


HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 17, 2019

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2020) BILL, 2019

[Fifth Day]

 *The Standing Finance Committee of the whole House resumed its deliberations on the Bill and Estimates.*

[Chairman: Mrs. Annisette-George]

10.00 a.m.

Madam Chairman: This meeting of the Standing Finance Committee will be resumed.

Head 18: Ministry of Finance, \$6,296,855,648

Madam Chairman: *Head 18:* Ministry of Finance, the sum of \$6,296,855,648. I shall now invite the Minister of Finance to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

Hon. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, the Ministry of Finance can be described as the engine room of the economy. The Ministry is responsible for raising and collection of revenue, and the authorization of expenditure, and the disbursement of funds to Ministries, statutory authorities, state enterprises and other Departments and agencies of government. The Ministry is also responsible for debt management and they are also responsible for supervision of all state enterprises and their subsidiaries, which currently number approximately 100.

The Ministry is also responsible for fiscal and monetary policy and exchange control. In essence, the Ministry is responsible for the management of the finances of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

UNREVISED

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$6,296,855,648 for Head 18, 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 the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly, and the Draft Estimates of Development Programme.*

We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, we are at page 81, Sub-Head 01, Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. Tewarie: Good morning everyone.

Hon. Members: Good morning.

Dr. Tewarie: Minister—[*Interruption*]

Madam Chairman: All right, so, if we could have a little order. What I would ask Members, Member for Caroni Central, if you would permit me, I would ask Members to leave the rulers on the desk at the end of the day.

Hon. Imbert: Which is what I do, which is what I do.

Madam Chairman: Okay, thank you. Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. Tewarie: Yes, we notice here, a general increase and simple question which is that, is this for vacant posts of incumbents as you say it is included here? And, will there be any additional expenditure for new posts?

Hon. Imbert: All right, could you be specific in terms of the page and Line Item please?

Dr. Tewarie: I thought we were on page 81. Are we on page 81?

Hon. Imbert: Yes, but what line Item are you on?

Dr. Tewarie: The general heading there, Personnel Expenditure, 01.

Hon. Imbert: So 01, you are talking about the increase of \$37 million?

Dr. Tewarie: Yes.

Hon. Imbert: Okay, the provision would allow for vacant posts and also recently the Cabinet approved restructuring of the Ministry of Finance to separate our Economic Management Division or unit into two parts, into debt management and economic management. So, we have some rationalization and upgrading of positions within that key part of the Ministry. So it is for vacant posts and for restructuring at the Ministry for efficiency.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay, so the Economic Management Division will have an increase in new posts and new employees?

Hon. Imbert: One division is going to be split into two. We found it a bit inefficient, to have one unit dealing with both the fiscal side, which is the budgetary accounts, dealing with the IMF, Standard & Poor's, Moody's, dealing with economic projections and so on. We found it cumbersome to have one unit dealing with that, and also dealing with debt management. So, it is now split into two parts, debt management and fiscal. And therefore, we need to restructure, we need to employ additional people, and we need to upgrade some of the positions in the split units.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay, will the part of that unit—you are saying two parts—that is not involved in debt, will that also be involved in forecasting?

Hon. Imbert: Yes, that is the purpose of that split, to split out forecasting and economic management from debt management.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay, so this new unit will deal with the forecasting?

Hon. Imbert: Now, let me also explain that because I know it came up in the debate. All of the international agencies have told the Central Statistical Office for a number of years, this is not new, it did not happen only under our time, but they have told the CSO that they should not be involved in economic forecasting, and

they should deal with actual data only. It has been a practice in this country for many years, 30/40 years, for the CSO to do economic projections, but that is not international best practice.

And if you look at the ratings from Standard & Poor's, and Moody's and also look at the Article IV IMF reports over a number of years going back 10 years, you would see they are making that comment that CSO should be just be dealing with actual, and that the Ministry of Finance should do projections. The projections are always corrected at the end of the year by the CSO when the actual figures come in.

So, in view of the fact that we have been told it is not our initiative, it is the initiative of the international agency telling us, that we should now do forecasting at the Ministry we have to beef up that division as well; bring in new people, upgrade the core competencies and so on.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay, this is an important issue, Minister, and I just want to get it clear, and also for the sake of the public. So, forecasting will now be done by the Economic Management Unit, one section of it in the Ministry of Finance, and that will be checked so to speak, validated when the numbers are reviewed by the CSO?

Hon. Imbert: Actually, it will be replaced, because the CSO does actuals, so the Ministry will do forward projections and when the actual numbers come in, the CSO numbers will become the official numbers. So, the Ministry will just be doing a projection.

Dr. Tewarie: I understand, and thank you for—

Hon. Imbert: And this year what we did, because it is new, we just used the World Bank projections, rather than our own economic projections for 2019. Okay?

Dr. Tewarie: All right, thank you very much. I am okay on that page, I do not know if any of my colleagues—

Madam Chairman: Item 002, Budget Division.

Dr. Tewarie: Again, the Budget Division, you have an increase and it does say “include provision for vacant posts”. I wanted to know if there were going to be any additional new posts?

Hon. Imbert: Just one second. No, it is existing vacancies.

Dr. Tewarie: Only existing vacancies?

Hon. Imbert: Yeah, existing vacancies.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yeah, I have a little question on that.

Madam Chairman: One minute, finish—

Dr. Tewarie: Yeah, I am finished with this section.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Thank you very much. Good morning to everyone. Good morning, Chair. Hon. Minister of Finance, I might need to be educated on this but I am asking the question. The gratuity section of the Ministry of Finance, where is that located?

Hon. Imbert: It is not this one. It has its own Head.

Dr. Gopeesingh: It has its own Head.

Hon. Imbert: That is coming up.

Dr. Gopeesingh: All right.

Hon. Imbert: If you look at the—

Madam Chairman: Schedule.

Hon. Imbert: The Schedule you will see Pensions and Gratuities, Head 20 is next. So we are dealing with Head 19 today.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Because there is always the complaint about people not getting their pensions and so on.

Hon. Imbert: It is not the Head under examination.

Dr. Gopeesingh: All right, okay, thanks.

Madam Chairman: All right. So we can move on? Item 003, Customs and Excise Duties. Cumuto/Manzanilla is that a yes? Please, Cumuto/Manzanilla and then I will take you Caroni Central.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you. Thank you, Chair. Minister, under Customs and Excise, 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, there is a decrease here of \$2 million, and I just wanted to find out how will this decrease impact upon the effective management of the operations of the Customs and Excise Division?

Hon. Imbert: Firstly, let me just say, it was remiss of me not to mention that we have two major revenue collection agencies in the Ministry, the Inland Revenue Division, and Customs and Excise. So Customs is an integral part of the Ministry of Finance. If you look at the 2019 original estimate—

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Yes.

Hon. Imbert:—you will see it was 40 million, and the estimate for 2020 is also 40. Overtime is something that you would not know exactly what it is going to be, until you get closer to the end of the year. So, you will see the original estimate for 2019 was 40 million, and we ended off the year with 41,000,850. It depends on the number of containers that come through the port. It depends on the number of hours of overtime that the customs officers work. This provision of 40 million will in no way impact adversely, because if we need to supplement, we will supplement. It is an estimate based on the best judgment at this time, as was in 2019.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: So Minister, are you indicating that the 01 which refers to

Salaries and cost of living will be impacted really by the overtime?

Hon. Imbert: No well, we are dealing with 03. What are you looking at?

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: I am dealing with—

Hon. Imbert: Sorry, my mistake. You are dealing with the 60 and the 62?

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Yes, yes.

Hon. Imbert: It is just an estimate, it includes a provision for vacant posts, and if it is necessary to supplement, we will supplement. Okay, sorry about that.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: That is okay. And in light of the fact that you raised the vacant posts which is 08, I know that you had indicated that you are working—at a Standing Finance Committee, you indicated that you were looking to provide for vacant posts and that you will try your best throughout the year to get the Public Service Commission to fill these posts.

Hon. Imbert: Well, we always do that.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Yes, but, what is the status on that in terms of how many posts are currently vacant? From since that exam?

Hon. Imbert: In Customs, it is a significant number. We can get that for you, but it is significant. I think it is over 100. But the fact is, that this is vacant posts without incumbents. So that, there is nobody in this post right now, okay. The other one at the top there, talking about the 2 million difference, there would be people in the vacant posts, but they would not be confirmed. They would be acting in those posts. Okay?

So, we will continue to try our best to get the Personnel Department and the Service Commission to deal with this but this is one of the reasons why we want to create a revenue authority, because the vacancies, I am not the first Minister of Finance, who has suffered from huge vacancies in Customs. At one time the vacancies were almost 50 per cent. And that has been a feature of our landscape for

20/30 years. So, this is not the first Government or first Minister of Finance who has had difficulties and struggled to fill vacant post in Customs. It is not up to us. That is just the system, there is an independent commission and we cannot tell them what to do. We could only ask.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Chair, and to the Minister. Minister, I walked in a bit late, but I know my colleague was dealing with the issue of vacant posts and you did allude to the challenges. Because in 2019, you had an allocation for \$6.350 million, and in 2020 the said allocation, and I did not see it under the Revised Estimates. So that means you had no vacant posts being filled.

10.15 a.m.

Hon. Imbert: We did not fill the posts. I want to underscore this. The reason why you had an allocation of 6.35 million for vacant posts and the actual expenditure was zero is that no vacant posts were filled by the Service Commission. This is not in our hands, it is our Constitution, it is the way it is set up and as I said, we could only ask them to fill the posts, we cannot force them to fill the posts.

Mr. Indarsingh: And how many vacant posts you—

Hon. Imbert: You came in late. I said it is significant, approximately 100, but we will get that information for you. Okay?

Mr. Indarsingh: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Well hon. Minister, I understand and appreciate your dilemma in filling vacant positions, but my colleagues, and probably the Minister of Education, will probably indicate that when we have this difficulty, when we had it in education, I would seek a meeting with the Public Service Commission or the Teaching Service Commission.

Hon. Imbert: No, that is a different commission. That is the Teaching Service Commission. It is not the same. It is different people and they operate differently.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Have you sought a meeting with them to explain that?

Hon. Imbert: The Permanent Secretary meets with the Service Commission and corresponds with them on these matters constantly, constantly.

Dr. Gopeesingh: But I think there is urgent need for some degree of amelioration to that difficulty.

Hon. Imbert: We cannot do anything about it.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes, I mean, you are in charge—

Hon. Imbert: What? We “gonna” force them?

Dr. Gopeesingh: You are in Government and you have the authority.

Hon. Imbert: I am making the point that when you were in Government, you had the same problem and the same posts were not filled. These are not new posts, you know.

Dr. Gopeesingh: But that does not mean the same, you must not perpetuate—

Hon. Imbert: These are posts that existed for the entire five years of the UNC Government and were not filled.

Madam Chairman: Okay, so I think the point has been made and belaboured.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes, we must not perpetuate it.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay. I just want to follow up on this issue. Minister, you mentioned the Revenue Authority so as—if you do not mind, and with the position of the Chair, the questions I may ask with regard to Customs and Excise, and Inland Revenue, might have implications or may be pointed towards your notion of the Revenue Authority. Now, I notice that in this particular instance, you have a reduction in salaries. You explained that—a decrease, sorry, in the allocation for

Salaries and cost of living.

Hon. Imbert: Not really, eh know. Look at the original for 2019.

Dr. Tewarie: 62.

Hon. Imbert: No, the original.

Dr. Tewarie: 60.

Hon. Imbert: And the original for 2020 is also 60, so there is no real decrease.

Dr. Tewarie: All right, so it was a reduction on the Revised Estimates.

Hon. Imbert: On the actuals, yes, so we will see how the actuals will be.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay. Well, I will wait for that. And the issue is—I want to ask this question because are you really seeking to have the vacant posts filled or in the light of the establishment of the Revenue Authority you do not wish to do that?

Hon. Imbert: Life goes on, you know.

Dr. Tewarie: Yes.

Hon. Imbert: We need the support of the Opposition to create the Revenue Authority, but we must always work in parallel and we are pushing hard to fill all the vacant posts.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay, so you are trying to fill.

Hon. Imbert: In any event, we have given the union the assurance that everybody who is in post will be eligible to be transferred to the Revenue Authority, so we are pushing hard to fill all the posts, we are not waiting on the Revenue Authority.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay, I am fine.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, just a follow up with respect to the line of questioning by the Member for Caroni Central. You did mention the issue of the TTRA, and in advocating for the TTRA, you have also spoken about the challenges with respect to the complement of customs officers. I

know we were speaking early about the amount of vacant positions, but would you be in a position at this time to tell us how many customs officers are currently on the establishment in terms of warm bodies?

Hon. Imbert: I do not have the exact figures but I can provide that during the day. During today, I will provide that information. Total numbers and also the total number of vacancies.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and I know that the Minister will willingly come forward with this information if it meets the line Item. 21: Government's Contribution to Group Pension – Daily-Rated Workers. Minister, is this in relation to the Government's contribution to the much touted pension for daily-rated employees?

Hon. Imbert: No.

Mr. Indarsingh: No? Okay, thank you very much.

Hon. Imbert: It is going to be much more than that. We estimate it would be over \$100 million a year.

Mr. Indarsingh: And where will you incorporate it? Because yesterday, you said the Ministry of Finance would be—will it be in the pensions?

Hon. Imbert: I had said that we would implement it in this fiscal year and we would, and once the numbers are finalized, we will make an appropriate provision for it.

Mr. Indarsingh: So you have not signed any memorandum of understanding or agreement with the recognized majority union on this?

Hon. Imbert: We have not finalized that yet. It is under way.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you. Hon. Minister, referring to the statement you made concerning 08: Vacant Posts and you indicated that the TTRA would probably remove that problem that we have been experiencing. I do not understand how we would not have the same problem because they would still need to have vacant posts filled and you would still need the Public Service Commission and therefore, would it not be more prudent to increase the staffing levels at the public service so that they are able to fulfil their mandate?

Hon. Imbert: Well, I think you are wrong on all points there. Firstly, this Item has nothing to do with staffing at the Public Service Commission. That is not relevant. And secondly, the Revenue Authority is going to be a statutory authority which would be exempt from the provisions of the Service Commission. So I think you are wrong on all points there.

Madam Chairman: Item 004: Inland Revenue Division. Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Hon. Minister, what changes do you envisage or expect in fiscal year 2020 given the increase in the sum of 13,500,000 for their salaries?

Hon. Imbert: Again, if you look at the original estimate for 2019, it was 92 million and the reason why only 75 million was spent was because, once again, the vacant posts in the Inland Revenue Division which are significant, again, 100 or more, were not filled by the Public Service Commission. However, we have put back 88.5 million in the hope that in 2020, the Service Commission will fill these posts so that it is not anything significantly different from the original 2019 estimate.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Okay. What is your complement of—

Hon. Imbert: We will get those numbers for you. I see we have some Inland Revenue people here and we will get those numbers for you within a very short

period of time.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Okay. Minister, you make the statements that there is difficulty in meeting the Board of Inland Revenue expectations to collect your taxes.

Hon. Imbert: Pardon?

Dr. Gopeesingh: I said you are having difficulty in collecting your taxes and you are making a statement that the Board of Inland Revenue has a number of vacancies, so does Customs and Excise. And if you are going through as a Government for four years—“doh” blame us. If we did not do it, we did not do it. But you have been there for four years and the Public Service Commission is the one who is impacting on the revenue that we should be collecting and you as Minister of Finance has a responsibility to deal with that issue and you cannot slip it under the board and then say the vacant positions are not being filled and Public Service Commission, they are not filling it. If we are supposed to be getting billions of dollars more on the Board of Inland Revenue and the Customs and Excise not fulfilling their responsibility because of vacant positions, I would expect that as Minister of Finance, and the Prime Minister, you all will do something about it as a Government. Do not blame us five years ago. I mean, you have to do something now.

Hon. Imbert: Is that a question?

Madam Chairman: It is an intervention.

Dr. Gopeesingh: And I empathize with you when you cannot collect your taxes but do not blame the Public Service Commission. Do something about it. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Imbert: Well, I would like to intervene then, Madam Chairman. I think that statement from the Member is ridiculous. You went through five years, you could not fill a single vacant post in Inland Revenue.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Madam Chairman.

Hon. Imbert: No, but you spoke. I did not interrupt you when you were talking.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Madam Chair, put some decency in the mind of the Minister of Finance please.

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I did not say anything when he was talking, you know.

Madam Chairman: All right. [*Crosstalk*] Could we just recoil a bit? Every member—

Hon. Imbert: No, if you talk nonsense, it would not be nice.

Madam Chairman: One minute. Every Member is allowed five minutes on an intervention. Caroni East, you had your intervention and the Minister of Finance is entitled to his. So let us keep the tone.

Hon. Imbert: As I said, for the five years and three months of the UNC Government, you could not fill a single post in the Inland Revenue Division. The Einstein's definition of insanity is doing the same over and over and expecting a different result. This is why we have put to the Parliament the concept of a revenue authority which is separated from the strictures of the Personnel Department and the Service Commission and we expect you to support it because you went through five years and could not fill a single post.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay, Madam Chairman. The reason I asked the question about whether you intended to fill any vacancies in Customs and Excise is because there is an increased provision here in Inland Revenue—and there will be things that come up later. There is an increased provision here for Inland Revenue but none for Customs and Excise and while I take your word for it that you intend to increase the filling of vacancies in both, the numbers though do not reflect that.

Hon. Imbert: That is not a true statement. I just had a big discussion with the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla about a \$2 million increase in the provision for Customs and Excise, Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. So you cannot make that statement, it is not factual. We have provided for vacant posts in Customs and we have provided for vacant posts in Inland Revenue and we are going to push to fill them all.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay, we will interrogate it as we go.

Hon. Imbert: Yeah, but I mean make statements that are factual, not things that are not true.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yeah, I was just going to ask the hon. Minister if he believes that the Einstein theory should be applied to him. [*Laughter*]

Madam Chairman: All right. Item 005: Treasury Division; Item 008: Investment Division.

Hon. Imbert: And the answer is no. [*Laughter*]

Madam Chairman: Item 009: Central Tenders Board. [*Crosstalk*] Minister of Finance, I could barely hear myself. Item 009: Central Tenders Board. Member for Caroni Central. It is for 009.

Dr. Tewarie: Yes, 009, yes. Minister, on this here, Central Tenders Board, again, it says includes provision for vacant posts, et cetera, and we go down, we see certain increases and so on. They are very small, so I would not make a case of that. But I just wanted to ask the question what is happening with the Central Tenders Board. I see later on there is something that suggests that you may be winding it up but what is happening with Central Tenders Board as you move to the procurement regulatory agency?

Hon. Imbert: Firstly, let me just clarify. The Vacant Posts in this line Item 009,

01: Central Tenders Board, Salaries, the provision is for vacant posts with incumbents. So this is a post where there is somebody in it but the person is not confirmed in the position. You will observe there is a minimal provision for vacant posts without incumbents, just \$10,000.

Dr. Tewarie: Yes, I acknowledge that.

Hon. Imbert: I just want to make this clear. And that should make it clear that we intend to proclaim that part of the procurement law which repeals the Central Tenders Board. You know that the Act has that in it. Right?

Dr. Tewarie: Yes.

Hon. Imbert: That it repeals. So since we are moving to implement, we would have to repeal it so it will go out of existence.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay. Could you help me to understand the increase in the Remuneration to Board Members?

Hon. Imbert: I will have to get clarity on that. I do not have those details at this point. Maybe they reclassified the board or something. I do not know.

Dr. Tewarie: All right.

Madam Chairman: Item 010: Valuation Division; Item 011: National Insurance Appeal Board Tribunal. Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, I see you have an increase of \$162,000 for Salaries and cost of living at the National Insurance Appeal Board Tribunal. How many vacant posts or what you intend to do with this increased allocation?

Hon. Imbert: I will get that information for you. We do not have it directly at hand but before the day is out, we will get it for you.

Mr. Indarsingh: While I know you will tell me, because I am trying to focus on your line of thought this morning, how many appeals are currently pending at the

National Insurance Appeal Board Tribunal?

10.30 a.m.

Hon. Imbert: Well, I think you are right when you said you know what I will tell you. I do not have that information at hand but I will get it for you before the end of the day.

Mr. Indarsingh: I am trying to think along the lines of my colleague, Caroni East.

Hon. Imbert: You were right, I mean, come on, you really expect me to have that information? How many appeals pending before the National Insurance Appeal Board? Be serious. We will get it for you.

Madam Chairman: Item 014: Financial Intelligence Unit. Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Hon. Minister, this is a particularly important unit which we have in the country to roll out the issues of money laundering and so on. But I see you only have for 1.7 million for salaries. Could you say how many people are employed in the FIU unit? That would see probably about 10 maximum?

Hon. Imbert: Just one second.

Dr. Gopeesingh: And how many vacant positions, if you have it? And if you need to beef that up?

Hon. Imbert: I have a table here that might give us that information. Actually no, I do not have those details, but I will get it to you before the end of the day. You want to know how many vacant posts there are, exactly what do you want to know?

Dr. Gopeesingh: No, well, how many positions are there in the FIU and how many vacant.

Hon. Imbert: How many positions, how many are filled, how many are vacant.

Dr. Gopeesingh: But bearing in mind if you do extrapolation of let us say 170,000

per person, per year, that is 10 people. But do you believe, hon. Minister, in light of what you all have been saying, and what we have been saying as a responsible Opposition, do you think that there is need for the increase of the amount of employees in the FIU unit?

Hon. Imbert: Let me get the information first and then we will deal with that.

Dr. Gopeesingh: There is need, strong need for increase.

Dr. Tewarie: Under the same question, Minister. Last year in response to a question you indicated that there were about 28 employees in that unit, and that you were taking a Cabinet Note for another 11. First of all, did you fill any new posts? Did you take the Cabinet Note? Did you have additional hirings or will you have additional hirings in the FIU?

Hon. Imbert: Firstly, let me clarify that the personnel in the FIU are a combination of public officers and contract officers, so there would be a provision elsewhere under Other Contracted Services and so on. My memory tells me yes that was approved, and that they have initiated the process of filling posts but I will get the details for you before the end of the day.

Dr. Tewarie: Thank you very much.

Madam Chairman: Item 017: Office of the Supervisor of Insolvency. Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration.

Mr. Karim: Thank you, Madam Chair. 02: Goods and Services, General Administration. May I refer to line Items, hon. Minister, line Items 16 and 22? There have been some substantial increases in those sums allocated. Could you give us a sense as to what is responsible for this increase, and how many positions will these cater for in both 16 and 22 contiguously?

Hon. Imbert: The bulk of this is for the restructuring of the Economic Management Division because we will be hiring people on contract first, and

short-term first, and then go into establishment positions.

Mr. Karim: Might you be able to answer the second part, Sir? How many persons you expect or propose to have?

Hon. Imbert: I will get that info for you.

Mr. Karim: For both 16 and 22.

Hon. Imbert: Yes, but it is mainly for the restructuring of the Economic Management Division into a debt management and a fiscal policy division.

Mr. Karim: May I also with your permission, Madam Chair, under the same heading, line Item 23 on page 88, we have Fees. There has been an increase of 7 almost \$8 million. Could you explain to us what those Fees would be?

