Member, in writing.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, no. I understand it. The 70 million is a summary of 45, 3 and 22. So that explains it. But, give us a little idea—Health Services Support

Programme, that that is for 22.

**Mr. Chairman:** 250, line Item 250.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** I just did all that. I went through that in some detail.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Okay. Fine.

**Dr. Bodo:** Back to the Refurbishment of the Labour Ward in San Fernando. Can you give us an idea of when that project is expected to be completed?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Within the next month or so.

**Dr. Bodo:** Okay. Thank you.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Do not forget the information on the renal dialysis centres.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Well, when we reach there.

**Mr. Chairman:** Infrastructure Development Fund, page 190; Item 004, Social Infrastructure, page 190 to page 191; Item 005, Member for Barataria/San Juan, 004, Social Infrastructure? Okay, question.

**Dr. Khan:** Just the status, 004, Health Facilities. Construction of the National Oncology Centre.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** That project as you know hon. Member, you had it for four years, was bogged down with problems from day one. It is now—has now gone to arbitration as we speak.

**Dr. Khan:** Is it going to continue or is it—?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** I cannot say. As the Prime Minister said when he answered an urgent question, if we get a value for money proposition we will look at it.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 005, Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, page 191.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Hon. Minister, could you say, 002, the outfitting of the new office. Where is this new office—?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** The offices of the—?

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** New office of the Ministry of Health.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes. The Ministry of Health currently rents premises, the landlord has indicated they want to get their building back. We have gone out and we are going to be building a new Ministry of Health headquarters at the corner of Jerningham Avenue and Queen's Park East, behind the MRFTT, there is an L-shaped piece of land there. I think UDeCOTT is in charge of that project and they are currently looking at tenders for it.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Minister, the same Health Services page 190, you have 70 million for Arima, 70 million for Point Fortin, et cetera. Is that the payment—the annual payment for the loans?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Correct, yes. All those are loan payments.

**Mr. Chairman:** Hon. Members, the question is that the sum of \$4,960,215,850 for Head 28, Ministry of Health stand part of the schedule.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 28 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you, Mr. Minister. Thank you Madam PS and to the technocrats.

*Head 17: Personnel Department, \$50,340,000.*

**Mr. Chairman:** I will now invite the Leader of the House, Minister of Planning and Development to make a brief opening statement, not exceeding five minutes.

**Hon. Robinson-Regis:** Thank you very kindly, Mr. Chairman. The Personnel Department is responsible for determining and advising on pay and terms and conditions of employment of a wide range of persons in the Public Service. The Department determines through consultation and negotiations with appropriate recognized associations and unions, the terms and conditions of service for persons in the Civil Service, Teaching Service, Police Service, Fire Service, Prison Service and Statutory Authorities, subject to the Statutory Authorities Act.

The Department is also responsible for the determination of terms and conditions of employment for daily-rated workers, contract employees, for the provision of secretariat services and advising the Salaries Review Commission on terms and conditions of employment for persons within its purview, as well as providing secretariat services to the Human Resource Advisory Committee, a sub-committee of Cabinet for which the Department provides guidelines to organizations under the committee's purview.

The Personnel Department is also required to advise on a wide range of human resources issues in the Public Service including matters related to industrial relations. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

*Question proposed:* That Head 17 stand part of the Schedule.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you for coming, Madam PS, and to the technocrats. Hon. Members, the sum of 50—

**Hon. Robinson-Regis:** Mr. Chairman, sorry to stop you. But this is the CPO.

**Mr. Chairman:** The CPO, sure. Madam CPO.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** You have to treat her very well, Mr. Chair.

**Hon. Robinson-Regis:** If you know what good for you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thanks for coming, Madam CPO, it is a pleasure [*Laughter*] to have you this late hour. But we have to do the business of the Parliament. [*Crosstalk*] Let me be at my good behaviour.

Hon. Members, the sum of \$50,340,000 for Head 17: Personnel Department is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*. We now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, Sub-Head 01, Personnel Expenditure, page 72, Item 001, General Administration, page 72. Member for Fyzabad.



**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, the Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, an increase of \$3 million for the provision of vacant posts. Can you indicate how many vacant posts and what categories of staff for that expenditure?

**Hon. Robinson-Regis:** Member for Fyzabad, we will provide you with that information in writing.

**Mr. Chairman:** Sub-Head 02, Goods and Services, page 72. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 16, Contract Employment, with this increase here, would the staff here be utilized to assist with the backlog of terms and conditions for contract employees across the public service?