Hon. Imbert: Sure, the Fees include a provision for analytical services. Daily rating agencies. Remember, we have—

Mr. Karim: Oh, from the rating agencies.

Hon. Imbert: Yeah, we have added another rating agency. At this time we also get a rating from Fitch.

Mr. Karim: Which is the one you added, Sir?

Hon. Imbert: Fitch. It makes three. We do S&P, Moody's and Fitch.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 34, the University Graduate Recruitment Programme. When this announcement was made a few budgets ago it was with a lot of fanfare, and the numbers reflect that 2018 to where we are today, but there had been no expenditure. Does this mean that no one was ever hired in the Ministry of Finance for this programme and can you indicate why?

Hon. Imbert: That is correct, and I can tell you why. There was a view that it should not be restricted to outstanding graduates. The policy as you may recall from the first budget, was that this was really geared towards people who got first

class honours, upper second class and so on. But there was a point of view that you should not restrict it to just those high achievers and it should be for all graduates which has slowed down the process. We are still of the view that you should give preference to high achievers with this programme so that is the reason why.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Ma'am. Minister, can you indicate whether or not this policy is across the board, in all Ministries?

Hon. Imbert: Yes, across the board. In fact, we got some push back from the public servants, we wanted to—yeah, I am telling you as it is. We wanted to employ high achievers and they felt it should be anybody. You know, anybody even with a pass degree, so it got, you know, a bit stuck, a bit bound down because of that. I am telling you like it is.

Mr. Padarath: I find that a little strange because I know you push back as well.

Hon. Imbert: Yes, I know.

Mr. Padarath: So, that is the compromise. [*Laughter*]

Hon. Imbert: Yes, I know. It is one of the things where I kind of gave way. Okay. [*Laughter and crosstalk*] No. I am doing that later. [*Laughter*]

Dr. Tewarie: I have a couple of questions, some of them are follow-up. On page 87, 17, Training, I just want to know if that Training is related to the Economic Management Unit.

Hon. Imbert: What page?

Madam Chairman: 87.

Hon. Imbert: You are going back.

Dr. Tewarie: No, no it is the same thing.

Hon. Imbert: I know, I know, but you are going back a page.

Dr. Tewarie: You said the Contract Employment was for that unit.

Hon. Imbert: That is across the board.

Dr. Tewarie: That is across the board?

Hon. Imbert: We send people abroad to various training courses even locally. That is for everybody.

Dr. Tewarie: All right, and then on Other Contracted Services, 28, Analytical Services, and you have here what it provides. This particular Legal Counsel and Advisory Services, is it that you are going to hire additional lawyers in the Ministry or is it a combination of that and the hiring of external lawyers?

Hon. Imbert: It is external, just external.

Dr. Tewarie: Then the issue of the rating agencies you cleared it up. I know you had announced that you would add Fitch to the group.

Hon. Imbert: We have added them.

Dr. Tewarie: But, Fitch has never reported on the country yet.

Hon. Imbert: It has never reported publicly.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay.

Hon. Imbert: It is private.

Dr. Tewarie: So it is not like the other agencies?

Hon. Imbert: I do not know, when you engage a rating agency you can choose to engage them to do a public rating or a private rating. If you do a public rating, it means you are locked into them almost for life, because they have to keep following up the country every six months, every three months, so that we have not yet made the decision to lock into Fitch, we already have S&P and Moody's. I am not permitted to say much except that it is a very favourable rating. [*Laughter*] That is all I can say.

Dr. Tewarie: Minister, that is a— [*Laughter*]

Hon. Imbert: I hate to burst your bubble.

Dr. Tewarie: I know, but that is even more reason for the matter to be public so

then we can have the comparison.

Hon. Imbert: I know, but you see, then you are going to be locked into a third rating agency for life. So it is a cost to the country, so we are very prudent in the Ministry of Finance.

Dr. Tewarie: All right Minister, I hear you. You have Fitch as the third agency but these reports are private.

Hon. Imbert: Private.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay, then you have consultants to the Ministry of Finance, 10 million?

Hon. Imbert: I will give you an example. We recently hired a consultant to look at amendments to the Insurance Act to advise us on how we should tax insurance companies now that the concept of a consolidated fund will disappear, because the current insurance legislation requires insurance companies to be taxed on the income from the assets in the Consolidated Fund. In the new insurance regime there is no longer to be a Consolidated Fund, you have to put up capital, I think up to 150 per cent of their liabilities and so on. So we had to hire a consultant to determine whether we should tax insurance companies like a corporation at 30 per cent, or whether we should use a different regime. And we have received advice, and I have announced that we are going to be coming to amend the Insurance Act using a similar formula to what was before, but now you are looking at the actual assets of the entities, so those are the kind of consultants that we hire from time to time. We hire persons to advise us on acquisition of assets, for example the fast ferry and so on. We hire people to advise the Ministry of Finance on the loan documentation and so on. These consultants are all really related to the business—

Dr. Tewarie: Specialist consultants.

Hon. Imbert:—and to the business of the Ministry, debt financing and so on.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay, and then the next one which is really, (vi), Electronic Media Monitoring Services, I am intrigued by that.

Hon. Imbert: Well, that is something that we inherited from your government.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay, tell me.

Hon. Imbert: There is an agency that monitors radio reports, television, newspaper, and does a summary.

Dr. Tewarie: So the Minister can respond—

Hon. Imbert: Everybody gets it. Everybody in the Ministry gets it. But we inherited that from your government. We just continued it. Okay, all right.

Dr. Tewarie: And then (vii), Strategic Management and Execution Services. Is that to follow execution for the budget or something else?

Hon. Imbert: Let me get you some greater details on that one. Okay? Because we have another division called Strategic Management. So let me get you some further information on that.

Dr. Tewarie: Later?

Hon. Imbert: Today, I will get it for you.

Dr. Tewarie: Thank you very much.

Mr. Karim: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, may I return you to line Item 34. When this announcement was made, if my memory serves me correct, there was a \$55 million allocation for this programme. Can you say whether any money at all—because we are seeing this in very many Ministries where a million dollars is allocated annually and no money is being used. At a time when we have a high level of youth unemployment and graduates who do not have jobs, and many of them may be scholarship winners, and you spoke this morning about your restructuring of the economics and analytics and so on, is this programme being disbanded or has this money been transferred to the OJT Programme? Could you

tell us what is happening with this graduate programme?

Hon. Imbert: I think I answered that already. I gave a complete answer to the Member for Princes Town, in English.

Mr. Karim: Could you tell me if any money, any money at all out of the 55 was used?

Hon. Imbert: I told him all of that already. You are asking the same question over and over again.

Mr. Karim: Could you remind me how much was used?

Hon. Imbert: No, I am not reminding you. I told him, he asked me and I told him. I answered that already.

Hon. Member: He answered it in full.

Hon. Imbert: I answered it in full.

Mr. Karim: He said how much was used?

Hon. Member: None.

Mr. Karim: None? So what happened to the money, is it being transferred to—vired to something else?

Hon. Imbert: Now, that is a different question. The answer is no.

Mr. Karim: I mean, this is a distraught to these young people in this country.

Hon. Imbert: Okay, thank you for that comment.

Dr. Gopeesingh: The Member for Caroni Central asked the question under (vii).

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, to draw your attention, line Items 62 and 66—

Hon. Imbert: And I would ask your colleagues to pay attention to you when you ask questions so they would not ask me the same question again.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance, please. Thank you.

Hon. Imbert: I was just trying to help. Just trying to help.

Mr. Padarath: Minister, line Items 62 and 66. I had the opportunity to look across most Ministries with respect to this particular line Item, and I noticed there was a decrease in most Ministries, but in the Ministry of Finance, 62 and 66 that deal with Promotions, Publicity and Printing, Hosting of Conferences, Seminars and other Functions, I have seen an increase under the Ministry of Finance. Can you tell us what was the thinking with respect to increasing these while the other areas have been decreased in other Ministries?

10.45 a.m.

Hon. Imbert: Well, again, that is a bit of a misinterpretation and a sort of a false construct. If you look at 2019 original, it is a million. And if you look at 2020 original, it is a million. Okay? For 62; you see it? So it is no different.

Mr. Padarath: Yes, Minister but in an earlier answer, you told us you were streamlining based on what was more realistic. So I am saying if you saw in the past years where there was a decrease, then why come back with an increase this year, when you have decreased the other Ministries? So therefore you are really cherry-picking in terms of the streamlining.

Hon. Imbert: I do not recall any conversation with respect to this line Item in any other Ministry where I said I am streamlining and reducing the allocation for Promotions, Publicity and Printing. I never said that. That never happened.

Mr. Padarath: I agree with you. You used it in the context of other line Items. So I am assuming that you would have ensured, across the board, that you would have applied the same policy as you applied under the graduate training programme.

Hon. Imbert: That is a false assumption. There are some things where you make an allocation based on forecasting and you expect to spend the money that you have allocated. Sometimes you spend the money, sometimes you spend less,

sometimes you spend more. So we are of the view this is an appropriate allocation for Promotions, Publicity and Printing, and I might say it is a fraction of what the UNC spent on this, probably about 5 per cent.

Mr. Padarath: I was wondering, Minister, does this have anything to do as well with the anticipation of the TTRA?

Hon. Imbert: No.

Mr. Padarath: No.

Hon. Imbert: It is just normal advertisements in the papers like from Inland Revenue and that sort of thing. For example, with the tax amnesty, the Ministry paid for some ads recently encouraging people to come in, telling people that the amnesty was extended. That is what it is for, there is nothing sinister here.

Dr. Tewarie: Yes, Item 34 again. I just want to confirm my understanding that across the Ministries and including yours, there were no hirings of the university graduates under this programme, which was announced some time ago. And secondly, although you indicated based on a question last time that you would hire 10 in the Ministry, none were hired. I understand why, by your explanation, but I just want to confirm that that is true.

Hon. Imbert: Now, why would I confirm something I told to Princes Town?

Dr. Tewarie: All right, thank you. So you are confirming.

Hon. Imbert: But I am not confirming it.

Dr. Tewarie: But I want to ask a second question though. Is this programme originally conceived for, what you can say, the better graduates?

Hon. Imbert: I told Princes Town that.

Dr. Tewarie: Yeah, I know. Is this programme going to now be—is the OJT Programme that you announced for 8,000, going to be sort of absorbed in this?

Hon. Imbert: I addressed that in a question; answered a question from Chaguanas

East. The answer is no.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay, so the answer to that is no. I did not hear that one.

Hon. Imbert: I really do not want to answer this question again, you know. This is now the third time.

Dr. Tewarie: No, no but I did not hear that one.

Hon. Imbert: I answered him, and I answered him.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay, well I understand the answer now. So I make that clear. So there are therefore two programmes, one that you announced, which has not been fulfilled because of various reasons that you advanced, and the OJT Programme, which is to cater for 8,000.

Hon. Imbert: But OJT is not in the Ministry of Finance. You are asking me about another Ministry. I suggest when the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development comes, you ask her.

Dr. Tewarie: All right, I will ask the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development.

Hon. Imbert: This is not OJT.

Dr. Tewarie: Given that you are the Minister of Finance doing the allocation—

Hon. Imbert: No, it “doh work so”.

Dr. Tewarie:—and you are leading the budget.

Hon. Imbert: You want me to answer everything on everything? I am not doing that.

Madam Chairman: So can we proceed?

Dr. Tewarie: But you are an expert on everything.

Hon. Imbert: “Ah glad yuh know, but ah not going tuh answer.”

Dr. Tewarie: I am conceding that you are.

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Budget Division. Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. Tewarie: Have you moved on?

Madam Chairman: Yes, Item 002, on page 89, Budget Division.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay, all right, I have just two quick questions there, which is—No, I will leave that, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Yes, fine. Item 003: Customs and Excise Division.

Mr. Karim: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Hon. Minister, line Item 28: Other Contracted Services. And I want to refer particularly to (iii) and (viii). Could you tell us of our total amount of scanners, how many are currently working?

Hon. Imbert: All.

Mr. Karim: All. How many are those, just to remind me of the figure?

Hon. Imbert: I will get the number for you.

Mr. Karim: And the maintenance, X-ray scanners, you have a figure of \$2 million. I think I just wanted to refer to line Item (viii). So you will get the figure, thank you.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Thank you. Hon. Minister, line Item 23: Fees, I am seeing an increase of 1.3 million. Can you account for this?

Hon. Imbert: I will get further clarification for you.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Line Item 28, hon. Minister, and if you go into your column, includes provision for (i) Operational Cost of Container Examination Stations at Point Lisas and Port of Spain, 11 million allocated. Bearing in mind the Manufacturers' Association and the business sector complaining bitterly about the long delays in clearing containers, obviously this has to relate to the examination of containers as well, what can you say in relation to that? Does it need more bodies? Does it need more productivity? You are spending 11 million, do you need to spend more, or how would you deal with that situation based on the complaints that the general business community are making?

Hon. Imbert: You require these examination stations because, based on profiling, containers are selected for secondary inspection. We have a problem in Trinidad and Tobago, you cannot avoid the fact that some persons try to import contraband and firearms and drugs through our ports. We have to be very, very careful. Yes, some businesses may complain that there are delays, but it is absolutely unavoidable. We cannot abandon the container examination stations. And I think that, from what I have seen, they are reasonably efficient.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I appreciate what you are saying and we are in sync with you on that, that we need to clear these things properly. But if you parallel Trinidad and Tobago with some of the other countries, how is it they are able to clear containers faster, by far faster than we are doing? Because they are searching for drugs. They are searching for contraband issues as well. How is it that they are doing it more efficiently when we are lagging behind?

Hon. Imbert: That is a false equivalency.

Dr. Gopeesingh: No, the—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Imbert: You have no data to support what you are saying. Which country are you talking about?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Well—

Hon. Imbert: Call one.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Across the board, Singapore.

Hon. Imbert: Call a—Singapore? Listen, Singapore is not at the gateway to South America. It is not next door to Venezuela.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I am not arguing the geographic issues.

Hon. Imbert: It is not next door to the cocaine-producing regions of the world. You cannot use that. That is a false equivalency.

Dr. Gopeesingh: No Minister. Minister, cocaine is shipped around the world. So

they have to check for cocaine and contraband things as well.

Hon. Imbert: We have particular problems and we cannot avoid that fact. We have arms and ammunition coming through in containers.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Look, I am trying to help you. We as the alternate government are trying to help you.

Hon. Imbert: We have narcotics coming in containers. Okay.

Dr. Gopeesingh: We are trying to help you.

Hon. Imbert: That is a false equivalency.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Analyze it.

Madam Chairman: Both of you all cannot speak at the same time.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Is 11 million enough to helping the manufacturing industry, which is losing billions of dollars because of the delay?

Hon. Imbert: I am sorry. I reject your figures.

Dr. Gopeesingh: So you are not going to—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Imbert: You have no facts to back up what you are saying.

Dr. Gopeesingh: You have no explanation to the business community?

Hon. Imbert: I said that this is reasonably efficient and I reject your data.

Dr. Gopeesingh: But if you accept that is reasonably efficient, I feel very sad for you.

Hon. Imbert: You could be sad but I reject your data.

Madam Chairman: Okay, so can we move on? Member for Caroni Central.

Hon. Imbert: You are stating false facts.

Dr. Tewarie: Yes, Chair. I want to ask a question on 28: Other Contracted Services, the same area there. It is related to what I said to the Minister before, that some of the questions I ask might be related to his intention to have the TTRA.

When you look at this, a number of things have to do with customs and

border protection. For instance, (v) for \$7.5 million and then UNCTAD Customs Border Control System, 2 million. And the Minister himself talked about the fact that, you know, we were in a particular zone and you had guns, you had drugs, and so on. Now, given that we are doing this with customs, and given the Government's intention to establish a TTRA, which will bring customs and BIR together, what would happen to the initiatives being taken here? Because I consider that they are valuable.

Hon. Imbert: That is it? "De question done?"

Dr. Tewarie: Yes.

Hon. Imbert: Okay. One of the things I had the honour to do, when I came in as Minister of Finance, is to sign a treaty with the United States for cooperation and collaboration in customs and border protection, which the UNC refused to do, so I had the honour to do that.

We would continue to collaborate with the United States Customs and Border Protection whether we have a TTRA or not. If the Minister of National Security wants to come in.

Mr. Young: Thank you very much, Minister of Finance. Madam Chair, just to add from a national security perspective, as I have listened to the conversation and to add to what the Minister of Finance has just said, this Government has been working assiduously with a number of international bodies and at no cost to us.

So, for example, one of the initiatives, again, that was not pursued in a previous time, is something called Sea Corps and Air Corps, where we are getting assistance, professional assistance, from the EU in addition to the North American assistance and they have come down and we have set up multi-agency teams: customs and excise, immigration, special units from the police service, the defence force and our intelligence services to do exactly what is being suggested, the

interdiction at ports and stuff like that. Of course, we cannot get into the specifics, but that is happening.

I have signed the MOU. As soon as this budget is over, we kick it off, actually, and that is going to have a serious effect on these illegal flows through some of our legal ports of entry. So it does not have to be. We are not all about focus throwing money behind it. We are making do with what we have and we are putting together some special units that are dedicated to dealing with interdiction and getting the international assistance. International assistance also comes with hardware and assets.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay, I have no problem with that and I think it is a good thing for the country, Madam Chair. The question I was really asking is that if you integrate customs as part of a revenue authority in which their main business is going to be now collection of taxes, are these sets of initiatives, which are national security-focused, are they going to be moved? Is a new agency going to be set up?

Hon. Imbert: No, they will continue.

Dr. Tewarie: Ah?

Hon. Imbert: They will continue. Right now there is collaboration between customs and all of these international agencies. If the TTRA is established, the collaboration will continue. They would not be moved anywhere else. The collaboration has to be with the customs entity, whether it is part of the Revenue Authority or not; whether it is a standalone, as it is now, or whether it is part of a larger revenue collection agency. The collaboration will be with that entity—

Dr. Tewarie: All right.

Hon. Imbert:—which will be part of the TTRA.

Dr. Tewarie: All right. Thank you very much.

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

Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, in a former Standing Finance Committee you indicated that there was a question posed to you regarding whether Columbus Communications, that is line Item 28: Other Contracted Services, whether Columbus Communications was an entity, whether it exists or does not exist. I see that there is (iv)—

Hon. Imbert: I do not remember anybody asking me that.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: That was in a Standing Finance Committee. The question was posed to you by Dr. Khan.

Hon. Imbert: To who?

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: To you, Sir.

Hon. Imbert: Me? When? Which committee?

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: And you indicated that you would get the information.

Hon. Imbert: When was this?

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Okay. Let me just ask the question.

Hon. Imbert: “Yeah, doh make up stories.”

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Is the Columbus Communications an operational and active entity, hon. Minister?

Hon. Imbert: I beg your pardon?

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Is Columbus Communications an operational and active entity?

Hon. Imbert: I would think so. I think it exists. There is service from Columbus Communications. I thought everybody in this country knows who Columbus Communications is. They own Flow. I do not understand the question. "Yuh doh have cable?"

11.00 a.m.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: It was an answer you promised to provide, hon. Minister, and so we are asking.

Hon. Imbert: Not in this—that never happened. This is the first time Ministry of Finance has been examined in this Finance Committee. Do not try that.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: I said at a previous time.

Hon. Imbert: That is irrelevant and I do not ever believe you anymore.

Madam Chairman: Okay Minister. Item 004: Inland Revenue Division. Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. Tewarie: Items 37 and 43, I mean, is there any reason why you have this increase in Janitorial Services and Security Services? You know and I think that when you look at the budget in many Ministries, this increase happens and it has happened for several years.

Hon. Imbert: I could answer that.

Dr. Tewarie: Right, okay.

Hon. Imbert: You know we have moved into a new building on the Government Campus, the new Inland Revenue Tower. Customs has moved into a new building also on the Government Campus. The Evaluations Division is occupying a new building in Barataria. So it is because of occupation of new buildings there is an increased requirement for security and janitorial, okay?

Mr. Lee: In terms of maintenance of equipment, there is a hefty increase of \$15 million budgeted for this year. Could you explain why such a hefty increase? Line Item 15: under Inland Revenue Division.

Hon. Imbert: Well, you would see the original location in 2019 was 6.5 eh, so it is the same as—

Mr. Lee: No, no.

Hon. Imbert: Oh, you are on page—or, you have gone back. I thought we were on

93.

Madam Chairman: No we are still on 004.

Hon. Imbert: Okay, where are we?

Mr. Lee: Line Item 15: Repairs and Maintenance of Equipment.

Hon. Imbert: I will have to get that information for you. I will get that for you.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Following that line Item 16, just below that, hon. Minister, Contract Employment increase of 4 million from 16 million to 20 million. Would that be trying to assist you in getting more workers for the Board of Inland Revenue, or what is that?

Hon. Imbert: I will get it for you. But as I said this is a Division where we experience significant problems in getting the Service Commission to fill vacant posts. So there is a dire need for contract employment but I will get the rationale. But if you look at the 2019 original you will see it was 20 million. The forecast for 2019 was 20. It means that they did not fill all of these contract positions. So we are going again to fill all of them in 2020.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I wish you well.

Hon. Imbert: Yes, thank you.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 04 under Inland Revenue. Just wondering if with the decrease in—I know that 04 takes into consideration 04 to 06, which includes a decrease in water and sewerage rates. If the hon. Minister has taken into consideration with this increase if should it not be a decrease in light of the fact you all will be implementing LED bulbs?

Hon. Imbert: This would be affected by the rental of new buildings and in increased electricity cost because of the usage of more floor space and greater accommodation. We have just hired for example 200 additional people in the Evaluation Division. That is no small number of persons. So the electricity

demands for air-conditioning and computer equipment and et cetera would go up.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 05: Telephones. I am seeing it is almost over 2 million increase in Telephones. I just trying inquire what these calling—who they are calling, Inland Revenue. All this increase in phone. Why is this additional allocation of 2 million?

Hon. Imbert: Again, Madam Chairman, Madam Chairman. Again, I would draw Members' attention—if my own Members would kind of cease and settle.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: I am not hearing you.

Hon. Imbert: If my own Members would cease and settle.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: I am not hearing you.

Madam Chairman: It appears, Minister of Finance, that your voice was probably losing strength so your Members want to assist.

Hon. Imbert: No, no, no, I have to answer that.

Madam Chairman: Can we have some—

Hon. Imbert: I need to answer that.

Madam Chairman: Could we have a little—can we have some order please. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Imbert: I would like to make a general point. When these statements are made about an increase, they are made in a vacuum. Look at the original allocation for telephone for 2019 it was 5 million and the current original for 2020 is 5. It is the same amount. What happened was that in 2019 the Inland Revenue Division was very efficient and very economical in the use of telephones. So it did not spend as much money as was allocated for it. And we expect also in 2020 they do the same thing. There will be very high efficient, very high achieving people.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: That is not quite so hon. Minister. If you check the other Heads there is the gradual increase in telephones.

Hon. Imbert: What other Heads? I am only talking about Inland Revenue.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: In the other Ministries we have done.

Hon. Imbert: I am only speaking of Inland Revenue. Do not draw me into anything else.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West, we are dealing with this particular Head, okay.

Hon. Imbert: Do not draw me into anything else. “Doh” try that.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: But what I am saying hon. Minister, is that when we had done all the Heads yesterday it was a gradual thing.

Madam Chairman: All right—

Hon. Imbert: You see what she is doing? That is irrelevant, irrelevant.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town, Member for Caroni Central, I am sorry.

Dr. Tewarie: Yes. I want to go Item 28, on 008: Investments. I can go there?

Hon. Imbert: What page is that? It is all right you could move. I have no problem. Could move along.

Dr. Tewarie: Sorry.

Madam Chairman: So we move on. 005: Treasury Division; 008 Investment Division. I now call on the Member for Caroni Central. That is where you are?

Dr. Tewarie: Yes. Minister 28, Item 28: Other Contracted Services. Now, I see the Estimates for 2019 which was 45 million and then only 3 million was spent and then you have 96 million now, an increase of 93 million. And it says:

“Includes provision for divestment of State Enterprises and special audits”

Now my question is which enterprises are you going to divest or are you going to do some work that would determine that; and secondly, how many special audits and what, if you know, what are particular state enterprises that are going to be

audited?

Hon. Imbert: I can get that for you, but I mean, the increase is significant. One of the things we are doing is looking at is the pension plan for Petrotrin, for example, which is quite expensive. Because there were queries about the sufficiency of Petrotrin's pension plan, whether it was adequate to meet the needs of all the pensioners. So that is one of the audits that we were doing. We have hired a firm of actuaries to do that. So things like that. So I can get the breakdown for you.

Dr. Tewarie: Yeah, I think it would be important. Also the question of which enterprises are due for—

Hon. Imbert: I will get the breakdown for you, I will get the breakdown for.

Dr. Tewarie: Thanks.

Madam Chairman: Item 009: Central Tenders Board; Item 010: Valuation Division. Member for Chaguanas East.

Mr. Karim: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 16. There has been a consistent high amount there. In fact, there has been a big jump from '18 to '19, all of which was—more was utilized. Could you give us a sense of what this \$29 million in 2020 is expected to be used for and how many persons? If you do not have the information now—

Madam Chairman: Page 96. We are on page 96.

Hon. Imbert: Page 96.

Mr. Karim: Line Item 16.

Hon. Imbert: Yes, as I told you, we have employed 200 additional field inspectors, field assessors in the Valuations Division to assess properties. So that is why you would see contract employment in the Valuations Division increasing.

Mr. Karim: You are employing less people than expected?

Hon. Imbert: Less people?

Mr. Karim: Well, I see you have a decrease from the previous.

Hon. Imbert: Of \$800,000?

Mr. Karim: Yes, small amount.

Hon. Imbert: That is not significant.

Mr. Karim: Well right, okay. So that exercise continues?

Hon. Imbert: Yeah.

Madam Chairman: Item 011: National Insurance Appeal Board Tribunal; Item 014: Finance Intelligence Unit. Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Hon. Minister, under line Item 16: Contract Employment for the FIU. In your earlier statements, you said that you were trying to get more people to work. Is that part of the situation where you are going to get contract employment to help you with the FIU? Page 97.

Hon. Imbert: 97? Just now, I am getting conflicting information here. Page 97, FIU—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes, line Item 16: Contract Employment.

Hon. Imbert: Yes, as I said we have a combination of public officers and contract officers in the—

Dr. Gopeesingh: That satisfies there.

Hon. Imbert: So that where we get the numbers from.

Madam Chairman: Item 017: Office of the Supervisor of Insolvency; Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. We are at page 99. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Budget Division; Item 003: Customs and Excise Division; Item 004: Inland Revenue Division. We are at page 100. Item 005: Treasury Division; Item 008: Investment Division; Item 009: Central Tenders Board; Item 010: Valuation Division; 011: National Insurance Appeal Board Tribunal; Item 014: Financial Intelligence Unit; Item 017: Office of the Supervisor

of Insolvency; Sub-Head 4. We are at page 102. Current Transfers and Subsidies.

Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Sir, under Current Transfers and Subsidies under the Treasury Division, contribution to the Caribbean Development Bank. In 2019 you had originally estimated \$77.5 million to be contributed. In 2019 the Government contributed 15 million and you have now budgeted 15 million this year 2020. What was rationale in 2019—the original Estimate at 77 million, and you only contributed 15 million. Was there a reason for the smaller amount of contribution?

Hon. Imbert: When you become a member of these multilateral financial institutions you can pay up your shares either in cash or by way of a promissory note. In 2019, the plan was to pay in cash, but we approached the Caribbean Development Bank and they have agreed that we give them a promissory note. Because this money is really for the other members of the bank, the less developed countries, as part of pool of loan funds, so it is only required when it is required. So it is across the board in all institutions in the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank and so on. You are allowed either to put promissory note, which you would have to make good on if it is called upon or you pay cash. For cash flow purposes we have been able to reduce this down to promissory note and some cash, okay?

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Thank you. Minister, following that question, what is our annual contribution to the CDC? **Hon. Imbert:** Let me get that for you.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Okay. Can I ask the—have we drawn down anything from CDB over the last year or two?

Hon. Imbert: Not as far as I know, but I mean, I am sure the Minister of Planning

could give further details.

Dr. Gopeesingh: All right, okay. The line Item 12, hon. Minister, under the same Current Transfers and Subsidies. The Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility, I know we pay a certain amount like 41—40 million in 2018, 2019 we paid \$41 million, and 2020 is estimated to be \$53 million. Does that vary from year to year? That is the first question.

11.15 a.m.

Hon. Imbert: We have been looking very carefully at the cover under the Caribbean Catastrophe Fund. We were very successful a couple years ago in terms of the payout that we got. We actually got about \$50 million in terms of a payout for an extreme rainfall event that occurred a couple of years ago. Then a year ago, we did not get the kind of payout that we anticipated because it is based on risk profiles and it is based on probabilities and statistics. In other words, when you take the cover out, you project a certain level of rainfall, and if there is an earthquake event, the intensity of the earthquake.

So we went back to the drawing board and we have revaluated our cover and our risk profiles and therefore we have adjusted our premiums and we are in a much better place now. I think if we have another catastrophic event we will get a very large payout. So it is based on advice from the technocrats. You see what you do, when you—just like a, let me use an analogy of car insurance. You might decide to have a large excess, you might figure you will never get into an accident, so you will have a large excess of 10,000 or 20,000 and if you get into an accident, well, you will cry. Or you could decide you going fully, full comprehensive with, you know, you pay a much higher premium and there is no excess, and therefore you get fully compensated. So that is the analogy.

So what the technocrats have done is gone back to the drawing board,

looked at the events and the probabilities associated with each level of event, reconfigured our policy and based on all the advice we have, we are in a much better place now. If, God forbid, there is a catastrophic event, you get a very large payout.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Have we ever draw down on it?

Hon. Imbert: I just told you that. We got \$50 million—

Dr. Gopeesingh: I did not hear that part.

Hon. Imbert:—a couple years ago because of an extreme rainfall event. We did very well.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Last year?

Dr. Tewarie: Thank you, Chair. And I hope we never have to draw on the insurance for catastrophe, but two questions; one on 07: Current Transfers and Subsidies for CARTAC. I noticed that the amount is being reduced, but, I just want to ask, what are they doing for us now, Minister? I know that generally they work with the CSO.

Hon. Imbert: CARTAC gives us technical assistance, and the allocation will depend on what we forecast for the year. So it depends on what we foresee occurring during the year.

Dr. Tewarie: Are they involved with us right now? Doing anything?

Hon. Imbert: Yes.

Dr. Tewarie: And that is with the CSO. Can you—?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: If I may? Thank you. Member, they continue to work with the CSO, because as we are moving to the National Statistical Institute, we want to make sure that the training is up to par and so on. So they continue to work with the CSO on a regular basis.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay. Thank you.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: You are welcome.

Dr. Tewarie: And the second question on 04. Oh no, this is another Item, sorry. It is another line Item.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, as a follow-up to the question that you responded to with the Member for Caroni East, and you said there was a drawdown of \$ 50 million. Could you advise whether those moneys were in fact used, if you said it was for the flood for compensation to persons who were impacted by floods?

Hon. Imbert: That is not in this fiscal year or last fiscal year. Not relevant, asked and answered years ago.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Hon. Minister, Current Transfers and Subsidies, the “Andean Bank”. Do we pay an annual contribution to CAF? I am not seeing it here.

Hon. Imbert: It is the Development Bank of Latin America. That is the correct name.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yeah. Well I know it as Andean Bank.

Hon. Imbert: I know what you know. The correct name is the Development Bank of Latin America.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I did my Masters in International Relations.

Hon. Member: Tell him. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Imbert: Let me repeat. The bank is called the Development Bank of Latin America. Whether you did studies or not, it seems you did not study the right thing. It is the Development Bank of Latin America.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Just like you did engineering, you have three Masters.

Hon. Imbert: “You ent study the right thing.” [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Indarsingh: The stadium in Grenada collapse.

Hon. Imbert: And I win the case.

Mr. Lee: Still under Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 104, under the Treasury Division, Minister of Finance, 03, Expenses in connection with International Financial Institutions. You have a hefty increase of \$71 million for the 2020 Estimates; the revised in 2019 was 40.8 million. Could you explain what this hefty increase of 71 with the expenses related to these international financial institutions?

Madam Chairman: Page 104, Item 02.

Hon. Imbert: Yes. The contribution to the Corporación Andina de Fomento which if the Member had really studied international relations, he would know is the Development Bank of Latin America is included there.

Mr. Charles: Bad pronunciation.

Hon. Imbert: “Yuh cah even speak English, Yuh cah even speak English.”
[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Okay. So if we will all pay a little attention and stop the banter, I think it will be a more productive exercise for us. We are at page 104. The Member for Pointe-a-Pierre had asked under the Item 03.

Hon. Imbert: He asked me what that was for.

Mr. Lee: That entire amount is for that?

Hon. Imbert: No, for the Corporación Andina de Fomento or Development Bank of Latin America or CAF, the contribution is 35 million. The contribution to the Multilateral Investment Fund 7 million, International Monetary Fund 1 million, Inter-American Investment Corporation 17.5 million. That is the breakdown; that is how you get up to the 70.

Mr. Lee: So, I just want to just add clarity. The 35 million that you just described will go to?

Hon. Imbert: Is for CAF.

Mr. Lee: For CAF.

Hon. Imbert: Yeah.

Mr. Lee: Why that hefty amount this budgeted year of 35 million?

Hon. Imbert: We are now a full member of the Development Bank of Latin America and with that full membership comes benefits and responsibilities. We are getting tremendous benefits from the CAF. They have already lent us US \$700 million and we have another tranche of \$100 million to get this month actually for infrastructure work. The previous loans were for budget support and we are in discussions with CAF right now for loans for a lot of our development projects.

So with those benefits they have qualified Trinidad and Tobago for a pipeline of loans totalling over US \$2 billion. So with that benefit comes a responsibility as a full shareholder to make a contribution of this level. But it is more than compensated for by the access to the loan funding. That is why you join these banks, because if you have to go to commercial banks you pay much more, you get moratoriums, you get low interest rates, that “kinda” thing.

Dr. Tewarie: Yes, I want to go back to page 103, 04, the Global Forum and Transparency Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes. Is there any reason, I know it is not, I mean, you are not talking about a billion dollar increase here, but it is still, you know. Is it for more services or is it an increase in the rate for what?

Hon. Imbert: No, we—you, your government joined us to the Global Forum.

Dr. Tewarie: Also to CAF, eh. I want to let you know.

Hon. Imbert: What is the relevance of that?

Dr. Tewarie: I just mentioned it, nah, since you take the opportunity to mention what we join.

Hon. Imbert: Just for so? Just for so?

Dr. Tewarie: Yeah. Just because you take the opportunity to mention what we

join.

Hon. Imbert: So this is just our fees that we have to pay them. If you look at—

Dr. Tewarie: It is just increased fees?

Hon. Imbert: No, it is not increase. Look at it, it is the same amount that was put in in 2019. It just that all we paid in 2019 was 151, but look at the amount, it is 356 and 356.

Dr. Tewarie: All right. Okay. So it remains the same.

Hon. Imbert: Yeah, it is the same thing.

Dr. Tewarie: All right.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Would the Minister be in a position to give us some information with respect to the payments to “Corporación de what” and the—

Hon. Imbert: Corporación Andina de Fomento.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Would you be in position to give us an appreciation of how much we have paid so far and the years of payment?

Hon. Imbert: Well, we only just began to borrow eh. *[Interruption]* I am answering you.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Okay. Go ahead.

Hon. Imbert: We only just began to borrow and therefore we would not have paid very much at this point in time, but I will get the information for you.

Dr. Gopeesingh: My understanding when we were in government, we paid a substantial amount to that so that you could draw down now when we did not draw down. You are drawing down now.

Hon. Imbert: Hold on. Clarify what you are saying. You are talking about the subscription? What are you saying? Which line Item are you on? Line Item?

Dr. Gopeesingh: But we were discussing that.

Hon. Imbert: Which one are you on now?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Anyway, you just evading, you do not want to—

Madam Chairman: So we move on.

Hon. Imbert: What are talking about?

Madam Chairman: Item 003: United Nations Organisation; Item 004: International Bodies; Item 005: Non-Profit Institutions; Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers. We are at Households?

Dr. Tewarie: Yes. Okay. Two quick questions.

Madam Chairman: Page 105.

Dr. Tewarie: Yes. This Food Price Support Programme. Minister.

Hon. Imbert: I am listening.

Dr. Tewarie: I just want to ask you how does this work? Is this through the social services programme? I just want to ask.

Hon. Imbert: I will get clarity. I think so, but let me just make sure before I respond to you. It is the cash card, the food card.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay. So this is—is it limited to that, is it?

Hon. Imbert: What we do is we top up the account every now and then for the Conditional Cash Transfer Programme.

Dr. Tewarie: I thought it might be that, but is it for food card alone or more?

Hon. Imbert: Yeah.

Dr. Tewarie: Right, okay. And then the VSEP for Central Tenders Board.

Hon. Imbert: Which line Item you on?

Madam Chairman: 17.

Dr. Tewarie: This is on 17. Now, remember I had raised the question before. I knew you would eventually have to come to this, but is this schedule then based on the allocation here for 2020?

Hon. Imbert: Well clearly if the Central Tenders Board is to be disbanded you

would offer employees there the option to go to the Procurement Board, be redeployed within the Public Service or take VSEP. It is the provision for that.

Dr. Tewarie: So this what—[*Interruption*]*—*and this is likely to happen this year?

Hon. Imbert: Well, that is why we have the provision here.

Dr. Tewarie: Right, okay.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Chair. Under Households, 40: Gratuities to Contract Workers. Minister, I think yesterday you indicated to the meeting that you would provide information on this particular issue and how this \$21,134,400 will be disbursed to contract officers and so on.

Hon. Imbert: Yes, what is the specific question?

Mr. Indarsingh: It is a new Sub-Item and you said yesterday that you would explain in terms of the payment—?

Hon. Imbert: What the Treasury has done in this year is decentralize the payment of gratuity. Prior to this year all gratuities were paid by the Treasury Division. So now allocations have been made in each Ministry for payment of gratuities to contract officers in that Ministry. So if you look in each Ministry you will see an Item for gratuities which was not there before.

Mr. Indarsingh: And based on the fact that public officers have all been complaining to us at constituency levels that they have to wait three and four years sometimes for their gratuity, some of them die waiting for it and so on. Minister, could you assure us that there would be timely releases to the respective Ministries and so on, and what you are doing at the Pensions Division to ensure that the calculation of gratuities and so on are done in a very efficient manner.

11.30 a.m.

Hon. Imbert: Well, as you should know, being a junior Minister of Finance at one time, there are a number of steps before gratuity can be paid. You have to get

the pension and leave records from each Department or Ministry that someone has been in. So if a person has moved from Ministry to Ministry to Ministry in their career, until each one of those Departments reports on their leave records and their pension records, the person cannot get their gratuity, and this is the major cause of the delay. Sometimes a person might be in six places and they have the records from five, but because the other place, the other Ministry was not keeping correct records, the whole process slows down.

What the Treasury Division is doing here is trying to speed up the process so that it is no longer a centralized system, it is now decentralized. So, hopefully, this is would add greater efficiency. But the problem of getting the records will still remain, and a lot of people have experiences. Even Members of Parliament from the last Government too experienced this. I tried my best to help them, but there are people who served in different portfolios in different Ministries from your Government, and they could not get their records from the various Ministries that they served in. So we continue to try and do this as quickly as we can, and this redistribution of gratuity allocations into each Ministry is designed to try and assist to speed up the process.

Dr. Gopeesingh: So we can expect a more efficient payment to people who are waiting for their gratuities, Minister?

Hon. Imbert: I think the answer is yes.

Dr. Gopeesingh: All right. Okay. Could you explain, line Item 08, UNIMED Group Health Plan? Nothing was put in for 2018, 2019 or 2020, but you still have it as a line Item. Could you explain that? Line Item 08.

Hon. Imbert: Well, it is not there.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yeah, but why is it necessary?

Hon. Imbert: But it was not there in '18 or '19.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I see you put it in there. Well, who is covering the—what was that used for, the UNIMED Health Plan. Has it been dissolved?

Hon. Imbert: What all the Government is required to do, is to top up the account. Remember this is a contributory plan, so that both employees and employer contribute, and it goes into a fund and then withdrawals are made from that fund based on claims. It is only when there is a deficit in the plan that the Government is required to put money in.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Okay.

Hon. Imbert: So that if a deficit occurs—I remember doing this about two years ago, put about 20 million into the plan to bring it back up into a surplus—in 2020 we will top-up the plan.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Thanks for the answer. The VSEP, line Item 17, the Central Tenders Board.

Hon. Imbert: I answered that already.

Dr. Gopeesingh: No, I just want to ask. Are you sending off everybody and you are giving VSEP to everyone or some will be absorbed in the public service?

Hon. Imbert: I answered that already.

Dr. Gopeesingh: No, no.

Hon. Imbert: You were not listening. I told the Member for Caroni Central, and he heard me, that we are offering options and alternatives to employees of the Central Tenders Board. They can go and work for the Procurement Regulator, they can be redeployed into the public service were a post exists or they can take voluntary separation.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Well thank you for that.

Hon. Imbert: I told him that, he heard me. I do not know why you did not hear.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I did not hear that.

Madam Chairman: Item 009, Other Transfers, page 106. Member for Chaguanas East.

Mr. Karim: Hon. Minister, might you be able to give us a little update on line Item 32, the G Pan Patent.

Hon. Imbert: Where is this?

Madam Chairman: Page 106.

Mr. Karim: Page 106. That has been going on for quite a while.

Hon. Imbert: Well that is something we have inherited.

Mr. Karim: We too.

Hon. Imbert: Okay. So that is the answer.

Mr. Karim: And any update?

Hon. Imbert: On what?

Mr. Karim: This is a patent fee.

Hon. Imbert: Yes.

Mr. Karim: And it is increasing now. Okay. The other thing is line Item 42, Sir. I noticed you had an allocation of 20 million, none was used, and you increased it 25. Could you give us a lil sense as to some of the incentives? You may have said something in the budget, if you could remind us.

Hon. Imbert: This is a programme that is managed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. We simply pay.

Mr. Karim: Oh, okay.

Hon. Imbert: Okay.

Mr. Charles: Line Item 39, Office of Procurement Regulation. There has been an increase of 9.5 and the only question is, will this get the Office of Procurement Regulation up to speed and, if so, when will we see it fully operational?

Hon. Imbert: This should signify that we are very serious about implementing the

procurement Act in 2020. This additional funding from 16 to 25 million is intended to allow the Office of the Procurement Regulator to be fully operational in 2020. That is the plan. So you see the VSEP for CTB workers and you see the increased allocation for the Office of Procurement Regulation.

Dr. Gopeesingh: The Securities and Exchange Commission, line Item 01, hon. Minister, there is an increase of 9.7 million, could you give us an appreciation of 35 million to 44 million?

Hon. Imbert: I will have to get details on that for you.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Okay.

Hon. Imbert: I am not sure why that was done.

Dr. Gopeesingh: The Heritage and Stabilisation Fund—Operating Expenses. That has increased minimally. Could you tell us what that entails, the operating expenses? Is that related to the—

Hon. Imbert: That is the expenses associated with the management of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, which has increased from 5.6 billion when we came in to \$6,256,000,000. That is US and that is an increase therefore of TT \$4 billion over the last four years. So I think if we spend just TT \$1 million to get an increase of \$4 billion in the fund, I think that is value for money.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yeah. Well the trustees that we had, that is why we increased the HSF from 3.5 to 5.6 billion; 2.1 billion increase during our time—

Hon. Imbert: Well that is ancient history.

Dr. Gopeesingh:—which was close to \$14 million.

Hon. Imbert: That was when you were here and we were there.**Dr. Gopeesingh:** How much are you paying now, the trustees or where is that? The trustees for the HSF, where is the line Item for that?

Hon. Imbert: You mean the fund managers?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes, the fund managers.

Hon. Imbert: We will get the information for you.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Dr. Gopeesingh: No, no. I have one, before you leave me. The CARICOM Development Fund has increased from 35 million to 70 million, could you give us an understanding, CDF?

Hon. Imbert: We were saddled with arrears that you gifted us in 2015 and we are paying down on the arrears to the Caribbean Development Fund, which you refused to pay, your obligations.

Dr. Gopeesingh: But you had 70 million allocated for it in 2019, but you only utilized 35 million. Why?

Hon. Imbert: Because it is difficult when you are saddled with a \$100 million bill by a previous Government to be able to find the cash to pay all of it, so we are doing it in instalments.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I am sure we utilized it wisely. Do not worry.

Hon. Imbert: You did not pay it. That is one of the bills you left for us.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Well, you are leaving billions for us.

Hon. Imbert: No, we are not, because we will be in Government.

Madam Chairman: Members, can we move on?

Hon. Imbert: We are leaving nothing for you.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Just one more, 28, First Citizens Bank Ltd.—Indemnity Calls. You had 92 million allocated in 2019, you only used less than 1 million and you are now allocating 54 million for it. Could you explain?

Hon. Imbert: That is, again, it is not an insurance per se, but it is based on the rationalization of the portfolio of Clico Investment Bank. Yes. Sorry, Caribbean

Money Market Brokers. When Clico collapsed, there were a number of institutions within the Clico group, such as, Clico Investment Bank and Caribbean Money Market Brokers. FCB was given the responsibility to manage the Caribbean Money Market Brokers portfolio, and we had to give them an indemnity that if there was a claim on the assets, that the Government will make good. In 2019, we only had to pay up 900,000, but we have put an appropriate allocation of 54 million based on the risk profile in 2020. It may not be utilized.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Okay. Madam Chair, I crave your indulgence because, if you leave me I might not have the opportunity again.

Madam Chairman: I do not think that is a fair comment.

Dr. Gopeesingh: The Private/Public Housing Construction, 50 million allocated in 2019, nothing was used as you showed there. So was there any—in the housing construction, was there any private sector, public sector partnership constructing houses, because no payment has been made? Could you give us where we are with that, and 25 million now is being given back again for it?