**Hon. Robinson-Regis:** Yes, they will.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** So, therefore we should see some ease-up and efficiency in the system.

**Hon. Robinson-Regis:** Well, as the Minister of Finance indicated, we have already started to see some improvement and we are anticipating that that will also assist.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** How many contract employees do we currently have and how much that we are look at bringing on board. We can get it in writing.

**Mr. Chairman:** You have the information there? Or you want to have it in writing.

**Hon. Robinson-Regis:** All right. We will give it in writing.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Minister line Item 08, Rent/Lease — Office Accommodation, there is an increase of 1.4 for this fiscal year. Some explanation, is it new office buildings or any new—the rental went up, I do not know?

**Hon. Robinson-Regis:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, it is not new buildings. But we do anticipate that given the length of time that we have been occupying some of those buildings that there may be an increase in rental and as a consequence of that we are preparing just in case.

**Mr. Karim:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. If I go on to the other page, because 02, Goods and Services goes on to page 73. Is it okay?

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes, sure. Proceed.

**Mr. Karim:** Okay, may I ask the Minister if we can get an explanation on line Item 28, what is responsible for the increase and what are these Contracted Services? You could put it in writing.

**Hon. Robinson-Regis:** Member, we have brought some former public servants back to help us with certain issues including some of the issues that we have raised in the budget and so we pay them under this Head. Including some retirees.

**Mr. Karim:** Do you have an idea as to the number?

**Hon. Robinson-Regis:** We can provide that in writing.

Member, instead of providing you with that—sorry, sorry, Mr. Chairman. Instead of providing you with that in writing, it is four persons.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** In keeping with the same line Item. Minister—

**Mr. Chairman:** Hold on, hold on, a continuation question on the same point?

**Mr. Karim:** If the information that is going to be provided is for the entire expenditure of the 3.0 million. Because, it would not be four persons alone, it will be a complement of persons I imagine.

**Hon. Robinson-Regis:** We will provide you with that in writing.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Minister, when the Public Service Commission was before a Joint Select Committee—

**Hon. Robinson-Regis:** Sorry, Member, I am not hearing you clearly.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** When the Public Service Commission was before a Joint Select Committee, one of the things they pointed out was the deficiency in the amount of personnel in the Personnel Department. They do not have the amount bodies to do the work—

**Hon. Robinson-Regis:** This is under which Head, please?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Contract Employment, line Item 16. It is a continuation of the question that my colleague asked. We want to see the—improve. Could you give us some idea on your thinking as Minister of Public Administration how you plan to deal with that? Minister of Planning and Development, sorry. Minister of Planning and Development.

**Hon. Robinson-Regis:** You want it as Minister of Planning and Development or as Minister of Public Administration?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, Minister of Planning and Development, come on, you know me.

**Hon. Robinson-Regis:** So, would you like me to answer it when I get to Minister of Planning and Development, seeing I am now pretending I am the Minister of Public Administration?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Well, it is your role.

**Mr. Chairman:** Members, we are on Personnel Department. Please, proceed.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Go ahead and it “nah”.

**Hon. Robinson-Regis:** Yes, Mr. Chairman, if I might just be clear. I was asked a question in my capacity as Minister of Planning and Development. However, I am not here in that capacity—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Okay, well I will wait.

**Hon. Robinson-Regis:** So, could you please ask me that question when I am here as Minister of Planning and Development, I will be very happy to answer it.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** But, you are answering for Personnel Department now—

**Hon. Robinson-Regis:** I am. So are you wanting me to answer for that Department?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yes. The personnel issues. What is the Personnel Department doing to improve their ability to function much more efficiently and effectively?  
[*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Robinson-Regis:** Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Member, we have sought to fill most of the positions, that we have, that are vacant which have been a bugbear for quite some time. In addition to that we have asked for Cabinet's approval to ensure that all contract positions are also filled and we are making sure that we are at a state of readiness to improve the service. And when I come as Minister of Planning and Development, you can ask me the question again.

**Mr. Chairman:** Sub-Head 03, Minor Equipment Services, page 74, Item 001, General Administration, page 74; Sub-Head 04, Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 74, Item 001, Regional Bodies, page 74, Item 004, International Bodies, page 74.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*. Sub-Head 09, Development Programme, Consolidated Fund, page 43, Item 005, Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, page 43. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Chair. Minister in line Item 034, Conduct a Job Evaluation/Classification for the Prison Service, it was budgeted 3 million in 2018. Nothing was utilized in 2018, 2019 you put it back but at 2 million. Why not— what was the cause for the reduction of that cost of estimation of the job evaluation with the Prison Service?

**Hon. Robinson-Regis:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, the prison is in the process of doing its own restructuring exercise, and once they do that restructuring exercise then we will be able to do the job evaluation. They have not concluded that restructuring exercise, but we anticipate that this year they will. Hence, we have put the money in an anticipation of that and then we will do the job evaluation exercise.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Mr. Chairman, if I can just add. The Government of Canada had very graciously given technical assistance to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for the full five years whilst the UNC was in power but regrettably it was not taken up. Upon coming into office we established a working relationship with the Government of Canada and they have given Trinidad and Tobago immense assistance which I know my colleague, the Minister of National Security will speak to when we come to national security.

It was with that in mind that we were able to achieve a complete retrofit of a number of positions and posts and other aspects in the prisons and I would imagine that the CPO's process would therefore be plugged into that.

[MRS. ANNISSETTE-GEORGE *in the Chair*]

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Items 036 and 038, if possible if you can provide in writing, more or less the same question. What is the status of this project as of September 30, 2018? What is the total cost of the implementation of this project thus far? What are the benefits that are expected to be realized from this exercise? And what are the objectives that are expected to be achieved within this fiscal year?

**Hon. Robinson-Regis:** With regard to 036, the total cost will be 24.9 million and it is expected to take 24 months, and we are about to execute the contract. With

regard to 038, the total cost is 12.5 million and it is expected to be completed in 2019.

With regard to the other details that you have requested, we will have to give you that in writing.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you.

**Hon. Robinson-Regis:** You are welcome.

**Mr. Karim:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Just with respect to the two line Items 036 and 038, could you give us a sense as to how long—because we have expended on line 36 approximately if we spend the \$2 million in 2019 as allocated, we would have spent \$6.6 million. And if we spend the \$3 million in line 38, we would have spent \$12.8 million. Could we get a sense as to what would have been done for that almost \$18 million? You can always give us—if you want to supply it in writing?

**Hon. Robinson-Regis:** Yes, I think we should. Let me just indicate that some work has started in terms of we have had some job descriptions done and so on. But I think to give you a full sense, it would be better if we give you it in writing.

**Mr. Karim:** I was just to get the percentage of work completed with the full objective in mind.

**Hon. Robinson-Regis:** Understood.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Chair. Minister line Item 41, Compensation Administration Framework for the determination of Remuneration Packages for Contract Employees. In 2018 you budgeted 700,000; nothing was utilized in 2018 and now you have 1\$ million. What really is this line Item supposed to?

**Hon. Robinson-Regis:** It is supposed to be a framework to determine more efficiency in terms of contracts that we give in the Public Service to develop a framework to ensure that the contracts that we do give are effective and are for the

positions that we need. In addition to that, what we have done is we have done the RFP and we are awaiting feedback from the CTB at this point.

**Mr. Lee:** So this is also to identify if proper compensation is being paid to the—

**Hon. Robinson-Regis:** Proper remuneration, yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** Hon. Members, the question is that the sum of \$50,340,000 for Head 17, Personnel Department stand part of the Schedule.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 17 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you, Madam Minister. Thank you, Madam CPO and your supporting—

*Head 04: Industrial Court, \$24,900,000.*

**Madam Chairman:** I will now invite the Attorney General to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

**Hon. Al-Rawi:** Should it please you, Madam Chair, I do not propose to be long. The Industrial Court is a well-established feature of our laws providing in essence what is mostly referred to as common sense justice in the parameters of good industrial relations. The Industrial Court has been in the context of some reformation. It has certainly been focused upon its plant machinery, its manpower, its personnel and also some of its governing legislation. It has come into sharp focus and there is intended to be further consultative discussions in particular on the Industrial Court as a whole.

We stand ready for your Committee's enquiry and I thank you for this opportunity.

*Question proposed:* That Head 04 stand part of the Schedule.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you, Attorney General. Hon. Members, the sum \$24,900,000 for Head 04, Industrial Court is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Item to be found in the *Draft*

*Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure and the Draft Estimates of the Development Programme.* We now shall proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, Sub-Head 10, Personnel Expenditure, page 21; Item 001, General Administration. Sub-Head 02, Goods and Services; Item 001, General Administration; Item 002, South Office; Item 003, Tobago. Sub-Head 03, Minor Equipment Purchases, page 24; Item 001, General Administration.