Hon. Imbert: We have made a provision of \$25 million. We decided to press on with this programme. What we have found in the private sector is a reluctance on the part of private builders to build an HDC house—I wish the Member for Tabaquite was here—for \$850,000. Remember this programme, we will give the private sector HDC drawings and HDC specifications for a small three-bedroom house. They will build it for a particular price and they will be given \$100,000 grant if they meet the specs and they meet the price. We have not found an appetite in the private sector for building houses in that range, because they have become accustomed, under the UNC, to getting \$1.3 million for a house that should really only cost \$700,000. But we are going at it again, and as you can see we are coming up with a programme to pay people \$500,000 for a basic house and

we think we will be successful. So we have gone again and put an allocation of 25 million.

Dr. Gopeesingh: So the 50 million was not utilized?

Hon. Imbert: It was not, because there was no appetite among the private sector builders to build a house for 750,000 or 850,000.

Dr. Gopeesingh: But if memory serves me right, there was an opening of a PPP in St. Augustine.

Hon. Imbert: That is different. That is HDC. This is finance. This was a finance initiative that if private builders build small houses for the Government's price of 750,000—

Dr. Gopeesingh: They would get \$100,000.

Hon. Imbert: They would get \$100,000. It would save us from paying 1.3 million for the same house, and they had no appetite to it, because they became accustomed under UNC of getting 100 per cent profit.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Well, they do not have confidence in you now. That is why they are not investing.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Hon. Imbert: They do not have confidence that we will give them twice the price. That is true. We are not going to give them twice the price.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Yes, thank you. Item 17: GATE, Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses Fund. I note that there is no increase from the approximate \$435 million, but given the fact that there are a number of issues—students are complaining, students from USC, et cetera, that institutions are withholding their degrees until the GATE payments are paid or the parents pay. Could the Minister just explain why no increase?

Hon. Imbert: GATE is a rolling fund. It is a rolling fund. It is based on applications from the institutions to the Ministry of Education who then audits the applications, and it is sent to the Minister of Finance for final approval. So this is probably a pass through.

Mr. Charles: So the problem is the submission of documents by the institutions and not the unavailability of funding?

Hon. Imbert: Yeah, that will be the problem.

Mr. Charles: Okay.

Dr. Tewarie: Yeah. Just a quick follow-up question on that. Is GATE assistance stabilized at 435 now or it just looks like that on paper?

Hon. Imbert: But if you look at the 2018 actual, it is 434.

Dr. Tewarie: 434.

Hon. Imbert: I think you could draw that conclusion.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay.

Hon. Imbert: I think you could draw that conclusion. There was a lot of frog-hopping under the previous Minister where persons were doing multiple degrees, five and six degrees at the same time, under the previous Minister, Chaguanas East. He was encouraging that. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Tewarie: Chair, I just want to follow up on 40, 41 and 42, which were all basically incentive programmes offered in another budget, and what we see here is that basically these incentives were not taken up. I see the Minister is proceeding with them and I have no problem with that, but as stimulus programmes, Minister, I think what this tells us is that they are not working.

Hon. Imbert: We have to keep trying.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay.

Hon. Imbert: We always have to try.

Dr. Tewarie: I say that in the context of other stimuli offered in the current budget. Right.

Hon. Imbert: We have to try.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South. I am not sure if you were taking a stretch or if you are trying to “ketch” my attention.

Mr. Indarsingh: I am always trying to “ketch” your attention.

Madam Chairman: Okay, very good. Couva South.

11.45 a.m.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Chair. Under Transfers to State Enterprises, I see under 40, Minister—

Madam Chairman: No, we have not reached there as yet.

Mr. Indarsingh: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas East.

Mr. Karim: Thank you, Madam Chairman. What was spoken of by the Minister of Finance, it is not “frog hoppers”, these are students we call them “programme hoppers”. But the question is, hon. Minister, could you say in this line Item 17, if I can get a list of it out of the \$435 million for the GATE programme, how many institutions, TLIs, are owed GATE moneys?

Hon. Imbert: I suggest you raise that with the Minister of Education when you deal with Education.

Mr. Karim: Okay. Can I ask if any amount here is being used to repay? I am just asking, because there appears to be some investment to the University of the West Indies for moneys owed for their involvement in the Couva hospital. Is there anything? Ask the Minister of Education too?

Hon. Imbert: No. I had the honour to launch GATE under the Patrick Manning administration—

Mr. Karim: And UTT as well.

Hon. Imbert:—a foresighted, farsighted PNM initiative—

Mr. Karim:—from dollar for dollar.

Hon. Imbert: I allowed you to speak, allow me to speak.

Dr. Gopeesingh: That has been converted to short-sighted.

Hon. Imbert: I had the honour to be the Minister of Tertiary Education to launch the Government Assistance for Tuition Programme—[*Desk thumping*] I am still talking. I am still talking. I did not interrupt you, put your hand down. And we are the ones who came up with that vision to increase the participation [*Desk thumping*] in tertiary education. It is a PNM programme. And since I had the honour to be the Minister in charge of Tertiary Education to launch, conceptualize, create and launch this programme, I can say without any fear of contradiction that the acronym is taken from the words “Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses”, and therefore by definition it can only be for tuition expenses. It cannot be for anything else. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Karim: No, but—

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas East.

Mr. Karim: Just—can I?

Madam Chairman: Yes, Member for Chaguanas East.

Mr. Karim: But tuition expenses are also expenses that are owed to TLIs. You know that as a former Minister of Tertiary Education. I just want to ask the question, this \$435 million, is this what is contributing because of its decrease to the slippage in the participation rate from 65 per cent to 60 per cent? I just want to ask whether—

Hon. Imbert: Are you finished?

Mr. Karim: Yeah.

Hon. Imbert: That is another imaginary statistic that came from your government. You love to throw out numbers, it is like \$9 oil, you never had that. You never reached 65 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] You never reached 65 per cent.

Mr. Karim: “Dat was ah Caricom thing, man.”

Hon. Imbert: That is a figment of your imagination. Fake statistics. Bogus statistics.

Madam Chairman: All right. Let us move on, Member for Caroni East.
[*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Minister, under line Item 11—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: I never have difficulty in hearing the Member for Caroni East, I am having difficulty now.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Tell them to pay attention.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Minister, under Line Item 11: IDF, Infrastructure Development Fund, would it be possible for you to provide to us a breakdown of the various Ministries’ utilization of the IDF?

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, you know, giving information that is in the public domain is tantamount to a sin. In every document here, in every Ministry, and in the Estimates of Development Programme there is the IDF allocation to every single Ministry. I refer your attention to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I am speaking for the public here now, Minister, and the public wants to know.

Hon. Imbert: No, no, no, you are not, you are trying to fool the public.

Dr. Gopeesingh: You spent X amount of money.

Hon. Imbert: Okay. It is in this document which you have.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes, I know we have it, we are asking larger questions here when we go into—

Hon. Imbert: What larger questions? It is in this document which you have.

Dr. Gopeesingh: You have spent X amount of money under the IDF, we are just asking you how you spent the money, which Ministry—

Hon. Imbert: It is in this document which you have and for the benefit of the public, this is online at the Ministry of Finance.

Dr. Gopeesingh: We are dealing with this and this does not have it.

Hon. Imbert: The *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*, everything is there, and you know it is there. You have a problem with reading; that is your problem.

Madam Chairman: Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises, I believe, Member for Couva South, you now have my attention.

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes, and thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, you have an increased allocation of \$5,012,000 to the Sugar Manufacturing Company Limited, could you inform us what this would be utilized for?

Hon. Imbert: That entity is in the process of being liquidated. The assets are being deposited for, so that is what that is for. It is for fees and expenses relating to the disposal of assets and demolition of derelict buildings, things like that.

Mr. Indarsingh: Derelict buildings.

Hon. Imbert: Refurbishment of—this is a company in liquidation so there would be bungalows that would be refurbished. There would be other buildings that are abandoned, not used that have to be demolished. There would be fees paid to consultants, things like that.

Mr. Indarsingh: Well, the little knowledge I had of Caroni, the Sugar Manufacturing Company Limited did not own any bungalows, Mr. Minister, so I

cannot see how this \$5 million-plus allocation will be used to break down bungalows or refurbish bungalows, and so on.

Hon. Imbert: Okay, I am glad you cannot see, but those are the facts.

Mr. Indarsingh: Those are the facts?

Hon. Imbert: Refurbishing assets, demolishing things that are not required, paying for fees in expenses in the liquidation of the Sugar Manufacturing Company.

Mr. Indarsingh: Well, I hope the \$5 million allocation will be properly utilized.

Hon. Imbert: I hope so too.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Ms. Ramdial: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item 57: Caribbean Airlines Limited, in your 2019 Revised Estimate you had an allocation of 43.2 million and in 2020 you have an allocation of 77.4 million, an increase of 34.2, can you explain that, please?

Mr. Imbert: What line Item is that?

Madam Chairman: Item 57 on page 106.

Hon. Imbert: Okay. As you may be aware we have leased additional aircraft for the air bridge in 2019 and we expect to continue to do that in 2020. The Government takes responsibility for those costs. We have also taken over some debt servicing liabilities of Caribbean Airlines.

Ms. Ramdial: Minister, how many additional aircraft you intend to lease for this increased cost?

Hon. Imbert: I will get that for you, but I believe it is two.

Ms. Ramdial: Okay.

Hon. Imbert: I will get it for you. I will get it for you.

Ms. Ramdial: Thank you.

Hon. Imbert: “Doh hol meh to it doh.”

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Madam. Item 91: EXIMBANK-FOREX Facility, the data here says that the Actual was 35 million which gives us an idea of the demand at that level of the economy and developments in the economy. It was reduced to 10 million in Estimates in 2019 and out of that 10 million only 4 million was allocated. So given the pressing demands by exporters for forex, could the Minister explain why only \$6 million were provided?

Hon. Imbert: I think you misunderstand the facility.

Mr. Charles: Okay.

Hon. Imbert: I think you misunderstand.

Mr. Charles: Yeah, well, explain.

Hon. Imbert: The Forex Facility is US dollars.

Mr. Charles: Yeah, I agree.

Hon. Imbert: The manufacturers pay for that with TT dollars. So that, let us say, we convert US \$20 million, we in the Ministry of Finance do not need to give the Eximbank US \$20 million equivalent in TT. We just need to give them funding for managing that fund. You follow? So you cannot use this number to indicate that this is the amount of forex that is given to the—

Mr. Charles: No, but it is an indication of the level of involvement by the State.

Hon. Imbert: Not really, no, because all we are doing, we have a special window at the Central Bank and Eximbank draws down on those US dollars but it gets TT for it. Okay?

Mr. Charles: Yeah.

Hon. Imbert: So this is not an indication of the amount, just an indication of the management expenses. All right? But if you want further details I would get it for

you.

Mr. Charles: Okay.

Hon. Imbert: We can get it for you.

Mr. Charles: Okay good.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes, Madam Chair—

Madam Chairman: No, Central, Central—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Oh, Central, right, okay. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Tewarie: Okay. All right. Just a couple of questions here, Madam Chair. Item 68: Trinidad and Tobago International Financial Centre, this is basically the subvention to that. Is that what it is?

Hon. Imbert: Correct. Yes.

Dr. Tewarie: All right. Then InvesTT—

Madam Chairman: Item 89.

Dr. Tewarie:—I see nothing here, is that because it is in the Ministry of Trade and Industry?

Hon. Imbert: Correct.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay. [*Laughter*] No, I just want to make sure.

Hon. Imbert: I “doh know why everybody getting on for”. You are asking me, I am answering you.

Dr. Tewarie: No, I just want to make sure.

Hon. Imbert: I answered you—everybody carrying on.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay. Item 90: National Investment Fund Holding Company, now, I see the allocation here is 4 million. Is that a direct Government allocation for operating the fund?

Hon. Imbert: Yes. The company.

Dr. Tewarie: So they do not take money out of the fund?

Hon. Imbert: No.

Dr. Tewarie: There is no management expenses on the fund?

Hon. Imbert: No. It is set up so that all of the money that is earned in dividends from the companies, like Republic Bank, goes into the account for the benefit of the bondholders, but the company has expenses to manage—

Dr. Tewarie: Yeah, well, I understand that, I just wanted to clarify that it is Government.

Hon. Imbert: Yes. Yes. Yes.

Dr. Tewarie: All right. And then the final one I want to raise here is, now, you have two things here, Madam Chair, you have 91 which says Eximbank Forex Facility and you have numbers there, and then you have 95: EXIMBANK-Business Portal and you have numbers there—

Hon. Imbert: I will get more details for you. The Eximbank used to be under the Ministry of Trade and Industry, it was shifted to the Ministry of Finance about a year ago. I will get more details for you. So some of the expenses of the Eximbank that are paid by subvention by Government now accrue to Finance. So I will get more details for you on the business portal.

Dr. Tewarie: All right. And when you get the details—I just asked, Minister, if you could provide these details, how many companies have benefited from the facility and what is the quantum?

Hon. Imbert: Sure. Certainly.

Dr. Tewarie: Right. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas East.

Mr. Karim: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, might you be able to tell us, line Item 42: Caroni (1975) Limited, 14 million and now 12 million,

what are these moneys used for?

Hon. Imbert: Listen, this company has proven to be very difficult to wind up. Remember this is the old Caroni so a lot of assets, a lot of liabilities, a lot of claims, some of them in court, so that this is the expenses that are incurred in winding up this company. You need accountants, forensic examiners, things like that.

Mr. Karim: Line Item 70: Allutrint-Operating Expenses, we did not see anything for two years and now suddenly it appears, 1.78—

Hon. Imbert: Well, it is hopeful that going forward Alutrint will have some activities in 2020.

Mr. Karim: You have no activities right now?

Hon. Imbert: No.

Mr. Karim: And then the other one is 93: The Couva Medical and Multi-Training Facility Ltd, if you might tell us, again, what it is intended to be used for.

Hon. Imbert: I will get information, but we in the Ministry of Finance provide technical assistance, technical support, so that may be for hiring of auditors or something, but I will get the information for you.

Mr. Karim: Okay. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Line Item 57: Caribbean Airlines still, bearing in mind the Government gives this money to Caribbean Airlines, 43 million, 54 million, 77 million. Is this part of their accounting processes when they say they make a profit X? Is this gift from the Government, is this taken into consideration in their accounting procedures in terms of the determination of their real profitability?

Hon. Imbert: You notice I did not interrupt you.

Dr. Gopeesingh: No.

Hon. Imbert: So please do not interrupt me. It is not a gift, you should know that the cost of providing transportation on the air bridge far exceeds the fare, the \$300. The actual cost is much more than that. So that we are compensating, and governments in the past have done it, this is nothing new. My predecessor did it. You compensate Caribbean Airlines for the loss on the air bridge. So that we think that we need to provide a proper service for Tobagonians, people travelling to and forth. As you may have been aware, in the summer vacation there was an increased demand, we allowed them to rent a plane; we paid for it, and so on.

12.00 noon

To answer now your question: when they declare profits, they take account of Government support. So if you look at the advertisement that Caribbean Airlines has put out, they give the gross profit and then they deduct Government support and they give the net profit. I am happy to say that for the first time in umpteen years Caribbean Airlines is now profitable, even after you take account of any moneys coming to them from the Government.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I think an audit needs to be done into their—

Hon. Imbert: I just want to say that. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: They cook up those figures.

Hon. Imbert: I want to congratulate the board and management of Caribbean Airlines for taking that entity, where under the UNC it was losing \$1.5 billion a year, to now making a substantial profit under this PNM administration.

Dr. Gopeesingh: You make up those figures. We need to an audit into Caribbean Airlines.

Hon. Imbert: Yes we need to audit the 2010 to 2015 period where your Government lost \$4 billion—\$4 billion in Caribbean Airlines. Yes, we need to audit that.

Dr. Gopeesingh: They are boasting of a profit when they know that there is no profit. You are making up those figures now. We know that there is no profit in Caribbean Airlines. They cook up those figures.

Hon. Imbert: No, no, it is in all the documents. It is in the Parliament.

Dr. Gopeesingh: They cook up those figures. Caribbean Airlines cook up those figures.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni East, be gracious and allow somebody else an opportunity.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes, I am now.

Ms. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item 84, Tourism and Industrial Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited. I saw no allocations in 2018/2019, and in 2020 we have a \$200,000 allocation. Can you explain that?

Hon. Imbert: We will look into that. TIDCO is no longer operating. I will look into that. Maybe it is some residual claim or something that we have to deal with.

Ms. Ramdial: All right, great.

Hon. Imbert: Remember when you look here, if you look at this carefully, you are going to see state enterprises that are not the direct responsibility of the Ministry of Finance, but we have to take care of things like liquidation, winding-up expenses, things like that. So I assume it is that, but I will find out for you.

Ms. Ramdial: All right, thank you. Line Item 86, Tourism Development—

Hon. Imbert: Actually, I have just got confirmation, it is expenses associated with the liquidation of TIDCO.

Ms. Ramdial: Okay. Line Item 86, Tourism Development Company Limited. I am seeing an increase for 2020 by 7.97 million. Can you explain that increase please?

Hon. Imbert: Because we intend to grow tourism in 2020.

Ms. Ramdial: I am sure you do. Exactly where are those moneys intended to be spent, in what aspect?

Hon. Imbert: I think you can ask the Minister of Tourism when Tourism is before you.

Ms. Ramdial: Will do, thank you very much.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: I will give way, Madam Chair, my colleagues just raised it.

Hon. Imbert: Actually that is today. Tourism is being examined today, so it is not long from now.

Ms. Ramdial: Thanks for telling me what I already know.

Hon. Imbert: Well I am glad, because I only just discovered that.

Dr. Tewarie: Quick question, Minister. On 68, TTIFC, has this institution—did they bring in any investment for the last financial year?

Hon. Imbert: No, I would not say so. You would have had the issue of TTIFC during your administration. They have been looking at shared services. I think probably I should backtrack and say that is not a fair comment, because there has been a significant expansion in shared services among banks, for example. Scotia Bank has a facility in Chaguanas.

Dr. Tewarie: That was happening since 2014.

Hon. Imbert: I know. I am just saying that it started and it has expanded considerably. So that what IFC is focusing now of FINTECH and shared services, and that sort of things. So it is not fair to say they have not brought it in, but they are continuing to work in the financial sector to bring new technology to Trinidad, cashless payments, e-payments, that sort of thing. Okay?

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Bodies,

Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies. New book, page 135.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the 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 135. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration, page 136. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households. Item 009: Other Transfers.

Hon. Members, we will now return to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 07: Debt Servicing, page 108. That was the book we were on before. Item 001: Interest, Local Loans, page 108.

Dr. Gopeesingh: On the Taurus Services, Minister of Finance, could you tell us how much we still owe Taurus Services? We have been paying 37 million, 29 million, 21 million. Estimate now—so that is 37 and 29—66 and 21.

Hon. Imbert: You want to know how much we owe Taurus?

Dr. Gopeesingh: How much we still owe and how much we have paid so far to Taurus Services?

Hon. Imbert: I will get that for you.

Dr. Gopeesingh: The same for TIDCO.

Hon. Imbert: Okay, again we are servicing a loan for TIDCO. What do you want to know, what remains in the loan, the balance?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes, how much we have paid and how much we have balanced.

Hon. Imbert: That might be the road paving from 2000. It might be. I feel so.

Mr. Young: “When you messed up de Savannah.”

Hon. Imbert: I think it is that. I know it is that.

Madam Chairman: Item 009: Interest on Overdraft.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I just wanted to ask on ETeck as well, Madam Chair. I crave your indulgence on 22, Evolving Technologies.

Madam Chairman: That is page 109?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: What do you want to know?

Dr. Gopeesingh: What is that being used for now, that 16 million and 14 million?

Hon. Imbert: No, these are—what the Ministry of Finance does, when we allow state enterprises to borrow we provide them with the debt servicing. So that it would have been a loan taken out by Eteck years ago. If you want to know what it is for and how much money is available, how much still remaining to be paid, we can get that for you.

Dr. Gopeesingh: We will really appreciate that.

Hon. Imbert: Probably for the upgrade of the Magdalena.

Madam Chairman: So Member for Caroni East has taken us to Item 011: Principal Repayment Local Loans. So that is where we are, Item 011: Principal Repayment Local Loans. Member for Caroni Central, do you have a question under this?

Dr. Tewarie: Yes, a general question. Can the Minister say whether on the issue of debt there has been any increase in the percentage of debt servicing on the basis of revenue within the last fiscal year?

Hon. Imbert: Give me a second. I actually have that information right here. You want to know what percentage?

Dr. Tewarie: Just the increase, because I know for the year before.

Hon. Imbert: Not sure it is an increase; that is why I am checking. I remember it was going down. It has gone up a little bit in terms of—no, actually it has gone

down. It has gone down significantly. It is in the *Review of the Economy*, but it has gone down significantly.

Dr. Tewarie: Well that is why I am asking the question, Minister, because I found that kind of strange.

Hon. Imbert: In 2018 the total debt service was 8.9 billion, and in 2019 the total debt service was 7.2 billion, and revenue went up. So revenue increased from '18 to '19 and debt servicing went down. So the testimony percentage of revenue that debt servicing is, went down. But I will get the actual number for you if you want.

Dr. Tewarie: Thank you.

Hon. Imbert: Actually we have it here. It was 20.7 per cent in 2018, and it dropped to 15.6 per cent in 2019. So debt servicing dropped from 20.7 per cent of revenue, to 15.6 per cent of revenue in 2019. Performance PNM style. [Laughter] “Buh is ah fact, it gone down 5 per cent”.

Dr. Tewarie: Well, I would not argue with you because I cannot—

Hon. Imbert: It is in the *Review of the Economy*.

Dr. Tewarie: Right, right. That is why I am asking the question. I saw that in the *Review of the Economy*, and I just wanted you to confirm that that is in fact true, because I find it—I have to do my own checking, boy.

Hon. Imbert: I can assure you that the public servants who do the review are very careful with their numbers, and very accurate and honest.

Dr. Tewarie: I have no doubt. I will say nothing about the—

Hon. Imbert: It is the same people.

Dr. Tewarie:—about the technical people. I give them always the benefit of the doubt.

Hon. Imbert: We do not fudge the figures.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Madam Chair, I am a little puzzled with line Item 18, Minister

of Finance, which looks at restructuring of First Citizens Bank Limited. If this is an enterprise that is making profitability and declaring profitability, why should the State be burdened with having to pay a debt for First Citizens Bank, could you explain that, of \$22 million every year? So from '18, '19 we have paid 44 million so far, and we estimate to pay another 22. Why should the State be supporting an institution which claims to be making a profit?

Hon. Imbert: Okay. You have been around long enough so you know that First Citizens is an amalgamation of the National Commercial Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, the Workers Bank and the Penny Bank. Three banks that came together because the banks were on the verge of collapse. So in 1993—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Well I know that, I lost millions with Workers' Bank.

Hon. Imbert: I did not interrupt you when you were speaking.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Go ahead, millions, yes. I had plenty shares with them.

Hon. Imbert: In 1993, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago created First Citizens out of the ashes of these three failed institutions, and had to put in equity and working capital, and take over the liabilities of the failed institutions. So there was a \$350 million facility at that point in time, which is still in existence, which FCB is not responsible for, because when we created the bank we gave them a clean balance sheet. So the Government took responsibility for the bad debts and so on in those institutions. So that is what that is for.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Thank you for the clarity on that, Minister. I appreciate it. Can I just ask you on Caribbean Airlines as well, is this repayment part of Mr. Manning's administration \$2.2 billion restructuring of BWIA in 2008?