Hon. Members, we will now proceed onto the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*, Sub-Head 09, Development Programme, Consolidated Fund, page 7; Item 05, Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Item F001, is that okay, Madam Chairman? Page 7, F001, Improvement Works and Furnishing of the Industrial Court, \$1 million. Could the Attorney General identify what location this \$1 million will be spent?

**Hon. Al-Rawi:** Port of Spain.

**Mr. Lee:** All in Port of Spain?

**Hon. Al-Rawi:** Yes, we are in design stage in Tobago, as you are well aware. We have finally managed to bring forward something which was languishing for a very long time, for a number of years prior to us coming into office. So we have done the design stage for Tobago. So Tobago is a separate project.

We are now at Port of Spain in looking to do the rationalization there and we will treat with South in due course.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, the question is that the sum \$24,900,000 for Head 04, Industrial Court stand part of the Schedule.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 04 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**9.20 p.m.**

*Head 08: Elections and Boundaries Commission, \$74,255,600.*



**Madam Chairman:** I will now invite the Minister of Communications to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

**Hon. Young:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I believe everyone in the House and everyone looking on knows the importance of the EBC, so we will forego any further statement and move straight into it line by line.

**Madam Chairman:** I welcome you, Minister.

*Question proposed:* That Head 08 stand part of the Schedule.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$74,255,600 for Head 08, Elections and Boundaries Commission is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. We are at page 41. Sub-Head 01, Personnel Expenditure; Item 001, General Administration. Member for Caroni Central.

**Dr. Tewarie:** I would just ask for clarification on 16, Contract Employment.

**Madam Chairman:** No, no. We are at Item 001, General Administration, page 41.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay. All right.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay? Item 002, Election Expenses, page 41; Sub-Head 02, Goods and Services, page 42; Item 001, General Administration, pages 42 to 43. Are we here now Caroni Central? Yes. Member for Caroni Central.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Just a clarification to the Minister on Contract Employment, and if he wants to relate that to Other Contracted Services, just to clarify what is this for.

**Hon. Young:** What is what for?

**Dr. Tewarie:** The Contract Employment, the increase. Obviously, we are talking about more personnel and Other Contracted Services, if he is aware, what it is for.

**Madam Chairman:** That is Item 28?

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yes.

**Hon. Young:** All right. With respect to 16, as the Member for Caroni Central predicted, it is for the EBC to take on more contract employment during the next fiscal. As we all know, we expect things to be happening next year 2019, and then with respect to Other Contracted Services, EBC has signed or continued a contract with De La Rue for certain services to be provided within the EBC. So, it is for the fulfilment of that to make it, as you know, a more secure election and that type of thing.

**Mr. Lee:** Just to add to the Minister, line Item 22, there is an increase of 2.3, does that also apply to what you had—

**Hon. Young:** Well, as you know, short-term employment is always employment that is utilized throughout the whole public sector. And over the next year, again, 2019, we know what should take place in 2019. So there would be further supplementation in that aspect.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 002, Election Expenses, Sub-Head 03, Minor Equipment Purchases, page 44; Item 001, General Administration. Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*, different book. We are at page 15; Sub-Head 09, Development Programme, Consolidated Fund, Item 005, Multi-Sectoral and Other Services page 15; Infrastructure Development Fund, page 175, same book; Item 005, Multi-Sectoral and Other Services.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 08 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you Minister, thank you Chief Election Officer. Head 70: Ministry of Communications. Members, we are at page 361 of the *Draft*

*Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure.*

*Head 70:* Ministry of Communications, \$225,589,480.

**Madam Chairman:** I will now invite the Minister of Communications to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

**Hon. Young:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the country knows in June of this year, the hon. Prime Minister separated Public Administration and the Ministry of Communications and there is now a Ministry of Communications that is in the process of getting up to speed. There are a number of departments that fall under it: NALIS, which is the library system throughout Trinidad and Tobago. I am happy to say TTT, and the launch of TTT Limited which took place successfully recently; National Archives, Freedom of Information, Information Commissioner, the Government Printery, the Board of film Censors. These are the main bodies that fall under the Ministry of Communications and we expect a lot to be taking place in the next year. Thank you.

*Question proposed:* That Head 70 stand part of the Schedule.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$225,589,480 for Head 70: Ministry of Communications is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, the *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly* and the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*. We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01, Personnel Expenditure, page 36; Item 001, General Administration, 361. Thank you. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 01.

Can you indicate how many persons will be receiving out of this budgeted \$4.7 million?

**Hon. Young:** As I had indicated earlier, and as you will see here, there are no items for 17 and 18, it is a newly separated Ministry, so we are in the process of filling that out. So, right now, this was just an amount given for us to be able to fill out the positions that were only recently settled, so we are in the process now of recruiting. There were some persons in position that were there before that have come across with us, but that is to be fleshed out.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** So, currently, how many persons are employed in total?

**Hon. Young:** How many are employed in total?

**Mrs Newallo-Hosein:** Yes.

**Hon. Young:** 130.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Madam Chair. To the Minister, just for my own clarification, seeing that there is a divorce from the public admin—it is now a separate Ministry—what is the official address of the Ministry of Communications for my own—

**Hon. Young:** Right now, we are still operating out of the NALIS building in Port of Spain.

**Mr. Lee:** So these 100 individuals that you just mentioned.

**Hon. Young:** Well, they are between there and then there is another building, Government Information Services up in Morvant.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 002, Government Printery. Member for Mayaro.

**Mr. Paray:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. Minister, in terms of the Government Printery, is there any intention to go full digitizing of this operation in terms of being able to access a lot of the forms and so on that you normally have to go to the Government Printery for? It takes you a half day. Any intention of pushing

that forward?

**Hon. Young:** As you would be aware, the answer is yes. I mean, more and more forms are being digitalized and you are able to download them. Some, for example, the Integrity Commission forms, you are actually able to plug it in right there on your system, your computer system, and then print it out afterwards. So the answer is yes.

**Mr. Paray:** Okay.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 003, National Archives, Sub-Head 02, Goods and Services; Item 001, General Administration; Item 002, Government Printery. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Madam Chair, to the Minister. In line Item 08, Rent Lease Office Accommodation Storage, 3.3 million. This is for the present location of the Government Printery I think somewhere in Caroni?

**Hon. Young:** In central. Correct. Yes, Frederick Settlement.

**Mr. Lee:** Okay.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 003, National Archives; Item 004, Freedom of Information Unit; Item 005, Office of Information Commissioner. Sub-Head 03, Minor Equipment Purchases, Item 001, General Administration; Item 002, Government Printery; Item 003, National Archives, Sub-Head 04, Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 001, Regional Bodies. Member for Mayaro.

**Mr. Paray:** Ma'am, I was looking at Item No. 53. Are we still there? 53 under National Library.

**Hon. Young:** We have not reached there yet.

**Madam Chairman:** We have not reached there as yet. Okay. We now go on to Item 004, International Bodies. Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Just for clarification on 03, that looks like the International Centre for

the Study of the Preservation of Cultural Property.

**Hon. Young:** Sorry, where are you, Member?

**Dr. Bodoë:** Page 366, just at the bottom.

**Hon. Young:** 03.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Under International Bodies. Just to get an idea of what is envisaged there. It says—I suspect is the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation of Cultural Property.

**Hon. Young:** Correct. So, it is a subscription fee to a body that, you know, one of these bodies to do with archiving that we are a member of.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Item 011, Transfer to State Enterprises. Member for Princes Town.

**Mr. Padarath:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, with respect to line Item 03, Trinidad and Tobago Television Company Limited, the question that I really have with respect to this particular line Item is whether or not there is a projected business model plan for self-sustainability with respect to TTT. I know that at one point there were discussions—I am not sure which Minister, if it was you or any other Member of the Government and you could correct me I am wrong—but I was advised at one point, one Minister had indicated that TTT was not looking to become self-sustainable but, actually, really to carry Government's message. So I really want to clarify that with respect to this particular line Item, whether or not there is a business model plan for self-sustainability and whether or not there are any projections by the next fiscal year in terms of this self-sustainability, if there is one.

**Hon. Young:** The answer is yes, there is one. The answer is, we would like for TTT to become self-sustained. As you will see here, this \$16.6 million which is the subvention to TTT. There is a business plan. It has begun to roll out. At this

stage, it is difficult to predict whether over the next fiscal it will be fully self-sustained. We certainly hope that we will narrow the subvention amounts that have to be given and granted.

There is a lot of exciting programming to take place, and really what TTT is, it is not a Government propaganda station. What it is, it is going to be utilized to give local content producers a platform for them to broadcast and to showcase their talents, et cetera, but also to ensure that proper news and proper information is provided.

**Mr. Padarath:** Thank you, Madam. Hon. Minister, with respect to something that you just said, and I smiled when you said “programming”. Just for our elucidation, and I see that there are several members with you, you could probably provide this technical advice. With respect to programming, a lot of the programming that we have been seeing so far with TTT coming back on board, has been archival repeats. Is there any attempt at this point and what per cent are we looking at new productions in terms of local content?