Hon. Imbert: I do not think so. I think this is when you mortgaged the aircraft to subsidize the billion-dollar losses in the 2010 to 2015 period. The aircraft were brought free of debt around 2011/2012, and then with cash, and then the UNC

mortgaged the aircraft and borrowed money against the aircraft. This is what this is all about. This is a testimony to your poor management of that airline.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Where is the payment of the \$2.2 billion that former Prime Minister, Mr. Manning, and when you were part of the Government, where is that located.

Hon. Imbert: Which line Item is that?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Caribbean Airlines.

Hon. Imbert: But where is it? Show me; show me the line Item.

Dr. Gopeesingh: It is a follow-up question to that.

Hon. Imbert: But where is the line Item?

Dr. Gopeesingh: 23.

Hon. Imbert: That is not it. This is for when you mortgaged the planes.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I am asking you. Caribbean Airlines existing now, which is the now restructured company from BWIA. A debt was incurred during Mr. Manning's administration which you were part of and the Prime Minister was part of. Where is that in terms of the Caribbean Airlines repayment?

Hon. Imbert: No debt was incurred.

Dr. Gopeesingh: No debt was incurred? So you took 2.2 billion from the recurrent expenditure to service BWIA then?

Hon. Imbert: Which line Item are you speaking about?

Dr. Gopeesingh: You know what I am talking about. You are just trying to evade.

Hon. Imbert: We are in 2020, which line Item are you are talking about? You are talking about something that happened 15 years ago.

Madam Chairman: We will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Minister of Finance, we have moved on please. *Draft Estimates of*

Development Programme. Sub-Head 09: Consolidated Fund, page 47. Item 003: Economic Infrastructure. Member for Caroni Central.

12.15 p.m.

Dr. Tewarie: Ma'am, I was going to just ask the Minister to clarify what "overdraft" means in this? If it refers—

Madam Chairman: I think we are on the Development Programme.

Hon. Imbert: We are on the Development Programme now. We have gone too far to tack back.

Dr. Tewarie: Is it the Central Bank overdraft alone?

Madam Chairman: Item 003: Economic Infrastructure, page 47; Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. And Members will note this spans two pages and therefore, I will announce the project groups. A. Administrative Services; F. Public Buildings; L. Customs and Excise Division.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 18 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister, thank you, PS and your team.

We go onto Head 20: Pensions and Gratuities. We are at page 123 of the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure.*

Head 20: Pensions and Gratuities, \$50,000,000.

Madam Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of Finance to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Imbert: Sure. Just give me the Head number, again.

Madam Chairman: Head 20.

Hon. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Chairman. The Ministry of Finance, as I indicated previously, has a number of areas of responsibility and activity. One of them is the Treasury Division which is responsible for the payment of all pensions

of public officers, the gratuities of public officers, teachers' pensions, naval and military pensions, retiring allowances for MPs, Presidents' pension, et cetera. And this particular Head is simply an account of the allocations for the payment of these Items, Pensions and Gratuities across the board throughout the public service.

Question proposed: That Head 20 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$50,000,000 for Head 20: Pensions and Gratuities is comprised of moneys proposed for 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: Households. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Minister, I am asking.

Hon. Imbert: Sure.

Mr. Charles: This 04, an allocation of 3.2 million, the Estimates for 2020, does it include the pensions in relation to the promised indexation of pensions?—one. And two, the increased benefits given to daily-paid workers?

Hon. Imbert: The allocation at this time does not provide for that. We had indicated that this will be done in fiscal 2020, so what you are going to see in the mid-year is the finalized figures. Okay?

Question put and agreed to.

Head 20 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much, director of pensions.

Hon. Imbert: Comptroller of Accounts.

Madam Chairman: Comptroller of Accounts. [*Crosstalk*] Sorry, Comptroller of Accounts.

Hon. Imbert: You have to go by her for your pension.

Madam Chairman: I am sorry. Thank you so much, [*Crosstalk*] Minister of

Finance and all the technocrats from the Ministry of Finance and the other divisions.

Head 35: Ministry of Tourism, \$97,208,469.

Madam Chairman: Head 35: Ministry of Tourism, \$97,208,469. I will now invite the Minister of Tourism to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes. Minister of Tourism.

Hon. Mitchell: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the Ministry of Tourism is mandated to provide leadership and strategic direction for the sector, formulate policy to guide the tourism development, collaborate with all stakeholders on matters related to tourism, and to facilitate and monitor the offer and access to tourism incentives in accordance with the Tourism Development Act.

The Ministry continues to be responsible for the management, maintenance and upgrade of five sites and attractions, namely: the Maracas beach facility, the Vessigny beach facility, Las Cuevas beach facility, and the La Brea Pitch Lake Visitor Centre. And over the next fiscal year the Ministry will complete handover of management and operations of the cruise and airports tourism offices.

As you are aware, public sector management for the tourism sector has transitioned away from the old TDC model into the creation of two destination marketing and management entities, one for Trinidad, and one for Tobago in recognition of each island's unique selling proposition.

Tourism Trinidad which falls under the Ministry of Tourism, and the Tobago Tourism Agency managed by the THA are now operationalized and have begun to add value in the turnaround of the tourism sectors on each island with improvement seen in several performance indicators.

[Mr. Forde in the Chair]

Over the next year both entities will continue to work towards increasing visitor

arrivals and tourism's overall contribution to GDP, improving Trinidad's and Tobago's tourism product offerings thereby enhancing visitor experience, and building compelling and internationally recognized destination brands in the new global landscape. I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Question proposed: That Head 35 stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$97,208,469 for Head 35: the Ministry of Tourism is comprised of moneys proposed for the 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 will now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 234, and we are in the recurrent expenditure booklet. I recognize the Member for Couva North.

Ms. Ramdial: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Minister, line 08, Vacant Posts – Salaries & C.O.L.A. (without incumbents), I am seeing no allocations for 2019 Revised Estimates, and an allocation of 350,000 for 2020. Can you explain that?

Hon. Mitchell: No allocations in the Revised Estimates because no positions were filled by the service commissions.

Ms. Ramdial: Right.

Hon. Mitchell: So in 2020 over the fiscal, we expect it is likely that the research assistant II position will be filled, so the provision is there.

Ms. Ramdial: All right. And line Item 14, Remuneration to members of Cabinet-Appointed Committees. I am seeing a sharp increase by \$233,000. Can you tell me about this committee or committees? What would account for such increases?

Hon. Mitchell: Yes. So there are two Cabinet-appointed committees that began work in last fiscal whose work will continue over the next fiscal. The way these Cabinet committees are remunerated, they are only remunerated at the end of the

committee's work. So there are two committees, the National Tourism Policy Committee, and the Tourism Investment Advisory Committee.

Ms. Ramdial: Okay. And how many persons are on these committees if you have the info at this time?

Hon. Mitchell: On the Tourism Investment Advisory Committee there are nine persons on that committee. And on the National Tourism Policy Committee there are 14 persons on that committee.

Ms. Ramdial: And what is the expected duration of these two committees? How long?

Hon. Mitchell: We expect the work of the National Tourism Policy Committee to be completed before year's end, and the Tourism Investment Advisory Committee, we expect the work to be completed by the second quarter of this fiscal.

Ms. Ramdial: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you. Item 16, Contract Employment, there is a sharp \$5 million increase in the Estimates for 2020.

Hon. Mitchell: So we are skipping ahead, eh.

Mr. Charles: I am skipping?

Mr. Chairman: Member, no. We have not reached there as yet. Member for Mayaro, are you okay? Item 001: General Administration, page 234. Member for Couva North.

Ms. Ramdial: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Minister, line Item 05: Telephones, I am seeing a sharp increase for 2020 by 360,000. Can you explain that?

Hon. Mitchell: I am sorry. What—?

Ms. Ramdial: 05, line Item under Goods and Services, Telephones.

Mr. Chairman: Telephones, page 234, Minister, 05: Telephones.

Hon. Mitchell: Okay. So the Estimate in 2019 was \$1 million. It was revised onwards to 439,300. And in 2020 there is an Estimate of \$800,000.

Ms. Ramdial: An increase by 360.

Hon. Mitchell: It is actually—sorry?

Ms. Ramdial: An increase by 360,000.

Hon. Mitchell: Right. Well, it is actually a decrease from the 2019 Estimates, and that is because we have been very economical in our use of cell phones and telephones at Ministries across the board.

Ms. Ramdial: I guess they got a new Minister. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Members. Sub-Head 02: Good and Services, page 234; Item 001: General Administration. Member for Couva North.

Ms. Ramdial: Thank you. Minister, line Item 10: Office Stationary and Supplies, a sharp increase by 625,000. Can you explain that?

Hon. Mitchell: Well, the increase is to make provision for increased office supplies for promotions at the cruise and airport offices for the cruise season, et cetera.

Ms. Ramdial: All right. Line Item 12: Material and Supplies, another sharp increase by 289,000.

Hon. Mitchell: Yes. So under this Vote over the next fiscal we intend to purchase two items of software, project management software, as well as statistical software, analysis software.

Ms. Ramdial: All right. And line Item 16: Contract Employment, a sharp increase by 4.9 million. Can you tell me how many contracts employees you intend to bring on board for fiscal 2020?

Hon. Mitchell: So there are 37 contract positions on the structure presently, 25

positions have expired, and there are 12 contracts still existing. The restructuring note is presently before PMCD. We expect over the next fiscal to have those positions renewed, those expired positions renewed, so this increase is to take account of that.

Ms. Ramdial: Okay. Line Item 27: Official Overseas Travel, another sharp increase by 657,000 for 2020. Can you account for that?

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Mitchell: This is for persons in the Ministry, the officers of the Ministry to attend CTO meetings, as well as trade shows, et cetera, overseas, and to assist the TTL and the Tobago agency in their marketing activities.

Ms. Ramdial: Okay.

Hon. Mitchell: So we expect to increase our attendance at these trade shows now that the TTL and Tobago, they are operationalized.

Ms. Ramdial: Line Item 37: Janitorial Services, I am seeing another sharp increase by 1.3 million. Can you account for this?

12.30 p.m.

Hon. Mitchell: One second. This is to cater for any increase in the janitorial contracts that may occur over the next year. At present the Ministry is responsible for not just the head office but also the cruise office, the airport office as well as the five sites and attractions.

Ms. Ramdial: And line Item 43: Security Services, another sharp increase by 971,000.

Hon. Mitchell: Also to cater for any increased cost, similarly that may occur over the next fiscal.

Ms. Ramdial: Okay, line Item 62: Promotions, Publicity and Printing, I am seeing an increase by 12.4 million. Minister, can you account for this?

Hon. Mitchell: Yes, well this is the increase over the Revised Estimates. If you look at the 2019 Estimates, 14 million was estimated. Now, under this Vote Item the usual expenditure is catered for advertising, et cetera. But specifically in the Ministry of Tourism this Vote is also used for the marketing of the destination, so it is actually shared with Tourism Trinidad. So, Tourism Trinidad they have a number of activities that they want to launch and activate over the next fiscal, and this amount will cater for that.

Ms. Ramdial: Okay, would you be so kind to provide a list of these strategies that you intend to implement for this 12 million?

Hon. Mitchell: As well as sponsorship as well, I am sorry. Yes, I can provide that in writing.

Ms. Ramdial: Some sort of info, right. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Member, you are okay? Member for Oropouche West, and then I will go to Couva North—Couva South.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Just to follow up with Couva North's question, hon. Minister, under line Item 62: Promotions, Publicity and Printing, we had the Estimate of 14 million, but if the thrust is to promote tourism why is it that only 1.5 was used?

Hon. Mitchell: No, 1.5 was not used. Approximately 5 million was expended, but 1.5 is under the Revised Estimates.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Yes, but it means that you had money that you—

Hon. Mitchell: No, it does not mean that 1.5 million was used. It just means that at a particular time during the preparation for the budget they would look at the amount of money that was actually used, that time may have been August, and they would put Revised Estimate. It is just an estimate of how much would have been used.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: No, because the Revised—you brought up the Revised to over 12 million, so you correlate it with the 2019 Estimate for the 14 million. So my question, it is really only 1.5 million when you have money there to promote tourism.

Hon. Mitchell: No, I can confirm to you that \$5 million was expended under this Vote.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Okay, but it does not reflect here.

Hon. Mitchell: I know, but I am confirming that to you now.

Mr. Chairman: All right, Members. Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, under Contract Employment—

Mr. Chairman: Line number, please?

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes, 16—you have this increased allocation of \$4,990,544, and if I could recollect just a two couple moments ago, you used a very nice term that there were 37 existing contract officers and 25 of these contracts expired—I like how you used that term—and 12 were still existing, and is it that these 25 that expired, are you going to rehire them, and how are you going to rehire them? Via public advertisements, inviting applications from nationals or it would be handled very quietly?

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mitchell: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I am a part of a very have transparent Government and we do everything with transparency in mind. These positions will be advertised when they are renewed. With respect to the 25—

Mr. Indarsingh: May I?

Hon. Mitchell: No, just now, let me answer.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, go ahead.

Hon. Mitchell: With respect to the 25 positions—

Mr. Chairman: Minister. Hold on, we would come back to you Member. Go ahead.

Hon. Mitchell: With respect to the 25 position that have expired, what usually happens is that they transition to short-term employment until the positions are renewed by Cabinet.

Mr. Chairman: Supplemental, Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: I am trying to follow the Minister when he said that these positions will be advertised when they are renewed, so I guess—

Mr. Chairman: No, I think he was clear there.

Hon. Mitchell: The positions will be advertised. Once they are renewed the positions will be advertised and the usual recruitment process will be undertaken.

Mr. Indarsingh: What is the usual recruitment process?

Mr. Chairman: Right, Members hold on, one second. I think we are getting into the semantics now. All right. It will be advertised as he said.

Mr. Indarsingh: Advertised where?

Hon. Mitchell: In the newspapers.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, you just want to give a lil brief briefly in terms of where it would be advertised?

Hon. Mitchell: In the newspapers.

Mr. Chairman: Right, the Member for Naparima.

Hon. Mitchell: The daily newspapers.

Mr. Chairman: Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Member.

Mr. Charles: Item 62: Promotions, Publicity and Printing, 14 million allocated, and you said last year the figure spent was 5 million out of the 14, and the question is, I am asking here, when will citizens see one ad on TV anywhere in the world advertising Trinidad and Tobago, as we see with Barbados, St. Lucia, et cetera? And if the strategy is direct marketing to the business groups and whatnot, could you give us an indication of what is the outreach to those business groups to come to Trinidad?

Hon. Mitchell: Presently, the TTL has developed a one-year strategic plan, and in the strategic plan all those matters that you are speaking about are outlined. With respect to television ads, I mean that is a particular strategy of other jurisdictions. In our jurisdiction in Trinidad perhaps digital marketing would be more—not only more economical but they would be better reaching the target market.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 236. Item 001: General Administration, page 236. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 236. Item 001: Regional Bodies, page 236; Item 003: United Nations Organisations, page 236; Item 007: Households, page 237; Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises, page 237; and I recognize Couva North.

Ms. Ramdial: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Minister, 04: Tourism Trinidad Destination Management Company Limited, I am seeing an increase for the 2020 Estimates by 2.3 million, please can you tell me the purpose for the increase?

Hon. Mitchell: So, the TTL just completed, not a recruitment exercise, where 19 persons were recruited, so these additional funds will take care of that personnel expenditure salaries from the additional persons recruited.

Ms. Ramdial: Can you give us a sense of how many projects they have completed in the last fiscal year, and what is the nature of these projects?

Hon. Mitchell: I can give you that in writing.

Ms. Ramdial: All right. One other question, you have the 2019 Revised Estimates at 7.9 million, is this the actual amount that was utilized, because I know previously, in a previous Vote you were saying that it was more than the actual Vote? More than the Revised Estimates which was—

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister.

Hon. Mitchell: Yes, 7.968. Yes.

Ms. Ramdial: 7.9, all utilized?

Hon. Mitchell: Yes.

Ms. Ramdial: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: Moving on. Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*, new book, Development Programme. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund, page 84. Page 84, Members. Item, pardon?

Mr. Karim: Is this a replacement page?

Ms. Ramdial: Yes, there is a replacement page, page 84.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, there is a replacement page. Thanks for that information. A replacement page, and we are on page 84, Consolidated Fund, Item 003: Economic Infrastructure, and it is pages 84 and 85, and there is a replacement page. Member for Couva North.

Ms. Ramdial: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Minister, line Item 019: Tourism Sites and Attractions Upgrade. In 2019 Estimates was 8 million, the Revised Estimate in 2019 you actually utilized 3.4, if that figure is correct, and the 2020 Estimate is 13 million, can you tell me which sites and attractions you intend to upgrade for 2020, and what were actually done in 2019 for the Revised Estimates at 3.4 million?

Hon. Mitchell: A lot of the works are ongoing. Over the last fiscal we commenced upgrading works to Manzanilla, Vessigny. The restaurants were upgraded. The concessioner area at La Brea, we installed CCTV, security lights at Vessigny, Manzanilla and La Brea, and outstanding payments were also paid. So, it really a continuation. The projects that we expect to execute in fiscal 2020, the completion of the works at the Manzanilla beach facility, completion of the works at Vessigny beach facility, at La Brea as well. We intend to commence works at the Galera Point Lighthouse in Toco, we intend very proudly to construct a lookout at Paramin, and to complete some more corrective works at the Maracas beach facility. Oh, and Las Cuevas, we intend to install some underground waste and water storage.

Ms. Ramdial: Okay. Line Item 28: Establishment of Trinidad and Tobago Tourism Regulatory and Licensing Authority, I see no allocations for 2020. Is it that that authority has been established?

Hon. Mitchell: No, the project? No. The authority has not been established. The authority has to be established through an Act of Parliament.

Ms. Ramdial: “Um-hmm.”

Hon. Mitchell: You would see expenditure in 2018, Actual expenditure of \$160,000. That was used to procure the draft Bill and the draft policy. We have also recognized that in order to implement compulsory regulations for the tourism sector a regulatory impact assessment has to be done, and over the next fiscal plans for proceeding with this project will be undertaken, and that is why you see no expenditure.

Ms. Ramdial: Okay. Line Item 029: Consultancy for the Development of a Strategic Tourism Incentive Plan. The 2019 Estimates was 500,000 and I am seeing 2020 Estimate at the same figure. You care to explain at what stage are you

at?

Hon. Mitchell: Yes, so \$29,217 was actually expended.

Ms. Ramdial: How much?

Hon. Mitchell: \$29,217. Now, although the line Item refers to a consultancy, previously you would have asked a question about Cabinet-appointed committees, so the Ministry took a decision that we really have the competency in house, so we appointed—this is the review of this strategic tourism incentive plan is being done by a Cabinet-appointed committee, and we expect the committee to be completed with its work by the second quarter. The main expenditure Items would be the cost to hold consultations, travel, airfare, et cetera.

Ms. Ramdial: And how many persons on that committee, Minister?

Hon. Mitchell: I just gave it to you.

Ms. Ramdial: Earlier? Okay. Okay, so let us move on. Line Item 030: Development of a National Tourism Policy (2018), 1.8 million. At what stage are you at, at this national tourism policy?

Hon. Mitchell: Right, so we are at a very advanced stage, as well a Cabinet-appointed committee is charged with completing the revision of the National Tourism Policy, and before year's end we should have the completion of that revision, and the completion of the report by the committee.

Ms. Ramdial: The Revised Estimate of 345,000 was expended on what exactly for this National Tourism Policy?

Hon. Mitchell: Similarly, hosting of consultations, travel, travel to Tobago, travel to all over the country, those types of expenses.

12.45 p.m.

Ms. Ramdial: So the \$1.8 million estimated for 2020 would be for?

Hon. Mitchell: So, once we are completed with the revision of the tourism policy,

the next step is to review and complete the master plan. And the additional funds would be utilized in the completion of the tourism master plan.

Ms. Ramdial: So all of your consultations are over?

Hon. Mitchell: I believe there is one more or two more consultations for the completion of the review of the policy.

Ms. Ramdial: Where are you going to be having those consultations?

Hon. Mitchell: Tobago.

Ms. Ramdial: Okay.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, in a response to a question that was posed by the Member for Couva North—

Mr. Chairman: Give me the line Item also please.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: I believe it is 028, where you indicated that \$29,217 was expended. Is that the line Item?

Hon. Mitchell: No, that is 029.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Okay, 29, and therefore—so it is 29 I am asking on. You said that what you recognized is that you already have the competency in-house. So you are not going outside, you are utilizing in-house persons for—

Hon. Mitchell: Yeah. We are not doing a tender to acquire a consultant. So it is being done by a Cabinet appointed Committee.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Can you advise, who are the persons who make up this team?

Hon. Mitchell: I will do that again.

Mr. Chairman: No, one second. You are asking for what, the names of the individuals or how many persons?

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: No, she asked for the numbers, I am asking for the names.

Mr. Chairman: You want the names?

Hon. Mitchell: Yeah.

Mr. Chairman: Could you provide it?

Hon. Mitchell: I will provide it in writing. I have it here, but I will provide it in writing.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: You prefer to provide it in writing?

Hon. Mitchell: I do.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: And also, because I would like to know the relevant competencies that each person really comes with.

Hon. Mitchell: I can provide that now.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: You could provide it now?

Hon. Mitchell: Yes. So the first person has: Tourism, Hospitality, Consultancy and Education. Yes, specialization in those areas. Second person: policy, planning and research, tourism, health, education and protocol and international relations. Third person: a physical planner, a public sector management and policy advisor. Fourth: tourism management, policy development, consultancy and education. The fifth person: arts, cultural education, tourism and management. The sixth person: digital marketing, business management, communication and advertising. Seven: sports management and promotion. Eight: hospitality, tourism and consultancy. Nine: economic tourism consultancy, education. Ten: hospitality, tourism and consultancy. Eleven: research and education. Twelve: architecture in education; and thirteen and fourteen: tourism and hospitality.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Is there a stipend that these persons will be collecting?

Hon. Mitchell: Yes, there is a stipend. For the chairman it is \$1,400 a month; deputy chairman \$900 a month; and for the other members, it is \$800 per month.

Ms. Ramdial: Thank you, Chair. Minister, line Item 056, IT Infrastructure Upgrade. Your 2019 Estimate was \$460,000, you only utilized \$47,500 in the

Revised Estimate and for 2020, you have \$427,000. Can you tell me what this entails?

Hon. Mitchell: This project is actually completed.

Ms. Ramdial: Oh, it is completed.

Hon. Mitchell: Yeah, it is completed. And the money, the provision made here is for the payment of the works. The Ministry upgraded its IT infrastructure to mitigate against downtime in the event of disaster, hardware failure, virus intrusion and other risks faced by cyber-attacks.

Ms. Ramdial: Line Item 057: Operationalization of Trinidad Tourism Ltd. The 2019 Estimate was 10 million you only utilized 1.7 in the Revised and you have an Estimate of 2.4. Exactly what is this going to be used for?

Hon. Mitchell: So the 2.4, the provision there is made to discharge some outstanding bills that we have at the Ministry. This operationalization of TTL was for the cost related to operationalization, like, purchasing office equipment, IT equipment, software recruitment, et cetera, vehicle, et cetera. So that is what it is doing to be used for, for the payment of outstanding bills.

Ms. Ramdial: Line Item 058: Maracas Beach Facility Management Project. You have an Estimate for 2020 at 2.5 million. Exactly at what stage are you at with this project and what is this 2.5 million going to be used for?

Hon. Mitchell: Yeah. This project we awarded a facilities management contract to UDeCOTT for the maintenance of the Maracas Beach Facility. The additional cost will take into consideration the increase cost of security and the engagement of a wastewater treatment operator.

So what UDeCOTT does, they do mechanical, electrical and plumbing maintenance, general infrastructure maintenance, oversight of grounds maintenance, oversight of the vendors, oversight of car park and wash room

operation, security services, fire suppression systems, landscaping, garbage removal, pest control, et cetera. So they managed the facility that is Maracas.

Ms. Ramdial: Okay. Line Item 059: Development of a Tourism Edition and Awareness Programme for Destination Trinidad and Tobago. I am seeing that allocation of 417,000, but only 123,000.4 was utilized in 2019. Exactly what are you going to utilize this 400,000 and where in your awareness programme?

Hon. Mitchell: So this project is well advanced. It is called “Time Tourism In Me”. It is an awareness and education project where we create a series of animated videos to educate the population. And it is really aimed at, let us say the average 12 year old, where we educate the population on the benefits of tourism as well as the tourism sector, et cetera.

Ms. Ramdial: On which stations are they aired on?

Hon. Mitchell: So it is animated video. So it will be pushed digitally.

Ms. Ramdial: Line Item 060: Development of a Theatre District. We are seeing here 2019 Estimate, 500,000. Nothing was utilized in the Revised Estimate of 2019 and now you have an allocation of 400,000 in 2020. How far are you along with this particular project?

Hon. Mitchell: So the conceptual framework and the project proposal, they are both complete. The project will now be handed over to the Tourism Trinidad Limited for completion. We expect that it will be completed over the next fiscal.

Ms. Ramdial: Where is this Theatre District?

Hon. Mitchell: No, it is really an online marketing tool that would market the creative sector, but in particular, the performing arts. So all the theatre productions that you see in all our very, I would say, high grade theatre facilities across the island, this website will be used to market all the productions that will be going on there.

Ms. Ramdial: Okay. And you have three new projects, 61 to 63, new projects introduced, we will go line by line, 61 Tourism Trinidad Limited, 11.7 million. Clarify a little bit.

Hon. Mitchell: So this new line Item, these funds will really be expended on the core function of Tourism Trinidad Limited. That is a market, advertising, branding, website development, attending trade shows, sponsorship of various local tourism events in Trinidad by the TTL. So this is really to fund the engine room of what the TTL is to become.

Mr. Chairman: And I presume you will want the same thing for 62 and 63.

Ms. Ramdial: 62 and 63, yes.

Mr. Chairman: So Minister, 62 and 63 you can give an update one time.

Hon. Mitchell: So 62, if you are aware, this is to fund the rebates that we offer through the TAUP Programme, Tourism Accommodation and Upgrade Programme. This will now be under the TTL. Prior to being with the Ministry it was with the TDC. What they do is they encourage accommodation players in the tourism sector.

Ms. Ramdial: Exactly how many hotel and guest houses have benefited from this incentive project?

Hon. Mitchell: I will have to give you that in writing.

Ms. Ramdial: Line Item 63: Tourism Stakeholder Enterprise Programme for 413,000. Explain that please.

Hon. Mitchell: This will now be under the TTL and this programme is one that will assist the small tourism operators. It is really an education and Tourism Development Programme to encourage them to develop a service quality, a service culture, develop and customize programmes, to facilitate attitude and behavioural change and develop plans for monitoring and evaluation in the tourism sector.

Mr. Chairman: Moving on. The Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: My colleague asked a relevant question, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, pages 85 and 86; Infrastructure Development Fund, page 195, Item 004: Social Infrastructure, page 195. And I recognize the Member for Couva North.

Ms. Ramdial: Thank you very much, Chair. Minister, I am seeing an allocation for recreation and culture for 6.5 million. Please explain on that, location, cost. Well actually, I am seeing it for the Maracas Beach Facility Improvement Projects, 6.5 million.

Hon. Mitchell: So that is for the Phase 2 to the Maracas Beach.

Ms. Ramdial: How many phases to this project, Minister?

Hon. Mitchell: This is the second phase.

Ms. Ramdial: And that is it?

Hon. Mitchell: We hope.

Ms. Ramdial: So 6.5 million will entail what kind of works.

Hon. Mitchell: All right. So types of work that it will, the upgrade of detention pump and pond to supply generators, back-up generators, to supply solar lighting, to supply general landscaping, and also to provide an expansion of the car park.

Ms. Ramdial: Minister, the vendors on Maracas Beach had some issues. Has that been sorted out?

Hon. Mitchell: No. Well, what issues are you talking about?

Ms. Ramdial: The location where they are now at in terms of selling—

Hon. Mitchell: So this Phase 2 will also treat with that.

Ms. Ramdial: How so?

Hon. Mitchell: Right. So if you visited Maracas—

Ms. Ramdial: I have.

Hon. Mitchell:—recently.

Ms. Ramdial: Quite recently, I have.

Hon. Mitchell: I am sure you have. You look like you visit Maracas often.

Ms. Ramdial: A lot, yes.

Hon. Mitchell: So you visit you would see that there is no—provision was not made under the first phase for a seating area for persons who purchased their bake and shark, et cetera. So you see that they have placed some tents there to observers across the island. It seems a bit unsightly. What we propose to do is to standardize and to build some proper seating areas for these vendors so that issue would be taken care of.

Ms. Ramdial: Okay. And how soon would that—

Hon. Mitchell: Over the next fiscal.

Ms. Ramdial: Okay.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 35 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Mr. PS and thank you to your senior executives from the Ministry of Tourism. Thanks for coming.

1.00 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Members, we will now go to Head 37: Integrity Commission. So welcome Registrar of the Integrity Commission and to the senior executives of the Integrity Commission. Welcome.

Head 37: Integrity Commission, \$12,353,960.

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

Hon. Imbert: The Integrity Commission was established by Act of Parliament,

Integrity in Public Life Act, Chap. 22:01 for the purpose of regulating the conduct of persons exercising public functions to preserve and promote the integrity of public officials and institutions. It is the premier institution for the promotion and preservation of integrity in all affairs to make Trinidad and Tobago a corruption-free society.

Question proposed: That the Head 37 stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$12,353,960 for Head 37, the Integrity Commission, is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimate of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*.

Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 239. Item 001: General Administration, page 239. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, page 239. Item 001: General Administration, pages 239 to 240. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 241—

Dr. Gopeesingh: No, no. You moved a little too fast there.

Mr. Chairman: No, hold on, Member. This particular Item?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Page 240 on 001.

Mr. Chairman: I am now going into that one.

Hon. Imbert: He “eh reach there yet.”

Dr. Gopeesingh: “Yuh eh reach there yet?”

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, page 239. Item 001: General Administration, pages 239 and page 240. Proceed, Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes, 240, the Contract Employment and Short-term Employment—

Mr. Chairman: Line item?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Line Items 10 and 22.

Mr. Chairman: Question?

Dr. Gopeesingh: In 2019, approximately \$4.8 million was allocated for Contract Employment; only \$700,000 was spent. And then Short-term Employment, 1.9 was allocated and 2.2 was spent. Could you give an explanation of what happened to the Contract Employment? I see it has come back to 2.877. If the Minister can explain what happened there?

Hon. Imbert: There would have been an intention on the part of the Commission to employ people in fiscal 2019 but they require the requisite approvals. The matter is under consideration at this point in time, so we have put a provision into 2020 in anticipation that they would be able to hire more staff on contract, because they have more responsibilities now. There are more boards, and so on, that they have to deal with.

Dr. Gopeesingh: So they would have to get the approval from whom, the Ministry of Finance?

Hon. Imbert: All contract positions have to be approved by Cabinet, as you know. It is a process.

Dr. Gopeesingh: But you are starving an institution that you require. But why you taking so long to do these things for them? That is a whole year—

Hon. Imbert: That is a false statement.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Uh?

Hon. Imbert: That is a false statement.

Dr. Gopeesingh: No, no. If it took a year to give them the approval and you come in this year to give them the approval—

Hon. Imbert: You have no data to back up that statement.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Well, based on what you just said.

Hon. Imbert: I never said anything like what you said.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, Members, okay. Oropouche West. [*Crosstalk*] Minister of Finance, Caroni East, please.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Excuse, Member. Just fix your mike, please.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Sorry. Line number 23: Fees. Hon. Minister, from 25,000 to now 270, 000, you could give me an explanation for this increase?

Mr. Chairman: Line Item 23: Fees, Minister of Finance. And your question again, Member?

Hon. Imbert: An explanation from 25,000 to 270,000, an increase of 244,000.

Mr. Chairman: Clarification on the fees, why the increase.

Hon. Imbert: The Integrity Commission from time to time would need expert legal advice on how to deal with an errant declarant among other matters, and that is what that is for.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: And line Item number 66: Hosting of Conferences, Seminars and other Functions, we move from 38,000 to 466,000.

Hon. Imbert: Well, in any given year there would be a different approach to information and education. One of the functions of the Integrity Commission is to educate the public and educate officeholders, so that it would vary from year to year. Some years they may have workshops and seminars, other years, conferences, and so on. This is an allocation for a proposed event in 2020.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Thank you.

Mr. Charles: Item 62.

Mr. Chairman: 62? Promotions, Publicity and Printing. Proceed.

Mr. Charles: A significant increase of 289. Would the Minister give the undertaking that he would get his errant Ministers to fulfil their Integrity

Commission form so there would be no publication in the media to—

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Thanks, Member.

Hon. Imbert: That is so irrelevant.

Mr. Chairman: Caroni East.

Hon. Imbert: Major transgressions on your side.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, Minister. I dealt with that.

Hon. Imbert: Your side.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, thank you. Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: After line Item 99, you have the total amount that was for General Administration. In 2019 it was 9.571 million and the Revised Estimate was 4.959 million. So almost less than 50 per cent was given to the Integrity Commission. Why were they not given the full amount of 9.5 million and just given \$4.9 million?

Hon. Imbert: Again, a false statement.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Well, it is here. It is here. It is recorded.

Hon. Imbert: It is a false statement. It is what is required. If you look at the Items where the actual expenditure was less than the allocation, it is under Contract Employment and Short-Term Employment. We gave them what was required.

Dr. Gopeesingh: So did you give them what was asked by them?

Hon. Imbert: We gave them what was required.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Required by you or by them?

Hon. Imbert: I have answered.

Dr. Gopeesingh: No, you have not answered. They would have asked, but if you think that this is what they require, you will give them what they require. But if they ask for their full amount and you did not give it to them, something is wrong. They required X, you required Y, Y was given but X was not given.

Hon. Imbert: That is a false equivalency. We gave them everything they asked for.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Well, I am sure they will probably speak about it.

Hon. Imbert: I am speaking now. We gave them everything they asked for. I just checked and that is the truth, not your fake news.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I cannot believe the Integrity Commission needs 9.6 million in 2019 and they only asked for 4.9.

Hon. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, I need to deal with this. The Member is making up stories. That is the allocation and they were given everything they requested. Stop making up stories. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: Okay, fine. Oropouche? Member for Tabaquite?

Mr. Charles: “Dey know yuh cheap so dey doh ask.”

Dr. Rambachan: I am following up on the Member for Caroni East.

Mr. Chairman: No. I need the line Item first.

Dr. Rambachan: The line Item is 22.

Mr. Chairman: Fine. Short-term Employment.

Dr. Rambachan: Sorry, not 22; 16. Sorry. Okay?

Mr. Chairman: Fine.

Dr. Rambachan: In a number of cases a lot of people have not gotten back clearances for a year, maybe two years, and one wonders if there is this request for that amount of Contract Employment. Was that contract employment, employment for people who would have been—I do not want to use “assessing”—looking at the forms and doing the necessary work so that people can get their clearance certificates, and so on? What kind of employment were we talking about?

Hon. Imbert: It is across the board throughout the organization.

Dr. Rambachan: And they only used 700,000? Is it that they could not find

people, or is it that—

Hon. Imbert: I answered that already, you know.

Dr. Rambachan: I know you answered it. It is just that I am concerned—

Hon. Imbert: You know I answered it and you are asking it again?

Mr. Chairman: Minister, Minister. Proceed, Member for Tabaquite.

Dr. Rambachan: You know, the Minister has a habit of calling people “dotish”, and what have you.

Mr. Chairman: No, no—

Hon. Imbert: No, no, no, no. Mr. Chairman, let that be struck from the record.

Dr. Rambachan: You know, I really—

Hon. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, I cannot continue with that kind of language coming from the other side. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: Minister, Minister. Okay, Mr. Minister— [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Imbert: I said no such thing here.

Mr. Chairman: Hold on. Member for Tabaquite, I have given you the clearance to proceed. Right? But your comment, I would like you to retract it, please.
[*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Chairman: Members—

Dr. Rambachan: It is retracted.

Mr. Chairman: Hold on, Member for Arouca/Maloney.

Dr. Rambachan: It is retracted, but I hope that if in the future—

Mr. Chairman: No, Member. Hold on. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Indarsingh: That is insulting.

Mr. Chairman: Listen, Member, just retract the statement. I gave you the permission to continue your discourse but I would just like you to retract the

statement. That is all—the comment that you made.

Dr. Rambachan: Retracted.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Proceed.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Chairman: Hold on, Member, hold on. Let Tabaquite finish and then I will come to you. [*Crosstalk*] Let me hear Tabaquite and then I will come to you, Member for Arouca/Maloney. Proceed, Tabaquite.

Dr. Rambachan: I have nothing more to say.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Member for Arouca/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, apart from what the Member for Tabaquite said, the Member for Caroni East also said something that should be retracted. I am sure the reporters heard it. If you did not hear it I am sure it is recorded.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Again, whatever the Member said did not reach my ear. But, Member for Caroni East, is it that you made a comment that should be retracted? I will—

Dr. Gopeesingh: I am honourable. Whatever I said, I retract it.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, appreciated. Now, Members, hold on. [*Crosstalk*] Okay, Members on both sides—

Hon. Imbert: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Chairman: One second, Mr. Minister. Members on both sides, I know we are close to lunchtime but we have the Integrity Commission and I would just believe that we should be at our good behaviour, please. Let us get on with the business and then we will break shortly.

Mr. Charles: Especially in front of IC.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister, you have a comment that is relevant to what is

happening?

Hon. Imbert: I heard what the Member said.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister, he has retracted—

Hon. Imbert: Both Members of the Opposition put on the record things that were never uttered by me. They spoke untruths, and that is their habit.

Mr. Chairman: Right, and both statements have been retracted and we are moving on. [*Crosstalk*] Member for Couva South, I just spoke.

Hon. Imbert: There he goes again.

Mr. Chairman: I just spoke.

Hon. Imbert: They “cyar” help it, especially Caroni East.

Mr. Chairman: We continue. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment, Purchases, page 241. Item 001: General Administration, page 241. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 241. Item 007: Households, page 241.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme. And we are on to a different book, *Development Programme, Consolidated Fund*, page 88. We are on page 88. One second, Pointe-a-Pierre. Item 005: Multi-sectorial and Other Services, page 88. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

1.15 p.m.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Chair. Under line Item Administrative Services: 002: Reform of the Integrity Commission, 2019 was estimated 300,000, nothing has been spent based on the Revised Estimate; 2020, 200,000 has been estimated. Could the Minister inform us what is envisaged by the reform of this line Item, what is supposed to happen?

Hon. Imbert: Apparently this is lumped together with the increase in Contract Employment. That is under—

Mr. Lee: Say that again.

Hon. Imbert: It is together with the increase in Contract Employment. That is under consideration.

Mr. Lee: So you say it is technically remuneration then?

Hon. Imbert: It is under consideration. It would be for upgrading the Integrity Commission.

Mr. Lee: So it is not like reforming the Integrity Commission as a body?

Hon. Imbert: I am told it would be for services to amend the Integrity in Public Life Act.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 241; Item 007—my apologies. I retract that statement.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 37 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Thank you, Registrar, and thank you members of the Integrity Commission executives.

Okay, Members, you all are now ready to break for lunch? Okay. We will now suspend for lunch and we will resume at 1.45 p.m.

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

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

Mr. Chairman: As resumed, Head 12: Public Service Appeal Board.

Head 12: Public Service Appeal Board, \$3,380,260.

Mr. Chairman: We will start over.

Head 12: Public Service Appeal Board, \$3,380,260.

Mr. Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of Finance to make a brief statement no more than five minutes. Mr. Minister.

Hon. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, the Public Service Appeal Board essentially deals

with appeals of decisions made by the Public Service Commission. Basically that is it.

Question proposed: That Head 12 stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$3,380,260 for Head 12: Public Service Appeal Board is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. We now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 57. Item 001: General Administration, page 57. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, page 57. Item 001: General Administration, pages 57 and 58. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 58. Item 001: General Administration, page 58. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 58. Item 007: Households, page 58.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 12 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Thank you senior executives of the Public Service Appeal Board. Thanks for coming.

Yes, Members. Registrar, thanks for coming, Tax Appeal Board and your assistant.

Head 09: Tax Appeal Board, \$5,917,700.

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

Hon. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Tax Appeal Board is established for the purpose of exercising its jurisdiction conferred upon it by the Tax Appeal Board Act. The Board consists of a Chairman and such other members as may be appointed, one of whom is the Vice-Chairman. It is a superior court of record which means that appeals of decisions made by the Tax Appeal Board would go to

the Court of Appeal. Its mandate is to look at appeals of decisions of the Board of Inland Revenue and other persons who perform functions under the Income Tax Act.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Question proposed: That Head 09 stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$5,917,700 for Head 09: Tax Appeal Board is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. We now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. So *Recurrent Expenditure* book, Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 49. Item 001: General Administration, page 49. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, page 49. Item 001: General Administration, pages 49 and 50. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 51. Item 001: General Administration, page 51. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 51. Item 007: Households, page 51.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 09 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Thank you Registrar and other officer, thanks for coming.

Page 243 of *Recurrent Expenditure* booklet—2-4-3—and we shall now proceed to Head 38, Environmental Commission. Good day, Registrar of the Environmental Commission and your two colleagues. Welcome to the Parliament Chamber.

Head 38: Environmental Commission, \$7,359,790.

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

Hon. Imbert: Sure. The Environmental Commission of Trinidad and Tobago is empowered by the Environmental Management Act of 1995. It is also a superior court of record, and it was established to settle environmental disputes. The purpose of the Commission is to hear and determine appeals from the decision or action of the Environmental Management Authority (EMA), applications for deferment of decisions by the EMA to undertake certain emergency response activities, and applications by the EMA for environmentally sensitive areas or environmentally sensitive species and administrative civil assessments. The Commission comprises a Chairman, a Deputy Chairman and three other members who are part-time. The members are appointed on the basis of their knowledge and experience.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Question proposed: That Head 38 stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$7,359,790 for Head 38: Environmental 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*. We will now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, and we are in the *Recurrent Expenditure* book, page 243. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration, page 243, and I will recognize firstly Couva North.

Ms. Ramdial: It is really for Goods and Services, Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, when we get to that. And you, Pointe-a-Pierre, same Goods and Services? Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, same page 243. Item 001: General Administration and we are on pages 243 and 244. Member for Couva North.

2.00 p.m.

Ms. Ramdial: Thank you, Chair. Line Item 16, Contract Employment. I am seeing an increase by \$180,000 for the 2020 Estimate. Can you explain that increase? How many positions for Contract Employment?

Mr. Chairman: Minister, we are on page 244.

Ms. Ramdial: 244.

Mr. Chairman: Just for clarity, Contract 16.

Hon. Imbert: This is to improve the ICT communications and public education performance of the Commission.

Ms. Ramdial: Approximately how many positions?

Hon. Imbert: Three to four persons.

Ms. Ramdial: Okay, and line Item 22; Short-term Employment, I am seeing another increase by \$188,000 for 2020.

Hon. Imbert: It is the same when you take the two together, and if you look at it carefully you will see the original 2019 estimate was 700, so it is the same as the original 2019. And would be based—

Ms. Ramdial: Of which only \$512,000 will—

Hon. Imbert: Yes, it will be based on what actually happened during the year. Short-term Employment as you know is a temporary thing.

Ms. Ramdial: Okay, and Fees, line Item 23, for Fees. I am seeing an increase by \$332,000, what type of fees are these?

Hon. Imbert: If you look at the original 2019 estimate, it was 324. So it is very close to the original 2019 estimate.

Ms. Ramdial: Yeah, but what type of fees? What type of fees? Legal fees?

Hon. Imbert: What I am told it is law research fees.

Ms. Ramdial: Law research fees.

Hon. Imbert: Subscriptions to LexisNexis and so on.

Ms. Ramdial: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 245. Item 001: General Administration, page 245. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 245. Item 007: Households, page 245.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 38 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you Registrar and your senior executives, thanks for coming.

Review of Expenditure booklet and we are on page 337. Head 67, Ministry of Planning and Development. Welcome, Madam Minister and welcome to your Permanent Secretary and other senior executives of the Ministry of Planning and Development. Welcome to the Parliament Chamber.

Head 67: Ministry of Planning and Development, \$302,454,000.

Mr. Chairman: I will now invite the 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 work of the Ministry of Planning and Development is centred around Government's national development thrust. In an effort to meet our mandate the Ministry provides technical support and advice, policy guidance, and development to all Ministries and agencies aimed at achieving the strategic goals and objectives, outlined under the five thematic areas in the National Development Strategy, *Vision 2030*.

Mr. Chairman, the importance of the nation's human resource capabilities in realizing the goals of *Vision 2030* cannot be underscored. The Government has identified a number of key national economic sectors for development towards diversification and growth and development. Therefore, it is prudent that there be a concomitant building of the human resource capacity to support the expansion

programme. The Ministry has been mandated to undertake national manpower planning and has commenced research in this area, with the overall aim to make recommendations that can lead to the development of a coordinated national manpower planning system. This system will link labour demand and supply through relevant, timely, labour market information whilst facilitating the future skills development needs of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Chairman, the Government remains committed to the preservation of the environment and climate action by addressing issues as it pertains to climate change vulnerability and risk assessments. The Ministry therefore has completed the national protected areas systems plan in 2018, which placed emphasis on 136 protected areas covering close to 20,000 square kilometers of protected land and marine space in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to state that my team including our supporting statutory boards and agencies, and this includes: the EMA; the IMA; CARIRI; CDA; the Green Fund; the Advisory Town Planning Panel; and the National Trust of Trinidad and Tobago. All under the Ministry of Planning and Development have proven and remain committed to working assiduously toward achieving the goals and objectives of the Government, as we continue to create stability, strength and growth in our economy for a better Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry, the Deputy Permanent Secretaries, and all the other members of staff of this Ministry for the work that they have done over the last four years. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Madam Minister.

Question proposed: That Head 67 stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$302,454 for Head 67: Ministry of

Planning and Development, is comprised of monies 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 Development Programme*.