**Hon. Young:** The answer is yes. As you know, production takes a while and when you launch a new programme, you want to have everything lined up. So you will be seeing, in the next few months, new programming coming on broad. There are a number of new programming items including some exciting talk shows, et cetera that will come on board, but we are waiting to roll into this fiscal year to see it. It is also going to be platform for some of those archive shows, some of the local programming that you are seeing on television—I am trying to remember what is the name of some of the local shows—what is it?—*No Boundaries* and these types of things. So, yes, it is to give those local productions.

**Mr. Padarath:** Thank you, Madam. Madam, with this same line Item, I notice that other Caribbean territories, hon. Minister, who have a similar model like ours

with respect to state media, what they have done is that they have partnered with regional organizations and international organizations as well for subventions with respect to specific programming as it is geared towards children in particular. Seeing that we have a plethora of issues with respect to children's issues in this country, is this something that TTT is considering and has approached international organizations and regional bodies that give these subventions?

**Hon. Young:** If they have not done so as yet, it is something that we would welcome and look at, once it fits into the right type of programming.

**Mr. Padarath:** But, at this point, could the Minister say whether or not it is an approach or it is not an approach?

**Hon. Young:** No, not as yet.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Madam Chair. To the Minister, staying with line Item 03, a couple questions. In 2018, you had the CNMG company, what was that subvention as compared to the subvention that is being given to TTT now, and how many employees does this new company, TTT, have and what happened to the old employees of CNMG?

**Hon. Young:** The old employees are still there. I cannot tell you what the previous subvention was for CNMG, but there was almost the same, I am told. We did not get—Madam, Budgets has disappeared on me, quite conveniently—it was actually less. It was \$15 million. The employees are still there. No employees have been laid off.

**Mr. Lee:** A follow-up question. Is there a CEO in place in this new TTT company, Minister?

**Hon. Young:** You are looking at him, Mr. Wendell Constantine.

**Mr. Padarath:** Madam, one last question from me on this particular line Item to the hon. Minister. And going back to the issue of the business model plan. For



media companies, in particular, state media companies throughout the world, what they look at in these business model plans is that there will be fixed timelines, especially as it relates to losses with respect to the subventions being provided by the State. Could the Minister indicate, through the business model that he has spoken of, whether or not this plan will cater for timelines with respect to losses and looking for alternative revenue streams, whether it is trying to get a private/public partnership involved, if there continues to significant losses, as it relates to TTT or any other state media agency?

**Madam Chairman:** I will allow it as regards TTT.

**Mr. Padarath:** Sure.

**Hon. Young:** This is such an interesting question and an opportunity to be reminded that one of the first difficulties this company faced when it came in, when this administration came in, were the multiple tens of millions of dollars of contracts that the last administration saddled them with which were pure political propaganda programmes like *Icons* and *Voices* and Ken Ali and the next one who likes to pretend he is a writer in the newspaper—he has gone quiet now—granting themselves contracts, paying themselves in US. So we eradicated all of that, you will be glad to know, and TTT is now operating as a private entity with state direction and it has, in fact, started to shed itself of the weight that it was burdened with under those times and it is now operating. It would not be, at this stage, any PPP project. It is a state enterprise and it is moving towards fulfilling its new mandate.

**Mr. Padarath:** Thank you, Madam. Madam, the scenario the Minister has described reminds me of PTSC under the PNM, where they left millions of dollars—

**Madam Chairman:** Member, Member.

**Mr. Padarath:** I asked the question and the Minister did not address—

**Madam Chairman:** Listen, it is late. The question you really want to ask from hereon is the question that we will ask. Okay? The question you will like to ask is?

**Mr. Padarath:** Are there specific timelines, Minister, with respect to the business model in terms of the losses, if this continues whether or not there is going to be an attempt to look into the public/private partnerships or any other model—

**Hon. Young:** No.

**Mr. Padarath:**—that could sustain TTT?

**Madam Chairman:** I believe that question was the question asked.

**Mr. Padarath:** Yeah, but he did not say whether there were timelines, Ma'am.

**Hon. Young:** No.

**Mr. Padarath:** That is what a business model does.

**Hon. Young:** You should have applied a different business model.

**Madam Chairman:** All right. Sub-Head 06—[*Crosstalk*] Member. Member. Sub-Head 06, Current Transfers to Statutory Boards & Similar Bodies, Item 004, Statutory Boards.