We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. And as I mentioned we are in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* booklet, Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 337. Item 001: General Administration, page 337. Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. Tewarie: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The first Item there 001: General Administration, speaks to an increase of \$7.5 million in Personal Expenditure. It mentions on the explanation “increased provision for vacant posts with incumbents”. Is this going to include in addition any new hirings, and what are these likely to be for?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much for the question. Yes, the amount will facilitate payment for new appointments. It will also facilitate payments for promotions, and the Ministry is in the process of filling 93 vacancies for the following divisions: The EPPD Division, we should be filling three posts; the NTU, 15 posts; the CSO, 56 posts; VGAL, three posts; IT, two posts; Communications, three posts; the SEPP, three posts; the Basel Convention, one post; the IDCD, one post; Human Resources, four; and the EDF, two.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: Member.

Dr. Tewarie: Yes.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Can I also indicate that the amount will facilitate allowances for positions of PSAs and DPSs, Government’s contribution to the NIS

to facilitate permanent, temporary, and acting appointments, remuneration to board members to facilitate payment of remuneration to the Advisory Town Planning Panel, the vacant post without incumbents, we also have provided for that. Remunerations to members of Cabinet-appointed Committees, salaries, allowances, Government's contribution to the group health insurance for monthly paid officers, Government's contribution to NIS.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay, so all of that is included. What about, I see under Technical Corporation though, there is a decrease in the Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. In light of what you just said, how do you explain this?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: With regard to the TCU—sorry Mr. Chairman. We are in the process of restructuring the TCU to facilitate the proposed establishment of a new division called the International Development Corporation Division.

What we found, Mr. Chairman, is that even though we had establish the TCU, and the TCU has been in existence for quite some time. We found that the work was not pointed enough, and as a consequence of that through the IDB we got a consultant to examine—well even before the IDB got involved—we got a consultant, a former Permanent Secretary to examine the work of the TCU, and what would be the staffing requirements. And then we got the IDB and the CDB also gave us some assistance to examine exactly what was needed for us to be more targeted in our development thrust, and so we are restructuring TCU to afford us the ability not only for the Ministry of Planning and Development to get more out of the technical cooperation, but indeed for the entire government service to get more strategic international cooperation and technical cooperation as we develop Trinidad and Tobago.

Dr. Tewarie: Well, part of the focus then of this unit has to do with the funds that are available for climate change related matters.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: That would be separate. That would be separate, but because the international thrust now is mainly climate change matters, of course it will also be part of the focus. Because as you know, it would not have been under your tenure, but the Environmental Division is under the Ministry of Planning and Development now.

Dr. Tewarie: Yes, so that—I am just asking I know it is not a line Item but I am deriving it out of this line Item. Does that mean therefore, that you will have a special unit under environment, or a special project under environment having to do with climate change?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: We already have that.

Dr. Tewarie: Right, okay.

Mr. Chairman: Same point?

Dr. Tewarie: No, are we on 004, or we are not there?

Mr. Chairman: No, we are coming to that. Let me just announce it. Item 003: Technical Co-operation, page 337; Item 004: Central Statistical Office, page 338. And I give way to you, Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. Tewarie: Yes. Okay, for the CSO here you have an increase in salaries, I appreciate that, and it says very clearly, “includes provision for vacant post with incumbents”. Again, are these going to include new hirings in the context of what you are seeking to do with the National Statistical Institute?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Okay, this specific one that you are asking about would be to facilitate the payment of the awards of increments and arrears for fiscal 2020, arising from the regularization of the CSO. And that was done in August 2015 under you.

Dr. Tewarie: Yeah, okay, okay.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Also—

Dr. Tewarie: This is now being done?

2.15 p.m.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Sorry?

Dr. Tewarie: So it is being—*[Interruption]* No, I am asking are they now being remunerated for the first time?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: No, it is ongoing.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay, it is ongoing. Right, okay.

Mr. Chairman: You good there, Member.

Dr. Tewarie: Yes, I am good.

Mr. Chairman: Item 005: Urban and Regional Planning Division, page 338. Proceed, Member.

Dr. Tewarie: 01, in this situation here again, I see a decrease. Could the Minister just elaborate on that?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Member, we are of the view that the funds here will be adequate for the needs for 2020.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay. Are there any special projects in Urban and Regional Planning?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Well, there is the wide project that I was talking about yesterday with the Town and Country Planning, with the Local Government and Trade and Industry that we spoke about yesterday and we are also doing another project within Town and Country to digitize the records.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay. Minister, what is happening—I mean, I do not know if you will take this question in the context of this line Item but in terms of what you are doing with ease of doing business support and the permits and so on with the other Ministries that you mentioned, I mean part of that is part of the decentralization and devolution process that comes from PAF?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Sorry. Mr. Chairman, could we deal with this under the Development Programme?

Mr. Chairman: Development Programme, okay. So it will be considered under the Development Programme. Just make a note, Member.

Dr. Tewarie: If it arises again, I will ask.

Mr. Chairman: Any other question there under 005?

Dr. Tewarie: No.

Mr. Chairman: So we now go to Item 006: Green Fund Executing Unit, page 339. Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. Tewarie: Yeah, the only question I would ask there would be about the Green Fund itself and ask if there have been applications and awards for green funding under this particular unit. If the Minister could describe what they might be.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes, the board has been meeting consistently but what we have found with regard to the Green Fund, and we are working on changing this, is that we have been going out to communities, to schools, to indicate what the Green Fund does and what we have been finding is that the application process is a bit convoluted and consequently, we are in the process of changing that. So that people can more easily access the funding. In addition to that, we have now reached a point where Tobago can access the Green Fund. You will recall that there was a court matter involving the THA and their inability to access the Green Fund. So that has been resolved and we are working very closely with the THA to ensure that they can access the Green Fund.

But the main issue was that the forms and the requirements were a bit convoluted and perhaps the level of the request was too high in some instances so that not enough people who have very good projects are able to access the Green Fund. So we are working on making that change. And we now have three new

applications before us.

Mr. Chairman: Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Thank you, Chair. Hon. Minister, I do not know whether the answer might be forthcoming here but when this unit goes out to educate the population to try and get some people interested in utilization of the funds for the benefit of the country, where are we in terms of the Green Fund? I do not know if this is a question for you or the Minister of Finance. And where is that Green Fund housed, the funding for that?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: The Green Fund is like many other funds housed in the Ministry of Finance so even though the unit is in the Ministry of Planning and Development, the unit in the Ministry of Planning and Development is the operational unit but to get the funding, an application has to be made by the Minister of Planning once the project is approved by Ministry of Planning to the Minister of Finance.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Sometimes I am a little reluctant to ask the questions but I think—

Mr. Chairman: Why would you be, Member? You are getting the answer.

Dr. Gopeesingh: No, no, I do not want to—[*Interruption*] The flow of it. The question is, people pay the Green Fund, does that go into a separate fund held separately or it goes into the Consolidated Fund?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: The Green Fund is a separate fund.

Dr. Gopeesingh: And it is held?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Well, I do not want to ask this publicly but what is the value now? What it stands as?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Can provide that information, I do not know. I mean—we

do know—you recall about the mortgaging of the fund but—

Dr. Gopeesingh: “I cannot recollect nah.”

Hon. Robinson-Regis: “You cyah remember?”

Dr. Gopeesingh: No.

Mr. Imbert: You maxed out the fund. Okay.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Okay. It was maxed out under—[*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Mr. Chairman: Thanks for the answers, Members. Appreciate the answers. Thanks, Minister of Finance. Item 008: Project Planning and Reconstruction Division, page 339; Item 009: Environmental Policy & Planning Division, page 339. Members, you all are with me eh? Caroni Central, you all with me eh? Nice. Sub-Head 02: we now move on to Goods and Services, page 340. [*Interruption*] I do not want to have to go back, Madam Minister. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, page 340. Item 001: General Administration, page 340. Caroni Central.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay, I draw attention, Minister, to Item 16: Contract Employment and there is an increase and may I ask why and you know, what you are likely to do with it?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: The increase was to facilitate the payment of salaries and allowances as a result of the fact that we filled vacant contract positions and also after the CPO had looked at the—you know, sometimes you employ people and you give an interim salary and then the CPO gives you the salary? After the CPO had looked at some of the salaries, it was higher than what the Ministry had paid and so it is to bring the salaries up to the terms and conditions as stated by the CPO.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay. 34: University Graduate Recruitment Programme. I just want to confirm that your Ministry also did not hire and I know the Minister already said that there is no connection between this particular allocation and

OJTs. I just wanted to ask if you are going to hire people this year, you think, under this group.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Well, I think the Minister of Finance indicated exactly what happened with this particular programme.

Dr. Tewarie: Yeah, yeah, I am clear.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: But given the fact that it is a programme that is not closed, we have put funding against the line Item so that once we can hire, we do have money.

Dr. Tewarie: So you may or may not.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: That is true. But let me also indicate that like several other Ministries, we have been using the OJT programme also and as you would know, we also use short-term hirings depending on the project or depending on the needs of the Ministry.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay. Janitorial Services, I see an increase also. Any reason? 37

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Firstly, this is because we have offices in Tower D, Level 17 and Tower C and also the offices that we have at Capital Plaza and Nicholas Towers and the fact is—Nicholas Towers, Level 22 and the fact is there was not full payment made in 2019 so we have to catch up.

Dr. Tewarie: 65, now you have a quite significant increase there, 321,000 for the Expenses for Cabinet appointed Bodies. Do you know what these are going to be or you are just making a provision in anticipation?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Well, we do have the Advisory Town Planning Panel and what they we have been doing is making site visits. So they go out to site visits so sometimes we have to pay for expenses when they go out and the daily operational expenses for the panel members and the Secretariat and we have established some committees under *Vision 2030* and the UN SDGs so hence the increase.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay, so there is a committee to monitor achievement of the SDGs or is it a different role?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Well, it is not just to monitor but to implement the SDGs and to implement *Vision 2030*. This is a recent development.

Dr. Tewarie: Yeah, well I see it is new money.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes, because next year, we are intending to do our voluntary report to the UN on our achievements of the SDGs so we needed to have a committee established to assist us with that.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay then.

Mr. Chairman: You are okay, Member?

Dr. Tewarie: I am fine, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: So we move on to Item 002: Library Service Unit, page 341; Item 003: Technical Co-operation, page 341. Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, under Contract Employment, I see no allocation for 2018 or 2019, if you could just explain to us what you will be doing with 500,000 as it relates to technical co-operation?

Mr. Chairman: That is line Item 16, Madam Minister.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes, I am seeing it. The allocation is to facilitate salaries for contract positions of business analysts that have been recently hired in the same new unit, the International Development Corporation Unit, so we have done some hiring there of recent vintage, so we needed to have the money.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: You are welcome.

Mr. Chairman: Item 004: Central Statistical Office, page 342; Item 005: Urban and Regional Planning Division, page 343. Caroni Central.

Dr. Tewarie: Yeah, I just want to ask, this Contract Employment, 16, is that

simply contract officers in the Ministry?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes, and we thought that that would be enough to maintain what we already have.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay, all right.

Mr. Chairman: Item 005: Urban and Regional Planning Division, page 343; Item 006: Green Fund Executing Unit, page 344; Item 008: Project Planning and Reconstruction Division, page 344. And I recognize the Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Minister of Planning, I am just seeking information for my own edification. The Project Planning and Reconstruction Division, the utilization and the management of the Infrastructure Development Fund, IDF, does that come under there? The IDF comes under there?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Well the IDF is another fund that really comes under the Ministry of Finance. This unit does the Development Programme, monitors all the different development—well, the entire Development Programme of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Dr. Gopeesingh: The planning for the IDF and the execution.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes, the planning, the execution, and remember that some of the funding comes from the IDF and some comes from the Consolidated Fund.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yeah.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: So this unit has to manage and assist Ministries and agencies in ensuring that they actually produce what they say they will produce from the Development Programme.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I remember the time during our administration they were moved to Planning because I think it must have—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: It is a unit, because of what it does, that has been moved to Finance; it has come back to Planning.

Dr. Gopeesingh: “Um-hmm.”

Hon. Robinson-Regis: But in the main, it has been under Planning because Planning manages the Development Programme of the Government.

2.30 p.m.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I think it is understandable. I remember going to Dr. Tewarie when he was Minister of Planning for the execution of the IDF, so that is reasonable.

Mr. Chairman: Item 009: Environmental Policy and Planning Division, page 345. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 345. Item: 001 General Administration, page 345; Item 002: Library Service Unit, page 346; Item 003: Technical Co-operation, page 346; Item 004: Central Statistical Office, page 346.

Dr. Tewarie: Just a—it is not related to a line Item here but if the Minister will answer, it is about the CSO.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, let me hear it and proceed.

Dr. Tewarie: Is there an allocation specifically focused on the transition of the CSO to the National Statistical Institute? Is there one?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Under the Development Programme.

Dr. Tewarie: It is under the Development Programme. All right, okay.

Mr. Chairman: I know the Minister of Finance said you are quite capable to handle it, so I give you the option.

Item 005: Urban and Regional Division, page 347; Item 006: Green Fund Executing Unit, page 347; Item 008: Project Planning and Reconstruction Division, page 347; Item 009: Environmental Policy and Planning Division, page 348. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 348. Item 001: Regional Bodies, page 348; Item 002: Commonwealth Bodies, page 348; Item 003: United Nations Organizations, page 349; Item 004: International Bodies, page 349; Item

005: Non-profit Institutions, page 349; Item 006: Educational Institutions, page 350.

Mr. Karim: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, might you be able to give us an idea as to any new developments with respect to CARIRI, line Item 01 for that 28 million estimate for 2020?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. CARIRI estimates at its recurrent expenditure for fiscal 2020 will be in the order of about 58 million and that it will earn 21 million. This will result in a budget deficit of \$9.6 million, and CARIRI will be seeking funding from the Government to deal with this deficit.

Mr. Chairman: Item—Couva South, Member, Couva South, or are you okay?

Mr. Indarsingh: You moved on to Households.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, I am now going on to Households. Caroni Central—we are going on to Households, you have a question before that?

Dr. Tewarie: No.

Mr. Chairman: So, Item 007: Households, page 350, and I will recognize Couva South first, and then I will come to you Caroni Central.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Minister, with respect to the settlement line Item to cane farmers re 2007 transition, in 2019 you had an allocation of 5 million and you actually spent \$1,737,200. 2020 again, a 5 million allocation. Could you tell us how many cane farmers that you have settled as a result of this line Item? And how many are still outstanding in terms of settlements, and will this \$5 million allocation fully relinquish all outstanding claims?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Okay, thank you, Sir. The number of cane farmers that have accepted the tranche one payment is 3,057. The number of cane farmers that accepted 53 per cent of tranches 2 and 3 are 744. The total payment made in tranche 1 is \$24,582,884.08. The total tranche payments of tranches 2 and 3 are

\$17,220,337.19. The total expenditure incurred is \$41,802,879.84.

Mr. Chairman: Supplemental, Couva South? I see your mike is on. Are you okay?

Mr. Indarsingh: I would like to know if there will be outstanding claims. As I said, will this \$5 million allocation fully relinquish all liabilities?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: As far as we understand it, there have been fluctuations in the number of cane farmers who have been coming into the Ministry to access their claims, and we expect that in fiscal 2020 the majority of outstanding cane farmers will come in to access their settlements. So we do expect that that will be—

Mr. Indarsingh: The number will increase?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Well, we have an increase of \$3,262,800. We are anticipating that the majority of cane farmers will come in to access the payments in 2020.

Mr. Indarsingh: Is there any existing matter in the courts of Trinidad and Tobago in relation to this issue?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: As far as we know because—I just want to put on the record that it is not the Ministry of Planning and Development that is dealing with the court matter. This is being dealt with by the Office of the Attorney General. But, as far as we know, because of course we will have to follow the proceedings, the next court date is October 18th, and once all the issues are fully ventilated in court we expect clarity to be brought to this matter, and that this matter will be brought to closure. Once this happens the Ministry will be in a better position to anticipate the flow of cane farmers accessing the programme. Consequently, we believe that that amount is sufficient.

Dr. Tewarie: I want to follow up—

Mr. Chairman: Same line Item?

Dr. Tewarie: Same line Item.

Mr. Chairman: Proceed.

Dr. Tewarie: I want to ask one short question and then I would like to use my time to say something. The question I want to ask is that the Minister mentioned in response to Couva South that \$41 million was spent on expenses related, I think, to the management of this fund. Can you indicate to me first of all if that is true? And secondly what does it cover?

Mr. Chairman: You want to know what is true, the 41 million figure or what?

Dr. Tewarie: 41 million.

Mr. Chairman: The 41 million.

Dr. Tewarie: For administrative cost. Yes.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Sorry, if I said that, which I do not recall saying, it is not the management.

Dr. Tewarie: What it is?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: It was what was paid out.

Dr. Tewarie: Oh, that was paid out.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Because between 2014 and 2019, in that period the total paid out was \$41,802,879.84, not in the management.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay, all right, I just had to clarify that. That is why I said—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes, because you would know that the management is the staff of the Ministry of Planning and Development, so it is not that we have anything set up other than what was there.

Dr. Tewarie: No, I understood that which is why I found the amount high and now that you clarified it, I am clear.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes, that what was paid out.

Dr. Tewarie: Chair, with your permission I want to say this. The Minister knows

that I wrote to her on this matter and she replied to me a few days ago in which she outlined her own position which was just articulated here, which is that the matter—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Sorry, before you continue, it is not my position. It is the position of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Dr. Tewarie: Yes, yes. Well, I wrote to you as the Minister responsible.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: No, no, I just, yeah, because if you say it is my position, it is not my position.

Dr. Tewarie: Chair, I think you know that I will not be irresponsible in any statement I make. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: Members please.

Dr. Tewarie: I think you know that for a fact—

Mr. Imbert: No way.

Dr. Tewarie:—and I think the Minister knows that also. On this particular matter, which is a vexing matter the reality is this. There are a number of cane farmers who have sued the Government, if the Minister wants me to use that term, for the moneys that were due to them which would have been a universal number of \$130 million agreed by Cabinet, and then disbursed according to a formula to each cane farmer, some of which was disbursed prior to 2014, and some of which are under changed terms have been accepted by some farmers.

Of those matters before the court, 10 individual cases have been won by the cane farmers, and in each case where the cane farmer won they got all the money due to them under law, and under the decisions of Cabinet plus costs which would exceed if it were to happen for every farmer, and the court were to decide consistently, it would exceed the \$130 million agreed upon.

On that basis I wrote to the hon. Minister because she is the Minister

responsible indicating since they are winning the cases the Government is fighting a case having to pay lawyers. They have to pay additional costs. Why do we not settle this matter and pay the cane farmers? The Minister then replied and said she could not do that because basically she did not have clarity from the court notwithstanding the fact that cases had been decided against the Attorney General and for the cane farmers.

I want to make a formal appeal here now on this matter. It is going to cost the Government much, much more to continue with these things with all these cane farmers beyond the \$130 million. I am asking the Minister, to consider the issue of a final settlement for the cane farmers under terms and conditions formally agreed by the Cabinet, and initially executed for the first tranche so that we could bring this matter to a close. Because, Mr. Chairman, I want to say that one of the cane farmers who was awarded the amount requested plus cost, actually died before she received the amount, and I raised in the letter as well that there was this human consideration that many of these cane farmers were old, and that some of them may die in the process, and I felt that a reasonable thing to do was to do that.

Now, the Minister says this is a Government matter, it relates to the Attorney General, but I am appealing to her as Minister, if she would use the resources, and the opportunity of Cabinet in order to allow this matter to be finally settled, and it will be to the benefit of the Government and the people.

2.45 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Thank you. Member, I know it is not a question but in all fairness I will give the Minister some time to respond.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, the fact of the matter is that upon coming into government, the Government of

Trinidad and Tobago determined that the formula that had been decided by the last Cabinet was not the formula that we found fair.

In addition to that Mr. Chairman, the Member for Caroni Central knows that the money that was set aside or given to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago by the EU was for a specific purpose. It was not really to pay each cane farmer a specific amount of money. It was in fact to prepare the cane farmers for this transition out of cane, and the Member knows that. However, the last Government determined that they would use the money to pay each cane farmer a certain amount.

Mr. Chairman, as you may know, each cane farmer apart from getting a cash award, also got two acres of land—*[Interruption]*—just a minute, please.

Mr. Chairman: Caroni Central, you were given your opportunity.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: They also got two acres of land—

Mr. Chairman: Hold on one second, Minister. You had your opportunity—

Mr. Indarsingh: No, no, no. We have to set the record straight.

Mr. Chairman: No, no, listen, Member for Couva South. Right? The Minister is on the floor at this time. After she has completed I will determine whether we will continue.

Mr. Indarsingh: No, but Chairman, ex-Caroni workers—*[Interruption]* two acres of land.

Mr. Chairman: Member, Member, Member, please. Go ahead Minister.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Indarsingh: The workers got land.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, the transition— *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Chairman: No, Member, please.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Even before this situation, Mr. Chairman, the cane farmers

got land for farming and land for a house spot. Mr. Chairman, they also got retraining, so that they could have entered into a different profession. Millions of dollars have been spent on settling the cane farmers. As I said, when this Government came into office there was a certain amount of money available from the EU and we determined that that was what was going to be used to pay the cane farmers. In this particular circumstance, several cane farmers came in and were paid. Then some cane farmers took the Government to court.

Mr. Chairman, the cane farmers who won, won on a default judgment. And it must be noted that these cases were not decided on their merit. Because a default judgment, Mr. Chairman, means that the entire matter has not been ventilated. Therefore, Mr. Chairman, the substantive issue of the quantum to be awarded to the cane farmers has not yet been fully ventilated. So even if the Member for Caroni Central has written me and suggested to me that because these court matters have been decided, as he put it, that we should act in a certain way, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago cannot do that. And there are other matters still before the High Court. And even with a default judgment, Mr. Chairman, these could be appealed. So this matter is not fully ventilated or settled.

Mr. Chairman, this Government, even in its previous incarnation, has been very fair to the cane farmers. I repeat, there are several cane farmers who received over \$1 million. There are others, there are several cane farmers who also received the land, the acres for farming and the house spot. Mr. Chairman, this is the situation, and the settlement to the cane farmers thus far has been very fair. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, again, we are in Standing Finance Committee. It is not a debate, but I am going to give Caroni Central, your comment, and then I will close off with the Minister after. I am not recognizing you Couva South.

Caroni Central, make your comment.

Mr. Indarsingh: “Why you not recognizing me?”

Mr. Chairman: Member, please. Caroni Central.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay. I just want to—I do not know, based on what the Minister said, I do not know if she is aware that the Government, through the Attorney General's office, has already paid the cheques to the 10 farmers. And in the case of the farmer in which the lady I mentioned had died, because the husband was also a beneficiary, joint, that husband got the amount. But the State, through the Attorney General's office, has already paid these farmers. And the first farmer to win, called me the day he got his cheque to say that they had in fact received the cheque. So, I think that there is some kind of misunderstanding here. I am not trying here to make mischief, Mr. Chairman. I am trying to get a resolution that is reasonable.

The Minister talks about fairness. I want to correct two facts, first of all, which is that the cane farmers did not receive the two acres of land. In any instance in which a cane farmer may have at some time received two acres of land, that cane farmer would have been a cane farmer and probably a worker as well in Caroni (1975) Limited. It is only as a worker in Caroni (1975) Limited that you got your two acres of land. The cane farmers were all independent entrepreneurial farmers.

Mr. Charles: You cannot intervene, man.

Dr. Tewarie: And—

Hon. Member: Who are you?

Mr. Chairman: Members on both sides. [*Crosstalk*] Listen, listen, Members, Caroni one more minute and we are moving on.

Dr. Tewarie: Yes, I do not want to carry on with this, Mr. Chairman. I just want

to close it on this note. The Government has already paid out money to the farmers based on the acknowledgment of the court—

Mr. Chairman: On the judgment.

Dr. Tewarie: On the judgment.

Mr. Chairman: Right, so again, so we have that information. So could we then close it off?

Dr. Tewarie: And what I want to ask the Minister—

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Dr. Tewarie: Can the Government among itself resolve this matter at Cabinet level and pay the farmers, please, before they die one by one?

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Thank you. Madam Minister, you care to make a final statement? Final statement on this—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, I think I was very—

Mr. Chairman: Minister, just one sec. Final statement on this and then we go on to Item 009: Other Transfers.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, I think I was very clear in what I said. The Cabinet has taken a certain decision. The cane farmers have decided that they are going to court.

[Mrs. Annisette-George in the Chair]

And Madam Chairman, even in the circumstance when the last Cabinet devised their own formula, in circumstances where they knew full well that the money from the EU was for retraining and not to pay people individually, the EU eventually had to sign on to the agreement to sign on to this new way of using the money, Madam Chairman. And Madam Chairman, the Cabinet has taken a decision and we stand by that decision.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Item 009: Other Transfers.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Madam Chair, I have a question.

Madam Chairman: Item 009: Other Transfers. Cumuto/Manzanilla, I think the— while I was not sitting here, I still hear everything. I believe the Deputy Chair indicated that we were moving on. Item 009: Other Transfers. Caroni Central? Item 010: Other Transfers Abroad. We go on to Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*, 02 - Institute of Marine Affairs, page 473. [Crosstalk] Could we have a little silence, please? Member for Couva South, let us have one conversation, please. Member for Tobago West, let us have one conversation. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. Page 473, Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration, pages 473 to 474. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households.

49 - Chaguaramas Development Authority, page 482. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households; Item 009: Transfers.

Member for Caroni Central?

Dr. Tewarie: The question I want to ask, you have passed the area already, so I am not going to ask it.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*, new book, page 140. Sub-Head 09: Development

Programme, Consolidated Fund. Item 001: Pre-investment, pages 140 to 141.
Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, with regard to line Items 007 and 008, your relocation—

Madam Chairman: I am just having a little difficulty hearing the Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: The relocation of the PTSC maintenance facilities, does that refer to San Fernando? Can you confirm that that is completed?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Sorry, repeat.

Dr. Bodoë: I see no allocation in 2020, so I am assuming that that relocation has been completed.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: It is not completed, but the thing is it is no longer under the Ministry of Planning and Development. It is now with UDeCOTT.

Dr. Bodoë: I see, all right.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: So you would notice that all of these projects, which is 005: Implementation of San Fernando Waterfront Redevelopment Programme; 006: Relocation of Squatters; 007: Relocation of PTSC; and 008: Upgrade of Plaza San Carlos. All of those were part of the San Fernando Waterfront Project. They have been moved from Planning where it was last year, and it is with UDeCOTT.

Dr. Bodoë: Okay, thank you.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Under the Office of the Prime Minister.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you.

Dr. Tewarie: Just a follow-up to that, so which is the executing agency?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: UDeCott. But you know that UDeCOTT is under the Office of the Prime Minister. So UDeCOTT is the executing agency. “Why you looking like that?”

Dr. Francis: He is confused.

Dr. Tewarie: Yes, I am confused. I am confused. So—

3.00 p.m.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: In the same way that UDeCOTT is the executing agency for the upgrade of Port of Spain.

Dr. Tewarie:—no, no I.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: The upgrade of Port of Spain is under the Ministry of Planning and Development, but for the San Fernando Waterfront, it is UDeCOTT, but under the Office of the Prime Minister.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay. Let me ask about 003. Can you give an update on that, where we are?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: I know that is your favourite project.

Dr. Tewarie: Well, I just ask for an update.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Seismic Microzonation Studies in Trinidad and Tobago.

Dr. Tewarie: So you do not want to—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: That project has been continuing and we are in—right now working as had been done before with UWI Seismic Research Centre and we are doing workshops, we are purchasing motion sensors, there is equipment to be maintained, we have the monthly cost for the technical steering committee and data collection for the remaining areas that has to be surveyed. We also have Tobago and San Fernando to be mapped.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, the seismic microzonation project deals with determining earthquake areas in Trinidad and Tobago.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay. Does this—is the—are any—besides the fact that the institute at St. Augustine is involved in this, are any—I am just asking this because one of

the valuable things in this is not just preparation for planning, but for disasters. Are they involved at all, the disaster preparedness people?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: We have the technical steering committee and the ODPM is part of that committee.

Dr. Tewarie: Part of it, okay. All right, I am fine with this.

Madam Chairman: Okay, so we are at Item 004: Social Infrastructure. Hon. Members, you will be advised that this spans three pages and therefore we will take them in accordance with project groups. So, at page 141 to 142, M. Central Statistical Office.

Dr. Tewarie: I see no allocation for the Statistics Division in Tobago. Does that mean that it is now completed and established?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes, we have it under recurrent now.

Dr. Tewarie: All right, okay. Then the—I wanted to ask a question on the—under the Ministry of Communications yesterday, having to do with printery, but I—having to do with CSO, but I see here you have an allocation for a digital printery. So does that mean that they have no new facilities, is that what it is?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes, we purchased the digital printery.

Dr. Tewarie: So you have new facilities there?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes, so that project is completed.

Dr. Tewarie: All right. And then—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Oh by the way, I would indicate that they work very well and at least 70 of the PSIP books were printed using CSO, the digital printery.

Dr. Tewarie: Well, that is good.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

Dr. Tewarie: Now Development of Trade in Services Statistics. Can you explain a little bit of what that is?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: The trade in services statistics is a relatively new area that the CSO is going to be capturing data on and so the allocation is to hire a consultant, data base specialists who would establish the new data base and the necessary equipment and supplies that would be relevant to this. What we had found is that with regard to getting information on the trading services, we were not getting enough information by just using the people who were involved in the industry, and we felt it better if the CSO itself would go out and capture the data that was necessary.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay. And the—based on what you have here, Conduct of Pre-Census Activities for 2020, does that mean therefore that we would have a census starting in 2021?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: That is the intention, but of course we will be doing the household survey and the housing and agriculture census.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay, I am fine for now.

Mr. Karim: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 055, I suspect some—I can see some moneys has all already been expended on this Item. Might you be able to give us a sense as to by what time we might be able to expect the completion of this survey in 2020?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Well we expecting survey, it is a survey of the household budget survey and the survey of living conditions. It is expected to commence on the 6th of January, 2020, and end by the 5th of January, 2021.

Mr. Karim: Okay. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Okay, can we go on. Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: That question was answered, that is Minister Karim's repertoire.

Madam Chairman: So A. Culture pages 142 to 143. Item 0—Member for Chaguanas East.

Mr. Karim: When you get to 005 if you can—

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Multi-Sectorial and Other Services, pages 143 to 146, Member for Chaguanas East.

Mr. Karim: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am—this is a related question on CARIRI that was asked before. Hon Minister, might you be able to give us a sense as to what is this improvement to the infrastructure and what type of equipment that you indicated before to give it very competitive and so on. Could you give you us a sense as to what is it?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: I do not have—let me see I have it. I think I have the list here, but I can provide that information.

Madam Chairman: So we will take them according to project groups so we now in C. which is Caribbean Industrial Research Institute. So Member for Fyzabad, are you in—

Hon. Robinson-Regis:—I think the Member for Chaguanas East recognized that that project had ended. But you still want the information—

Mr. Karim:—so we could see the impact.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: We will provide it.

Mr. Karim: Right. Okay.

Madam Chairman: Okay. All right, anybody else in C. Caribbean Industrial Research Institute? Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. Tewarie: This recycling of tire crumbs into asphalt mixes, okay. What have they been able to achieve there? I see that there is a continued allocation for it. Are they able convert it into an asphalt mix?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Phase 1 of the project was undertaken in fiscal 2019 and it involved the conduct of a pre-feasibility study for the establishment of a rubber crumb production facility and a facility that produces rubber asphalt. So it was a

pre-feasibility study that was done and the study was completed and based on the findings we have determined that there would be a need for a market survey for rubber crumb-based products. And the justification for the project is to mitigate the adverse environmental and health impacts, occasioned by the improper disposal of tyres and in many instances because of the improper disposal of tyres we get a lot of vector-borne diseases because, you know, the water settles in the tyres and so on. So the objective is to promote the recycling of tyres and expand the local production of products using the rubber crumb and to foster a new business creations.

Dr. Tewarie: So what—the phase is now to determine the market and I am sure the market is there.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes, the appetite.

Madam Chairman: All right, so D. Chaguaramas Area Development, pages 143 to 144. Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I was just looking at line Item 036, Madam Minister, Upgrade of Chaguaramas Golf Course - Phase 1. I see 1.5 million was allocated, about 700,000 spent.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Sorry, Member, I am not hearing you clearly.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Oh sorry, really?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

Dr. Gopeesingh: All right, Item 036: Upgrade of Chaguaramas Golf Course - Phase 1, 2019 Estimate was 1.5 million, 668 is under Revised Estimates, most likely that is what was spent and 1 million for 2020. That would complete Phase 1 or that would overlap into Phase 2?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: That is to complete Phase 1. But what we anticipate is that, given the fact that they are trying to expedite work, we probably would need more

money before the end of the year. But we are trying to expedite the work there.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Okay.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Thank you. Hon. Minister, line Item 040: Construction of Access Roads and Drainage at Agro Park, and if you could kindly let me know where is this Agro Park and how many kilometres of road to cover 895,000?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: I will have to give you the kilometres, but the Agro Park is within the peninsula, with the intention—as you know, part of Tucker Valley has been used to grow different types of fruits and vegetables and so. Also, using different mechanisms rather than the old mechanisms. So the Agro Park is really for that purpose.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: So you are saying it is now high-tech, like hydroponics and so?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Well, it is various methods.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: All vertical farming.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Various methods, yes.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni— Are you finished, Member for Oropouche West? Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. Tewarie: Yes, 034: The Police Headquarters. I see there is no allocation for it. Is it still functional or is it abandoned?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: No, it is still functional but we what we wanted to ensure is that the correct location was determined and the correct design. So there is the police post, there is—the police is located, but they are located inside and not close enough to the—

Dr. Tewarie: Entrance?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Egress and access.

Dr. Tewarie: Yeah, but I mean, a lot of that was based on electronic eyes, for instance, and the ability to follow. Is that still functional?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes, it is.

Dr. Tewarie: The technology?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

Dr. Tewarie: All right, and I see Development of Car Parks and it says 5 Car Parks. Is that along entrance to Chaguaramas? I am asking.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Well the CDA has entered into a lease agreement with the developer of the waterpark, the amusement park and we are working with them on the location of the Car Park.

Dr. Tewarie: And who will pay for the Car Park?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: The Government and the lessee.

Dr. Tewarie: So there is an agreement to be established.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

Dr. Tewarie: That is fine, nothing else.

Madam Chairman: All right, so A. Administrative Services, pages 144 to 145. Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Minister, with regard to line Item 049: The Integrated Public Management Information System. I know that was mentioned last year in the context of Public Administration. I see no expenditure in 2019, but an allocation in 2020. Can you shed some light on that?

3.15 p.m.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: It is an IT server for the Project Planning Unit within the Ministry of Planning and Development, and that is to facilitate improvements in the management of the PSIP portfolio.

Dr. Bodoë: I see. Okay. And if I may, Madam Chair, Item 056, Establishment of

Results Based Management System. Can you shed some light on that?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: As we had indicated last year, we are moving to a process of being able to ensure that all the projects that we do are properly monitored and evaluated throughout the year, and also that the projects that we do are in keeping with *Vision 2030*. So it is to fund the production of the annual report on performance which is one of the documents that we lay in relation to *Vision 2030*.

It is also to host the Development Evaluation Forum and that that will be in 2020. That forum is to institutionalize results-based management as part and parcel of what the Ministry of Planning and Development does, and in addition what the Ministries in the Government of Trinidad and Tobago do. It is also for the roll out of the National Monitoring and Evaluation Programme.

Dr. Bodoë: So it would roll out to other Ministries?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Throughout the Government. Because right now the Ministry of Planning and Development has been working with other Ministries to ensure that they put in place monitoring and evaluation units within the Ministries, because that is an essential part of ensuring that you are working in keeping with the development strategy.

Dr. Bodoë: That is fine. Thank you.

Dr. Tewarie: Minister, there were—

Madam Chairman: Just a minute. Let me recognize Member for Chaguanas East then you.

Dr. Tewarie: Sorry, go ahead.

Mr. Karim: Thank you, Madam Chair. Is it okay with your permission to ask on page 145 the same heading?

Madam Chairman: Once we are in Administrative Services, sure.

Mr. Karim: Well, I want to ask with respect to line Item 099 and 100. Hon.

Minister, I noticed that there were no allocations but this is a new project. Is this new in the sense that it was done somewhere else or is it a new national manpower plan?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: It is a new national manpower plan.

Mr. Karim: Was any done at all?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: There had been one done several years ago, but we feel given the changes in employment and what is needed for the further development of Trinidad and Tobago, that we need a new national manpower plan.

Mr. Karim: Was that plan at all dating back to 2016 or before that, the last plan?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: No, the last plan was done many years ago.

Mr. Karim: Many years. In a plan like this there must be some relationship, I think, with the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development. And in fact, in my looking at these figures, the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development has a modernized labour market information system to the extent of 300,000. Is there going to be a nexus with this?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes, but the thing is that in the Ministry of Planning and Development, part of our mandate is manpower planning, but we would not be doing this to the exclusion of other Ministries. So, of course, the information that the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development has already collected will feed into this and the Ministry of Education has a role to play in terms of the manpower planning. But our mandate is manpower planning.

Mr. Karim: Do you have an idea by when you would want to see this completed? This is of critical importance.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes, I am echoing what you are saying. It is of critical importance so we are trying to expedite it.

Mr. Karim: You are hoping it would be finished in 2020?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes, we think it should be.

Mr. Karim: And Minister, might you give us some information with respect to this new implementation of “After School Care”. What is that about?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: You would recall that the Minister of Finance mentioned the day care.

Mr. Karim: So this is the day care centre?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes. Well, it is not the centres per se, but you would recall also that we had some concerns about the training and so on. This will deal with the training and also to encourage Ministries to have a similar daycare system within the Ministry.

Mr. Karim: All right, I just wanted to get it clear, because the way it is titled here, “After School Care”.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

Mr. Karim: Now, when the Minister of Finance spoke—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: He talked about daycare.

Mr. Karim: —he talked about daycare.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes. Well it is—they overlap.

Mr. Karim: Two different things.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: No, they are not two different things.

Mr. Karim: All right. So if you can tell me what?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Because within Ministries it would more than likely be after school care. But it is twofold, it is to provide for that and also to be able to provide for the training of those persons who would be doing the daycare.

Mr. Karim: Okay. You have an idea as to how many you are looking at? How many of these facilities? This will be in every Ministry?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Well that is what we are intending.

Mr. Karim: Okay.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: You may recall that some years ago the Office of the Attorney General when they moved to Cabildo, they set up a child care centre within the Ministry. So we want to make sure—and the Parliament also has it.

Mr. Karim: Okay. Thank you very much.

Dr. Tewarie: No. It was in response to something the Minister said. I just wanted to remind the Minister that the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit was always at the Ministry of Planning and Development. It may be revamped or re-organized or whatever it is now, and it predated me when I was Minister there. But when I was there we, in fact, brought four reports to the Parliament on an annual basis. But we have had no reports we had a report year from this Ministry and we had a report of a different kind this year, but we did not, you know, I mean I do not think you should say you are creating a unit.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit was created when I was the Minister of Planning and Development, just saying. What I am saying is that what we want to do is to make sure all Ministries have a monitoring and evaluation unit, because it is essential if you want to achieve your development programme. That is what I am saying.

Dr. Tewarie: Okay.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Line Item, Minister, 064. Could you give an understanding to us about Global Services Offshoring Promotion Programme, where \$5.4 million was spent already and another \$4.5 allocated to be spent? What does it entail? Global Services Offshoring Promotion Programme?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Now this programme was a programme that was negotiated through an IDB loan done under the Member for Caroni Central. And when we came into office we had to restructure the programme because not very

much had been achieved by that time. So during the period when we first came into office we restructured the programme to be able to more effectively utilize the loan funding.

The programme is one where we have developed a hub for GSI, a GSI hub which is the Global Services Initiative. We have had training for those persons who want to get into the international market. So we have had—I am going to read everything that I see here.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Just a short thing for understanding.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: It is a loan agreement for the Global Services Promotion Programme between the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the IDB and this was signed in January 2014 in the amount of \$18 million. In 2018 Cabinet agreed to a re-scoping of the loan in order to utilize the funds and a portion of the uncommitted and undisbursed loan funds were cancelled. The loan closes in November 2019. The key deliverables—and we had to re-scope because the funds were not utilized but we were paying commitment fees.

The key deliverables are a digital immersion technology workshop, a two-day workshop for IBM. We are working with COSTAATT to bring about fundamentals of exporting and import/export management workshop; the introduction to motion graphics; digital communication graphics; introduction to design graphics; the advance certificate in process improvement, measurement and management, and a certificate in applied quality management programme. In Tobago specifically we are doing fundamentals of strategic planning, effective customer service delivery—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Okay.

Hon. Robinson-Regis:—re-delivering an animation hub, and we are also developing skills for global services. In that regard we have signed letters of

agreement with six firms and that is Animae Caribe festival, Avasant TT Consulting Limited, Coded Arts Limited, Fujitsu Caribbean (Trinidad) Limited, Lagoon Animation Studios Limited, Social Justice Foundation. And we are using the findings of a consultancy for the strategic analysis of the ITS sector and this consultancy will give us an insight into the current landscape and opportunities for growth in this sector in Trinidad and Tobago through the collection and analysis of data identify—of data.

We will also be having an identification of gaps and opportunities and the development of a sector map. We have a project team to be established comprising at least one project manager, one finance procurement manager, two project assistants who will be responsible for charting the way forward for global services under the leadership of the Executive of the Ministry of Planning and Development. And in order to continue with this programme, funding has been provided under the PSIP.

And let me take the opportunity to say that we were able to bring Facebook to Trinidad and Tobago and we had a big session with Facebook. And we also brought—or we were supposed to get what is his name [*Interruption*—not WhatsApp. We were supposed to get Apple. Apple was supposed to come to also interact with our young people. This has been a very successful project now that it has been re-scoped and it is very focused.

Dr. Tewarie: I just want to mention to the Minister. All those things—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Is it a question, sorry?

Dr. Tewarie: No, I just want to say—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: You can make a five-minute intervention.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Okay.

Dr. Tewarie: In addition to what you are doing, which is fine, I mean they are good things, right. Okay. Why do you not connect with some of the companies in Trinidad and Tobago that are in services to help them export?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Those companies that we mentioned, they are in Trinidad. Anima Production is in Trinidad doing animation in several countries. *[Interruption]* No. We have connected with these companies and they are working with our people to ensure that they can export these services, and they have actually been doing it. As a matter of fact we were able to pick—was it six companies?—and they were able to go out of Trinidad and Tobago and see how it is done.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Just a follow up on what the Member for Chaguanas East asked on line Item 100, which is the implementation of after school care. I heard what the Minister is saying that they are trying to establish these care centres within Ministries as well and the places of work. What is your way forward in terms of identifying the environment, ensuring the infrastructure is good and ensuring the accreditation of the people who are going to be managing these daycare centres?

Because there are three—we did it. It took a year for us to do the ECCE Centres where there were over 700 in Trinidad. And we accredited 200 and we developed a public/private sector partnership. How are you going to do this, and when you expect this to be completed for the care of these children two years and three years of age?

3.30 p.m.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: We are now in the process of rolling out this.

Dr. Gopeesingh: It is a good project—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: I will have to come back to you on that.

Dr. Gopeesingh:—but I know it is going to be long, because you have to check

the accreditation of the people involved—teaching, the environment and the infrastructure of the centres as well. It is going to take a while.

Madam Chairman: Okay? So we go on to C. Foreign and Technical Assistance; F. Public Buildings; B. Administration; Infrastructure Development Fund, page 225. Different book—same book. You have it, 225? Item 003, Economic—it is the same book we have. Okay? Item 003, Economic Infrastructure, pages 225 to 226. I would just give Members a little time to find the right page because of my misdirection. Are we there? Item 004, Social Infrastructure; Item 005, Multi-Sectoral and Other Services.

Hon. Members, the question is that the sum of \$302,454,000 for Head 67: Ministry of Planning and Development stand part of the Schedule.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 67 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Madam PS and other members of your Ministry. Okay.

So, Members, before we take the suspension, I just wanted to—well I see the Whip is not here, but I do not know if the other Members of the Opposition are in a position to say. Having regard to what happened today, is it possible that if tomorrow we find ourselves in the same position that we may wish to consider other Ministries and bodies? We would have to know so that we would notify them.

Hon. Members: Yes, yes.

Madam Chairman: And we could take some easy ones like the Office of the President and the Equal Opportunity Tribunal.

[Mr. David Lee enters the Meeting]

So, Whip, I was just enquiring, having regard to what has happened today—

nothing limits us to eight Heads—whether it is that we are prepared to consider, because I was going to advise other Ministries to come. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Lee: Dr. Tim—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: So yeah. In terms of, even if just not only for tomorrow, but for the management of the other days, whether we would want to consider lining up other entities in the event we end up in a position like this. Okay? So what I wanted to suggest is that depending on the time, if we cover the entities tomorrow and we find ourselves in this position, that we may be able to take two or three of the smaller ones like Equal Opportunity Tribunal and Office of the President. The thing is, we have to know so that we could put them on alert. We just cannot do it ad hoc in fairness to them.

Mr. Lee: I understand, Madam Chair, but tomorrow—I would not have an issue with that, let us say, Monday. I know Tuesday would be the last day, but tomorrow we have something planned. I think both sides have something planned tomorrow. Now, just to clarify, Madam Chair, that today, if things were being kept equal, was supposed to have been a Saturday. That is why we are—

Madam Chairman: Yeah, but we knew since Tuesday that today would not be Saturday. Right? We knew since Tuesday that today would not have been Saturday. You know, because we are on television, you know things that I know that I would not say here. So do not make it appear that we did not consider it. We knew today would not have been Saturday since Tuesday. Okay? It is just that, you know, in terms of us maximizing the benefit of the time, we find ourselves in this position.

Mr. Lee: No, well, I hear you, Madam Chair, but we will stick to the schedule as proposed.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chair, could I just indicate that even though we do

have something on tomorrow evening, we were willing to stay, because we are not the only ones in our party. You know, our party is quite wide and deep, so we would be willing to stay but, of course, this is the Opposition's agenda, so.

Madam Chairman: Okay? But I would just want to say, put everybody on notice, I think in the interest of time, I would still advise Equal Opportunity Tribunal and Office of the President, so that if it is that we find ourselves at two o'clock in a particular position, we may be able to take two little ones, which will take an hour. Okay?

So this Standing Finance Committee is suspended to Friday the 18th of October, 2019, at 10.00 a.m.

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