**Mr. Paray:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. Minister, in terms of NALIS, does NALIS have a separate facilities management unit for the public libraries?

**Hon. Young:** Yes.

**Mr. Paray:** And the reason why I asked that, because our library in Rio Claro, I have experienced some challenges taking my children there over the last month or so in terms of the grass and maintenance of the building. The AC on the top floor is not working, so I was wondering if there was a separate facilities unit to come and look after that, because I have been trying to—

**Hon. Young:** I said the answer is yes, so now that you have drawn that to our

attention, I will ask that they take a look at it and see what can be done.

**Mr. Paray:** Thank you.

**Mr. Karim:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Might we be able to get a little update, Minister, on the status of the Chaguanas Library?

**Hon. Young:** Yes. The construction of the Chaguanas Library, we had releases of just under \$2 million for it in the year 2018. We will be continuing work, and once we can fund it, we will continue to fund it hopefully towards completion in this fiscal year.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*. New book. 53, National Library and Information System; Sub-Head 01, Personnel Expenditure, Item 001, General Administration, page 503. New book. [*Laughter*] Sub-Head 02, Goods and Services, Item 001, General Administration; Sub-Head, 03, Minor Equipment Purchases, page 504. New book. Item 001, General Administration; Sub-Head 04, Current Transfers and Subsidies, Item 007, Households, page 504. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister line Item, 02, Pension Contribution, can you indicate the reason for the increase of \$3.6 million?

**Hon. Young:** More persons are reaching the age of retirement and it is also adding money towards the pension so they can make the payments.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*. Sub-Head 09, Development Programme, Consolidated Fund, page 152; different book. Item 004. Social Infrastructure, page 152 to 153. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** I want to ask a question, but I am frightened.

**Madam Chairman:** New book. [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Lee:** Is it okay? Page 153. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Chairman:** Pages 152 to 153. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, page 153, 004, Strategic Redevelopment of TTT, \$30 million a new project. Could you elucidate?

**Hon. Young:** As part of the business plan and the redevelopment of TTT, we have found that when we looked at it some of the equipment is as old as 12 years old and, as you know, in today's day and age technology has moved far in advance of that, so it is to purchase new equipment and to upgrade some of the things like the master control room, cameras and this type of thing and to boost up on our production side, so we can fulfil the new programming I was talking about.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, one minute. I now understand why you were so coy. [*Laughter*] Okay. So we are at Item 004, Social Infrastructure, unless we are all following your Whip and we are now at Item 005.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 004.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Yes. On line Item 002, can the hon. Minister explain exactly what is Collocation of Libraries?

**Hon. Young:** Yes. Cabinet has decided in our determination to deliver value for money for the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago, when we looked at it, unfortunately, we found that the use of libraries has been reduced within recent time. So what we are looking at is collocating now, library facilities with community development across the country and using some of the community centres and just shrinking the size of the library. So we are using the same space as some of the community centres across the country, thereby reducing the cost to the taxpayers, but still providing the level of service that our citizens deserve.

**9.50 p.m.**

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** If I can just repeat what it is you are saying? So you are going to be working alongside community development in—

**Hon. Young:** Co-locating with community development.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** And utilizing the community centres—

**Hon. Young:** Where appropriate.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Okay. So that means that you are going to be able to— you are providing the staffing or will community development be providing the staffing in this?

**Hon. Young:** As part of the co-location. Well, I mean, librarians, as you know, would have a specific level of training, et cetera. So the answer is we will still provide the necessary baseline staff for the functioning of libraries.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Tabaquite, you had a question?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Mr. Minister, page 153, Item 004. Strategic Redevelopment of TTT—

**Madam Chairman:** So, one minute, please. 005, Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Sure. 004, Strategic Redevelopment of TTT. So in other words, are you saying this is like a cash injection into TTT?

**Hon. Young:** A capital injection for capital expenditure.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Capital injection. It says here, “Strategic Redevelopment”, so I am translating redevelopment really to mean the equipment and what have you.

**Hon. Young:** Well correct, to fulfil the business plan, new programming, and stuff.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Good. In any organization if you invest money you hope someday to break even and even to make a profit, or a contribution to your

organization. Is there available that can be examined that business plan that will take TTT?

**Hon. Young:** No. It is a very competitive environment. As you know, there are a number of televisions in Trinidad and Tobago—stations—and I certainly have no intention of laying our business plan here out naked for the other television stations and conglomerates.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Can you, Minister, say under this then what is your projection as to—by when will you have TTT being a profitable institution or at least covering its costs?

**Hon. Young:** That does not come under this question but I had answered it earlier. We are not putting an ultimate timeline on TTT, the same way it was not done previously and telling them that if you are not profitable by so and so date we will shut you down. What we have done is we have taken a number of decisions that immediately put them in a better position, and from a cash flow point of view, and we will continue to support TTT.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Items 02 and 03, the automation and digitization, and the institutional strengthening of the National Archives. Is this in specific relation to TTT?

**Hon. Young:** No, this is the National Archives so it is digitizing all of our records, et cetera, that are in archives and making it—giving it a longer shelf life, and this type of thing, completely separate from TTT.

**Madam Chairman:** Infrastructure Development Fund, page 234; new book. You run out of books? Item 005, Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Mr. Minister, earlier on you said that money was allocated for

the construction of the Chaguanas Library. I noticed under the Infrastructure Development Fund that there is nothing allocated for the Chaguanas Library.

**Hon. Young:** So what had happened is what I had read out is how much was spent in the last fiscal and I saw a projection of what we hope to spend in the next fiscal. But as you quite rightly pointed out, there was no allocation. So we have it as a priority Item. And I can tell “Madam Budgets”, who is present with us now, to go at them in the mid-year review. But what we might be able to do is shift some in the meantime to just keep the work going and get a replenishment in the mid-year.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Just now. Let me get you right. Are you saying that you are going put some money immediately into the Chaguanas Library so that work can be started? Because, Mr. Minister, let us face it. That building has been stacked up there for a little while and any time you stop a building and try to restart it the cost of restarting amounts to quite a lot, and it might be in the interest of the taxpayer to make sure that the building is completed rather than the building continues to deteriorate with the weather.

**Hon. Young:** Okay.

**Dr. Rambachan:** The building is not properly secured.

**Hon. Young:** Okay, noted.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Chaguanas East.

**Mr. Karim:** Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Hon. Minister, might you give us a sense of line Item 032, the \$500,000 that is allocated to the Couva Library; construction of it? Is it new? Is it a new project? Is it ongoing? If so, where it is and what is the status of it?

**Hon. Young:** Okay, so Couva is not your constituency, so I will let you off the hook. It is actually completed and that is the retention fee.

**Mr. Karim:** Where is it located?

**Hon. Young:** In Couva.

**Mr. Karim:** No, where in Couva? I know Couva good. Where in Couva?

**Hon. Young:** Next to the secondary school.

**Mr. Karim:** Okay. All right. Couva East?

**Hon. Young:** There is not a Couva East. It is Couva North and Couva South.

**Mr. Karim:** No, no, the secondary school.

**Hon. Young:** EBC gone already.

**Mr. Karim:** I know you do not know Couva as well, but it is Couva East Secondary School.

**Hon. Young:** You would not know what I know and do not know, do not go down that road.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, the question is that the sum of \$225,589,480 for Head 70, Ministry of Communications stand part of the Schedule.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 70 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Madam Chairman:** I would just like to thank all Members—*[Interruption]* It seems that we have so much energy; I wonder if we would like to start on day two?  
*[Crosstalk]*

**Hon. Young:** The next one is National Security, I am prepared, Madam Chair.

**Madam Chairman:** Can we start day two?

**Hon. Members:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** I mean, Whip, I am sure you will be very eager because you were really concerned about the 10 hours.

**Mr. Lee:** No, I do not have the right book. *[Laughter]*

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Same book.



**Mr. Al-Rawi:** But, Madam Chair, seriously, we are very much prepared, just for the record. We had been asked by the Leader of the Opposition to sit for 10 hours and we have only done seven, Madam Chair. We are fresh and ready to go ahead. The AG's office and the Ministry of National Security are both ready. So if my learned friends are ready, we would like to proceed. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Chairman:** In the interest of the staff of the Parliament, which is my wider interest—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Padarath:** And clearly they do not have feelings for their own staff, Madam.

**Madam Chairman:** Well, I would say, in the [*Crosstalk*] interest of the staff of the Parliament—and I know we were worried about dinner but maybe we are fed too well so we have, you know, “volting” energy. I would just really like to thank everyone for their cooperation, the afternoon into the evening for having completed, in record time, these nine Heads. I really hope for the next four days we are able to be as efficient, effective and productive as we have been today. So I congratulate you all. This Standing Finance Committee is suspended [*Laughter*] to Thursday the 11<sup>th</sup> of October, 2018, at 10.00 a.m. Thank you.

**9.58 p.m.:** *Standing Finance Committee suspended.*